

NO LONGER 'KINGS'
LEARNING TO BE A MONGOLIAN PERSON IN THE MIDDLE GOBI

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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Declaration

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation examines the inter-subjective processes through which young children are shaped and shape others into persons (*hün*), as they learn to interact through the Mongolian mode of hierarchical relations. Based on twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork in the middle Gobi, the research focuses on the period when children (between two and eight years of age) lose their status as indulged and protected babies and learn to assume the role of older brother/sister (*ah/egj*) and younger sibling (*düü*). To investigate how children become competent at interacting through the Mongolian mode of hierarchical relations, the study considers three questions: how do children learn to enact etiquette (*yos*)? How do children develop relations within and outside of their family (*ger бүл*) and family network (*ah düü*)? How do children learn to work and to become helpful? The research reveals that Mongolian social hierarchy is structurally produced by, and is the product of, an irreconcilable moral tension. On the one hand, children learn to form relations of interdependence and to actively take part in the production of asymmetrical but mutual obligations. On the other hand, children learn to use etiquette to establish relations at the safe distance of respect, and to develop social and emotional skills to protect themselves from the potential dangers of relatedness. By documenting the processes through which children learn to form relations as *ah/egj* and *düü*, this study uncovers the social mechanisms which sustain the re-production of Mongolian social hierarchy and the individual skills necessary to be a socially and morally competent Mongolian person. More generally, the dissertation contributes to the anthropological study of personhood by rethinking 'the cultural construction of the person' as an on-going process of learning.

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Transliteration of Mongolian terms

The transliteration of Mongolian terms, which are italicised in the thesis is from the Cyrillic orthography of the conventional Halh Mongolian dialect. Mongolian Cyrillic is the most recent of the many writing systems that have been used for Mongolian. It was introduced in the 1940s in the Mongolian People's Republic replacing the traditional Mongolian script derived from Uighur.

The choice of a system for the transliteration of Mongolian terms is somewhat arbitrary as there is no standard convention. The Dundgobi region where I conducted my fieldwork is mainly populated by Halh people, the largest ethnic group in Mongolia. In this dissertation, I adopt High's transliteration (2008), adapted from the scheme for phonetic translation proposed by Rozycki (1966) to render the transliteration close to the conventional Halh pronunciation. Mongolian terms appearing in citations from other texts remain in their original form. Following Sneath (2000), I do not use Mongolian plurals to prevent the multiplication of terms in the text. Following Legrand (1997), I indicate the radical of verbs without suffix. All translations are my own.

Cyrillic	Transliteration	Pronunciation	Cyrillic	Transliteration	Pronunciation
<u>А</u>	a	car	<u>Пп</u>	p	pie
<u>Б</u>	b	bike	<u>Рр</u>	r	(rolling 'r')
<u>В</u>	v	vase	<u>Сс</u>	s	safe
<u>Г</u>	g	gold	<u>Тт</u>	t	ten
<u>Д</u>	d	dime	<u>Уу</u>	u	coat
<u>Е</u>	ye	yearn	<u>Үү</u>	ü	put
<u>Ё</u>	yo	yacht	<u>Фф</u>	f	fine
<u>Ж</u>	j	jest	<u>Хх</u>	h ¹	loch
<u>З</u>	z	adze	<u>Цц</u>	ts	cats
<u>И</u>	i	tin	<u>Чч</u>	ch	chat
<u>Й</u>	i	tin	<u>Шш</u>	sh	show
<u>К</u>	k	key	<u>Щщ</u>	sh	shch
<u>Л</u>	l	billy	<u>Ъъ</u>	-	
<u>М</u>	m	map	<u>Ыы</u>	y	pin
<u>Н</u>	n	not	<u>Ьь</u>	i	i
<u>О</u>	o	hot	<u>Ээ</u>	e	pen
<u>Ө</u>	ö	yearn	<u>Юю</u>	yu	you
			<u>Яя</u>	ya	kayak

¹ I use the common English transliteration 'Gengis Khan' instead of 'Gengis Han'.

Visuals



Figure 1: Partial world map with Mongolia circled in red
[source: <http://maps.google.fr>]



Figure 2: Map of Mongolia (Dundgobi region and Ulaanbaatar highlighted)
[source: <http://maps.google.fr>]

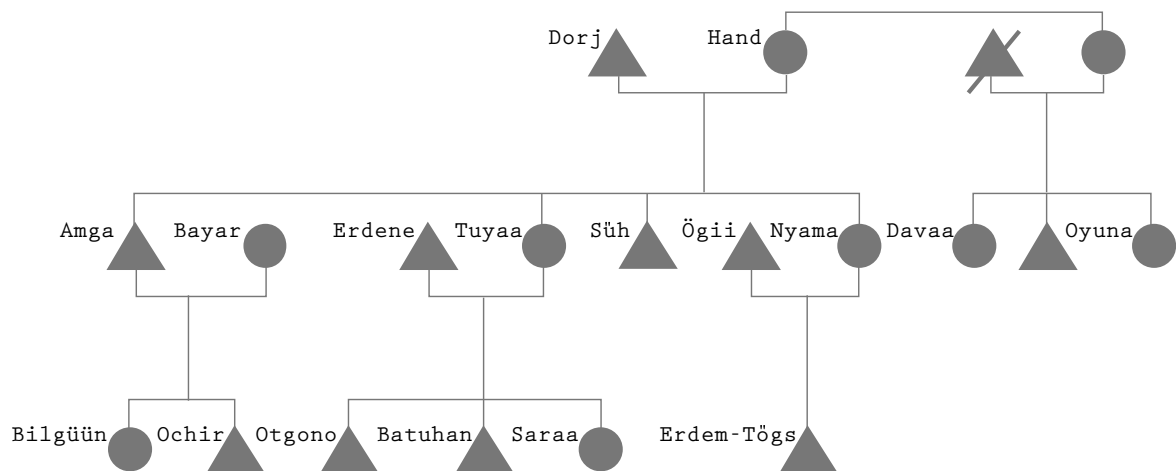


Figure 3: Kinship diagram representing the main protagonists of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prologue: Mongolian babies produce hierarchy

When I arrived in Mongolia in January 2008, twenty-four-year-old Nyama was nine months pregnant. She had decided to give birth in the hospital of her natal Dundgobi region rather than in one of the hospitals of the capital city Ulaanbaatar where she lived with her husband. We had first met in 2003 when I stayed at her parents' camp in the countryside. Since then, we had become close friends and I decided to wait with her until she gave birth. We resided at the home of one of Nyama's cousins, who lived together with his mother and his sisters, Davaa (twenty-four years old) and Oyuna (five years old), in a yurt (*ger*)² in the south-western part of the regional capital. The scene that I describe below happened two days after the birth of Nyama's son, just after they arrived from the hospital.

On arriving home from kindergarten, Oyuna rushed towards the eastern bed where her auntie was sitting with the baby in her arms. Oyuna seemed bemused by the little face emerging from the swaddling clothes. Making a surprising effort to control her high pitched voice, she said softly, "What a little baby (Jaahan mama!)" The baby³ then babbled and Oyuna, who seemed half surprised, half amused, exclaimed, "What is going on?". Nyama brought her son to her chest, rocking him gently and with a large smile told Oyuna, "You are now an older sister⁴ (Chi egch bolson)." Oyuna asked whether she could carry the baby, but Nyama told her she was not allowed. She added, "Now that you are an older sister (egch), you need to study well in the kindergarten". Still wearing her shoes and the coat she had not taken time to remove upon arriving, Oyuna remained near them, closely observing the baby as Nyama untied his swaddling clothes to change him.

² A yurt is a circular tent covered with felt; the traditional dwelling of Mongolian peoples.

³ Babies are not given their names upon birth. In this description, I only use Nyama's son's name after he received it the next day.

⁴ More precisely, a classificatory older sister.

When Davaa arrived home, Oyuna was still observing the baby with a sustained interest. "You have become a mother!" Davaa said to Nyama, her voice betraying her emotion. After undressing in the eastern side of the yurt, Davaa came closer to Nyama and the baby, asking, like all other visitors would do, "Is your body well (Chini biyee sain uu)?" She then turned to Oyuna and told her, "You now have two younger siblings (dүү): the baby of auntie Byamba, and the baby of auntie Nyama (Chi odoo hoyor дүүtei: Biambegchiin jaal, Nyamegchiin jaal)." Oyuna replied with obvious pride, "I am his older sister. From now onwards, I won't ever eat a sweet (Bi egee. Bi odoo hezech chiher idehgүй)!" As Nyama was swaddling her son, the baby started crying. Oyuna's mum told her daughter to stay away and leave Nyama and the baby in peace. Oyuna refused to move and replied assertively to her mother, "I am his bigger sister, he is my younger sibling (Bi egee, minii дүү)!"

The next day, we left the regional capital. Nyama's parents had come from the countryside to pick up Nyama and the baby who had just been given his name, Erdem-Tögs. Nyama and Erdem-Tögs were going to rest at Nyama's parents, in the countryside, for a month. On their way, they dropped me off at the home of Erdene,⁵ Nyama's sister's husband, with whose family I was going to live for the duration of my fieldwork.

It was only a few days before the Mongolian New Year (Tsagaan Sar) and when we arrived at Erdene's, the yurt was packed with relatives helping to make hundreds of dumplings which were going to be offered to guests during the New Year visits. Nyama sat on the bed located in the eastern side.⁶ Bilgүүн, Nyama's seven-year-old niece, immediately came close to her. She gently sniffed the baby on his cheek, which is the way older people kiss younger ones. "You are now the eldest sister (egch) of four younger siblings (дүү)," exclaimed Nyama. The four дүү whom Nyama referred to here were four boys: Bilgүүн's own brother, two of Bilgүүн's first cousins, Otgono and Batuhan, with whom Bilgүүн lived during the school year, and Erdem-Tögs.

⁵ Homes are always named after the household head, that is, the oldest man of the family.

⁶ Guests usually sit in the western part of the yurt (*ger*), located on the left-hand side when entering as the door of yurts is always orientated southward. In this case, there was no room on the sofa located in the western side for Nyama to sit with her baby.

Nyama's nephews, Otgono and Batuhan, who had so far only showed a remote interest in the baby, came closer. Batuhan, who was three years old, was the youngest child of his family. Nyama asked him, "This is your younger sibling, right (Chinii düü, mon uu)?" Batuhan did not hesitate, "No (Ügüi)!" he exclaimed. Nyama insisted, "You have become an older brother (Chi ah bolson)." The following day, Nyama and Erdem-Tögs left with Nyama's parents and I stayed in the district centre with Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan whose life I was going to share for the next twenty months.

The way Erdem-Tögs was introduced to his cousins demonstrates that from their very first interactions, Mongolian infants are not just born into a hierarchical social environment but are directly involved in the production of hierarchical relations. How people in rural Mongolia produce social hierarchy as they interact and how, in turn, the Mongolian mode of hierarchical relations produces Mongolian persons is the topic of this thesis. Let me start my investigation by introducing the reader to essential aspects of Mongolian social hierarchy as revealed by the above interactions.

The way Nyama introduced her son to his cousins without presenting the baby's personal identity is instructive. The term 'younger sibling' (*düü*) that she used is a generic term to refer to younger people and does not mark gender. Even after the baby was given his name, Nyama did not use it to introduce him. In fact, for a long time, Batuhan and Otgono did not remember the name of their cousin but referred to him as auntie Nyama's baby (*Nyama egchiin jaal*).⁷ In the same way, when the birth of a baby is announced to adults, no emphasis is placed on the baby's personal features such as weight, name or physical characteristics. Rather, parents are said to have become with a son (*hüütei bolson*) or with a daughter (*ohintoi bolson*). In sum, the introduction of Erdem-Tögs to his relatives was less about him than it was about how he transformed Nyama into a mother and his cousins into older brothers (*ah*) and older sisters (*egch*). What then, are the implications of being turned into an *ah* or an *egch*?

⁷ Not using names is part of the protective techniques towards infants which I will explain in Chapter 3.

The kinship terms, older brother (*ah*), older sister (*egch*) and younger sibling (*düü*) denote relational statuses. They are used as formal terms of address and reference to mark seniority and to show respect towards older people irrespective of kinship bonds. In fact, older people are never called by their personal name only, which is considered to be disrespectful. When interacting with a senior person, junior people use the polite pronoun *ta*. They address and refer to men by using the term for older brother, *ah*, and to women, by using the term for older sister, *egch*. These terms can be combined with the person's name or a nickname can be used by close relatives. When interacting with a peer or with a younger person, the colloquial pronoun *chi* is used. Younger people are addressed by their personal name or the junior sibling term *düü* preceded by the possessive pronoun *minii*. The meaning of the expression *minii düü* depends on the context of its usage: it can be used to express affection and tenderness or to insist on obligations to help and obey. Any interaction and relation thus involves the positioning of people in term of relative seniority, according to their generation and gender by using sibling terms *ah* (older brother), *egch* (older sister) and *düü* (younger sibling). The fact that kinship terms do not index genealogical positions comes as no surprise to anthropologists (see e.g. Astuti 2009; Needham 1962; Schneider 1984). This however prompts the question of how children make sense of the terms *ah*, *egch* and *düü* which can be used to designate perfect strangers, their neighbours, their friends as well as children who have the same parents as them.

In the vignette, Nyama and Davaa did not just draw attention to the fact that Oyuna, Bilgüün and Batuhan were older than the baby but introduced the baby as a person who was part of their personal network of relatives. Oyuna was invited to consider that the baby was *her second düü*, a status that Nyama's son shared with the baby daughter of another of Oyuna's first cousins. In the same way, Bilgüün was prompted to include Erdem-Tögs as *one of her düü*, together with her brother and first cousins. Lastly, Nyama asked Batuhan to confirm that Erdem-Tögs was *his düü*. By being placed in the position of *egch* or *ah* and by being encouraged to place Erdem-Tögs within a set of *düü* with whom they entertained a special relation, the children were shown that kin relationships are encompassed within the Mongolian hierarchical mode of relating. In fact, the compound word *ah düü*, literally 'older

brothers and young siblings', is one of the terms most frequently used to designate one's relatives (including people related through consanguinity and affinity).

Nyama was quick to point out to Oyuna that her status of *egch* had changed others' expectations of her. Oyuna's reaction shows that she too thought that being an *egch* was not only a relational position but had moral implications for herself. In fact, Oyuna spontaneously stated her intention to stop eating sweets as a consequence of having become an *egch*. While Oyuna understood that becoming an *egch* came with certain expectations and responsibilities, she also saw this status as giving her prerogatives. For instance, she used her status as *egch* to resist her mother's order. Given that the baby was her own *düü*, she claimed the right to stay close to him. In other words, *ah*, *egch* and *düü* are statuses understood to create both expectations and obligations, to confer both responsibilities and prerogatives.

Let me draw a brief comparison to further convey how the way Erdem-Tögs was introduced to Oyuna, Batuhan and Bilgüün is intrinsically productive of hierarchy. To do so, I use the description Briggs gives of an Inuit father, Inuttiaq, introducing his newborn daughter to his older daughters, Raigili, six years old, and Saarak, three years old. The scene takes place in the middle of the night just after their mother had given birth at home (1970:156-7):

Raigili was wakened while our tea was brewing. Shaken into semiconsciousness by Inuttiaq in the efflorescence of his excitement, she raised a groggy head from her pillow. "Child! Look at your baby sister!" She gazed unseeingly for a moment in the direction her father indicated and grunted something unintelligible. "Do you love (naklik) her?" her father persisted. "Yes." Inuttiaq tried to teach her the kinship term by which she should address the baby, but her head had already sunk back to the pillow, and she was fast asleep again.

Saarak was another matter. She was allowed to sleep soundly, and when she did stir after a while, Inuttiaq rhythmically rubbed her back in an attempt to lull her back to sleep. His efforts were futile, and when he saw that she was really awake, he pointed out the baby to her. I [Briggs] held my breath. But

there was no outburst, not for the first minute. Saarak chirped and cooed and poked at the baby with friendly interest. It was only when she saw her mother put the baby to her breast that the storm broke: a storm of wails and slaps. Allaq, holding the baby protectively, said in a tender voice, "Don't hurt her." Whereupon Saarak demanded her endangered right: to be nursed.

The way these two Inuit children were introduced to their baby sister places the emphasis on the baby, how they should feel towards her and treat her. When the younger sister tries to hit the baby, her mother makes no mention of the fact that she should behave well in her quality of older sister. The soft manner in which the mother reacts to Saarak's aggressive behaviour towards her baby-sister stands in contrast with the way Oyuna was kept at a safe distance from her cousin. This is consistent with Inuits tending to avoid attempting directly to control the behaviour of others and their general egalitarian ethic of relationship (although forms of gender and age hierarchy also exist among family members).

The way their newborn sister was introduced to Raigili and Saarak suggests that among Inuits, sibling relations are primarily defined through love and acceptance of a new member in the family, rather than by the responsibilities and obligations expected of older siblings. In Inuits, the term for sibling is only used to refer to people who have the same parents and does not mark seniority. The Inuit baby is presented as an individual with whom other children should interact with equal respect as with other individuals. By contrast, the way Erdem-Tögs was introduced to his *ah* and *egch* reveals that in Mongolia the focus is on the obligations that older children have towards the baby and how relating to a younger person changes and determines their personal status. Whereas in the Inuit context, respect for individual prerogatives by and large determine relations, in Mongolia context, asymmetrical obligations determine mutual but asymmetrical prerogatives.

As they were introduced to Erdem-Tögs, Batuhan and Oyuna reacted very differently. While Oyuna welcomed the news, Batuhan refused to be identified as an older brother. This demonstrates that this apparently immediate transformation of children into older siblings, in fact represents a profound change requiring that they learn a new mode of relating to others. It also revealed three

aspects of Mongolian social hierarchy. First, it shows the importance of relating to others according to relative seniority. Second, it demonstrates how the experience of kinship is embedded within the hierarchical mode of relating. Third, it proves that the positions of *ah*, *egch* and *düü* are not just relational statuses but have moral and practical implications for oneself, in part created by others' expectations. The Mongolian expression *ah düü* which designates the extensible group of people related to *ego* through social relations ordered by seniority and the idiom of kinship, encapsulates these three aspects. In the rest of the dissertation, I use the expression '*ah düü* mode of relating' to designate the Mongolian hierarchical mode of relating to others.

The mutual production of persons

The starting point of this study is that every human infant is born in a pre-existing cultural environment and takes part in the production of relationships, which in turn go on to produce her as a person. In his seminal essay on the person, Mauss (1938) first highlighted that the way people conceive of the category of person vary cross-culturally. Since then, anthropological studies have documented how people living in different social contexts entertain different expectations about the way to treat others and to act as a moral person. Initially, studies drew a more or less explicit contrast between two 'types of person': 'the traditional sociocentric person' (typically a product of hierarchical societies) and 'the modern individualistic person' (typically a product of industrialised Western societies); two opposed ideal-types most clearly exemplified by Dumont's contrast of *homo hierarchicus* (1963) with *homo aequalis* (1985 [1977]).

In the last two decades, anthropologists have become increasingly critical of analytical attempts at classifying the diversity of human personhood observed empirically, into 'types of person' (see e.g. Bloch 2012b; Hann 2012; Spiro 1993; Turiel 2004) and rather opted for thin-grained contextualised descriptions of the experience of relating to others and experiencing being a person in a given social setting (e.g. Allerton 2001; Astuti 1995; Carsten 1997; Mahmood 2005; Wikan 1990). In contemporary studies, egocentric and sociocentric, autonomy and dependence, individuality and mutuality are no longer seen as essential traits of

different types of persons but are analysed as interrelated qualities or dimensions of sociality and selves (e.g. LiPuma 1998; Mascolo & Li 2004; Mascolo *et al.* 2004; Mosko 2010; Raeff *et al.* 2000; Raeff 2010).

An increasing number of studies of personhood and sociality include practices of care for infants and children (e.g. Astuti 1998; Empson 2011; Stash 2009; Toren 2007; Walker 2013). While these studies provide carefully documented account of the everyday dilemmas and tensions that people experience in forming relations with others, they do not directly interrogate the learning processes through which people come to share assumptions about their individuality and about the social world. In this dissertation, my aim is not just to examine what it means to be a socially and morally competent Mongolian person but to reveal the social mechanisms through which people learn and produce anew Mongolian hierarchy over generations. To do so, I focus on how young children in the Dundgobi learn to interact through the *ah düü* mode of relating.

Human babies are all born in a state of dependence on others and progressively acquire physical and moral autonomy. How babies' initial state of fragility and dependence is conceptualised and how adults care for children vary considerably across cultures (e.g. Gottlieb 2004; Levine 1994; Razy 2007). Moreover, the form of self-sufficiency and moral autonomy required to be a morally and socially competent child is also subject to wide cultural variation (e.g. Göncü 1999; Levine & New 2008; Rogoff 2003). For all of us however, as sensitively stated by Walker in the introduction to his monograph about Urarina people of the Peruvian Amazon, individuality is developed on the basis of a primary state of mutuality (2011:7):

We (humans) come into the world accompanied, and this remains our defining condition: who we are, how we come to experience ourselves as conscious subjects, with the capacity to act on the world, are fundamentally conditioned by our constitutively accompanied nature. This mutuality does not undermine individuality but precedes it and is its condition of existence.

Mutuality 'comes first' developmentally. In the life course however, mutuality and individuality are moral qualities of the person conjointly constituted in the

processes of relating to others while developing personal autonomy. Building on Walker's formulation, I use mutuality to mean a state of interdependence or of being in relation without assuming that mutuality implies symmetrical ways of relating. The question of how children in the Dundgobi learn to be socially and morally competent Mongolian persons can then be redefined as: how is 'their individuality' formed in relation to others? How is 'their mutuality' redefined as children develop a sense of individuality? To answer such questions, my research, primarily based on twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2008 and 2009, examines the inter-subjective processes through which children are shaped and shape others into persons (*hūn*) as they learn to interact through the Mongolian mode of hierarchical relations.

By focusing my study on how Mongolian children between the ages of two and eight learn to interact through an encompassing mode of hierarchical relations, my goal is threefold. Firstly, I want to uncover the learning processes through which children become competent at positioning themselves as *düü* (junior sibling/person) and *ah* or *egch* (older brother or sister, senior persons) and to unveil the mechanisms through which social hierarchy is (re)produced over generations. Secondly, I aim to reveal some of the shared assumptions and skills which underline the hierarchical mode of relating in Mongolia and which constitute some prevalent aspects of Mongolian personhood. Thirdly, I intend to contribute to the study of the person by rethinking 'the cultural construction of the person' as an ongoing process of learning.

A 'family-centred' ethnography

As explained in the former section, the learning processes through which children become competent at interacting according to the *ah düü* mode of relating constitute the empirical focus of this dissertation. Processes of learning to form relations are not limited to a specific activity. They are pervasive, ongoing, and embedded within the development of personal relationships. Moreover, children and adults continuously learn as they interact with others and have to learn to enact different statuses through their life cycle. To a certain extent, abstracting

learning processes from the flux of interactions of which they are part contradicts the essentially processual nature of learning.

There are two possible approaches to studying learning as a dynamic process. First, one can establish what children need to learn by observing the competences and conceptions that adults share and investigate the trajectory through which children develop similar ideas (e.g. Astuti *et al.* 2004; Bloch 2005:61-86; Odden 2008). To be effective, such a strategy generally requires the researcher to complement participant observation with experimental tasks. Alternatively, one can look at the salient practices and 'messages' that children receive from their social environment and what children make of them (e.g. Briggs 1998; Stafford 1995; Toren 1990). Obviously these two approaches are not exclusive and researchers in fact always gain insights from both children and adults to understand how learning occurs. In conducting my study, I primarily opted for the second approach with the idea of letting how and what children learn emerge from long-term observations of their daily life. This way I hoped to gain insights into both children's knowledge and the processes through which they develop such knowledge without assuming that this trajectory necessarily leads them to the 'reproduction' of adults' conceptions (Toren 1993).

As underlined by Bloch (2012a:143-85), most of our knowledge is implicit and thus learned and accessible through practice. This fact has important epistemological implications which, as Malinowski (1932:1-25) first pledged, justify the use of long-term participant observation as a research method. Firstly, this means that verbal knowledge needs to be treated as a special kind of knowledge. People's *a posteriori* reflexive rationalisations produced in conversations and interviews cannot be assumed to have motivational or explanatory power over their actions. Secondly, this entails that to understand other people and share their implicit knowledge, the only possible method is to build this implicit knowledge oneself through participating in their daily activities. Not only is people's knowledge largely implicit and grounded in practice but as stated by Toren (1999:27), "it is the nature of human beings to make meaning inter-subjectively – that is to say in relation to one another". Although the inter-

subjective nature of meaning might seem obvious to the reader, it has important implications for the way I approach studying children and learning.

The first implication is that children cannot be studied in isolation from their social environment. The second implication is that children do not make sense of their social world by simply copying or receiving the 'knowledge' of more experienced members of their social groups (for a critique of the 'fax-like' model of knowledge transmission see Strauss 1992). To make sense of their social world and become competent members of their social group, children always need to re-produce, that is, to produce anew its meaning. This is not to say that children create meaning from scratch or are 'free creators' of culture but rather that they encounter the challenging task of making sense of their culturally constituted world through others. Thirdly, it means that the way people make sense of their social world is a historical process, both because it takes place in a historically specific context and because the processes through which each one of us creates meaning and participates in creating public meaning constitute what Toren calls the "microhistory of the constitution of ideas" (1999:28, see also Toren 1993).⁸ Lastly, looking at meaning as inter-subjectively constituted implies taking into account that "children do not have the same understanding of the world as adults" and that processes of development are relevant to understanding children's ideas (Toren 1999:29).

Following Bloch's and Toren's insights, this study is mainly concerned with the micro-interactions of daily life through which children learn about and make sense of their social environments. My research method was principally based on the traditional anthropological method of participant observation as I shared the life of a family in a district of the middle Gobi from January 2008 to October 2009. I centred my fieldwork around the activities of three children: Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan with whom I lived and was able to participate in their daily activities. Born respectively in 2000, 2002 and 2005, their interpersonal relationships were ordered by their status of *egch*, *ah* or *düü*. Otgono and Batuhan shared part of their extended network of relationships with their first cousin Bilgüün, which allowed

⁸ Notwithstanding Toren and Sperber's disagreement about their model of the mind, Sperber's epidemiological approach (1996) adopts a similar focus on micro-processes of communication through which ideas spread.

me to compare their respective position within it. I had already conducted fieldwork with Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan's families in 2003 and 2006. This allowed me to have an in-depth knowledge of their life history and a longitudinal perspective on the changes of their positions within their family and extended family.

My apprenticeship in learning to learn through observing and participating was immediate and reinforced by the fact that adults were generally not keen on my questions, an attitude which I will explain fully in Chapter 7. My status of 'peculiar adult' (see below) however allowed me to have inquisitive conversations with children, some of which I recorded. I conducted some interviews with adults and used some child-centred techniques such as using pictures or drawings to engage conversations on a specific topic. I also got into the habit of randomly recording 'live interactions', taking detailed notes focused on one child for thirty minutes.

The idea of recording 'live interactions' was inspired by the method of 'spot-observation' used by psychological anthropologists (e.g. Gaskins 1999; Whiting & Edwards 1992; Whiting & Whiting 1975). 'Spot-observations' are used to create a dataset of observations to compare the activities and/or types of behaviours of a sample of children. I used the method of live observation with four boys (Otgono, Batuhan, Bilgüün's brother Ochir and a two-year-old neighbour Mönkö) and two girls (Bilgüün, and a three-year-old neighbour Uyanga) without having pre-established what behaviour I intended to code. Rather, I hoped that it would help me uncover some of the micro-interactive processes through which learning happens. Given that children seasonally migrated between the village and the countryside my recordings are discontinuous. My live observations have thereafter turned into a rich database of detailed ethnographic recordings which I use in this dissertation.

By having conducted fieldwork centred on the life and experiences of a few children whom I got to know intimately, I aim to more generally shed light on children's perspectives and contextualise their social agency within the social constraints of being a child in rural Southern Mongolia. In doing so, my study is part of the flourishing body of contemporary studies of infants and children as

subjects both epistemologically and socially (e.g. Ahn 2011; Bolin 2006; Morton 1996; Razy 2007; Rydström 2003). In contrast with studies based on age-groups or institutional settings (e.g. Corsaro & Rizzo 1988; Tobin *et al.* 2009), I chose to focus my study on a few children, those with whom I lived and others to whom I gained access through their social network. Previous studies show the heuristic value of focusing on one or a few children in order to be able to interpret children's reactions in view of their personality, locate them within the history of their relationships and account for learning processes (e.g. Briggs 1998; Gottlieb 2004; Schieffelin 1990). In my case, the three children around which I centred my research were members of the same family group and indeed lived together most of the time during my field research. Let me explain the advantages of adopting what I call a 'family-centred ethnography' as strategy for my research.

It was crucial for my research that I understand children in their daily life and family context. As I explain in the next section, as time passed my position within the district community became increasingly consolidated as a member of Erdene's family, which gave me greater insights into the family's social network but also created distance from others. My choice of adopting a family-centred focus represents both a deliberate research strategy and reflects the nature of social life in rural Mongolia. In the village, networks of relations are by-and-large developed as a member of a given family (*ger бүл*) and extended family group (*ah дүү*). In the countryside, everyday life is *de facto* family-centred as camps (*hot ail*) in the Gobi rarely count more than two households. Finally, I use family-centred ethnography as a rhetorical device. By basing my analysis on fine-grained ethnographic descriptions of a few children's interactions, I hope that the reader will develop a sense of familiarity with them and through their living portraits be able to gain a sense of the (inter-)subjective processes involved in learning to be a competent Mongolian person.

Access and positionality

I first visited Mongolia in 2003 to conduct three months' fieldwork on hospitality practices for my master's dissertation. Prior to my arrival, I had contacted a first year university student in French, Nyama. She welcomed me in Ulaanbaatar and

we immediately left for spending her summer holidays on her parents' camp. There I got to know Nyama's relatives, including Bilgüün who was three and Otgono and her nine-month-old brother Ochir. A few weeks after my arrival, Nyama's sister whose son had just turned one got married (*gerle-*). On a rainy day at the end of August, following traditional virilocal practices, Erdene and Tuyaa's brand new yurt was erected on Erdene's father's compound in the village.

In 2006, I decided to go back to Mongolia for six months to develop my skills in Mongolian language, with the prospect of starting a PhD a year later. I was already considering working with children and asked Erdene whether I could come and live with his family. By then, Otgono had a fiery and determined eleven-month-old brother, Batuhan. I arranged with the kindergarten and school directors to teach children English and also gave lessons to adults in the different village institutions: the hospital, city-hall, cultural centre, school and kindergarten.

During the New Year, the spring, and the summer holidays, I accompanied Otgono to the countryside where he stayed with his matrilineal grandparents. There I got to know Otgono's cousins, in particular Bilgüün and her brother Ochir. I spent my time helping in various herding and domestic activities, when possible accompanying children. That summer was especially dry, and we had to move camp three times in the space of a month. I helped dismantling the yurt, loading it onto the trailer and rebuilding it to the best of my ability. This marked a change in my status. Having proven my willingness to help and my capacity to do so, Otgono's grandfather thereafter introduced me to visitors as one of his people (*manai hün*). While Otgono's grandmother used to introduce me as the friend of her youngest daughter, Nyama (*Nyamagiin naiz*), she started to refer to me as her French daughter (*Frants ohin*) and made a traditional Mongolian robe (*deel*) for me.⁹ Being treated like a family member (rather than a guest), it became natural to refer and address Tuyaa's parents, as father (*aav*) and mother (*eej*), and to call Tuyaa who was one year older than me *egee*, while I had until then related to her as a peer. When I left Erdene's family in June 2006, Erdene and Tuyaa agreed that I could come back for a much longer period for my doctoral research.

⁹ The relation between work and family membership will be fully explored in Chapter 7.



Figure 4: Dismantling the yurt before changing camp

By living for six months in an exclusively Mongolian-speaking environment, I developed basic skills in the Mongolian language. I continued learning written and spoken Mongolian once back in London and throughout my doctoral fieldwork. My language skills developed throughout my fieldwork but my family, friends and colleagues, who got used to my way of talking, also kept making efforts to talk to me and explain things in terms they knew I could understand. In April 2008 and in January 2009, I decided to spend a month in Ulaanbaatar to take one-to-one lessons in Mongolian to improve my linguistic skills. I also stayed in Ulaanbaatar for a few weeks during the summer of 2009 and before I left so as to work on transcriptions and translations. By the time I conducted my doctoral fieldwork, Nyama's French had long become perfectly fluent. She became my research assistant: teaching me Mongolian, helping me transcribe and translate recordings and legal documents, etc. upon my stays in the capital city.

When I arrived in January 2008, Otgono had turned five and attended kindergarten. His brother, Batuhan, was three, and often preferred to stay at home

rather than go to kindergarten. Their elder cousin, Bilgüün, who was seven, had started school and was staying with Erdene's family during the school year. Following their schedule, I divided my time between the kindergarten, home and school. During the first six months, I spent most of my days in the kindergarten with Otgono. There I got to know the staff well. After the start of the second school year, I alternated between spending time with Batuhan in the kindergarten, or in Otgono or Bilgüün's school classrooms. I should emphasize that children's lives in rural Mongolia are not segregated by age and thus making them the focus of my research implied developing relationships with a much broader network of people: their friends, family members, relatives, teachers, etc.

Otgono and Bilgüün were eager to be the centre of my attention and they were usually happy for me to accompany them when they visited other households or played with friends. They were especially excited when I accompanied them to school so that they could show off their special relationship with me to their classmates. It took longer for Batuhan to become familiar with me. At three, he spoke very little and was already the focus of adults' attention at home. With time, he included me in his activities.

My stance of curious observer was by and large mutual. Especially at the beginning of my stay or when we received visitors, children and adults were intrigued by my appearances and curious of my behaviours as I took part in daily activities. Children often requested that I took pictures of them and enjoyed playing with my Dictaphone as both interviewees and interviewers. On the few occasions when children refused to let me join their activities I, of course, respected their wishes. In the same way, I suspended my participation in adults' activities or social gatherings when I felt it was inappropriate.

Throughout my fieldwork I remained a 'peculiar person'. First because of my European facial traits and white skin colour. Secondly because, aged 28, I was still childless, which made me a 'girl' (*ohin*) rather than a 'woman' (*emegtei*). Thirdly, because I interacted with children in ways that were not 'adult-like'. I intentionally played with my status of 'stranger' to establish a position where I could part take in children's sociality and everyday life as an 'auntie without authority' (for a

similar approach see Corsaro 2003:7-35, Mandell's method of taking the 'least-adult' role 1988). In the kindergarten and in school, children were told to address me as *Od-bagch* (Teacher-Aude) but, imitating Otgono and Batuhan, most often called me *Od-egee* (auntie-Aude). At first children (and adults) were surprised that I did not behave like a 'normal teacher' outside of the time when I taught them English. Instead I took part in their games, asked them questions, observed them and took notes and did not intervene when their teachers left them unsupervised. As a result, children were comfortable committing small acts of mischief in my presence, which they would not dare commit in the presence of other adults. I also consistently refused to intervene in their disputes. I thus successfully managed to minimize the position of authority which the status of *egch* and teacher conferred on me, though showing enough awareness of the Mongolian etiquette (see Chapter 2) to make my behaviours 'appropriate'.



Figure 5: Me, teaching English to children in the kindergarten

(Photo by Zolma)

Erdene and Tuyaa made all possible efforts to accommodate and help with my research. They left it up to my judgement to find ways to contribute as a family member. I contributed towards food supplies and did my best to fulfil my duties as a female family member although part taking in children's activities at times implied disregarding my obligations. At the time of my doctoral fieldwork, Erdene was engaged in various kinds of 'businesses' (*biznyes*). He no longer made silver bowls but still engaged in their trade. At various times, he also sold motorcycles, TV antennae, silver belts, and furniture, which he made himself with the help of a friend he employed. Together with Tuyaa and Erdene's large herd, the money Erdene earned represented the main source of income for the family.

Erdene's income like his schedule was highly variable. Though he enjoyed spending his free time playing dominos with neighbours, unlike them he rarely drank alcohol nor did he smoke. Tuyaa now worked for a steady, but what she considered relatively small salary¹⁰ as an accountant at the Haan bank local branch. She was responsible for loans and worked long hours, often staying at the office in the evening, and occasionally returning to work at weekends. By comparison with other men of his generation living in the village, Erdene reluctantly assisted Tuyaa at home. Throughout my fieldwork, gender roles and the personal responsibilities of family members were an ongoing object of unspoken negotiations.

I presented my research to adults as being concerned with how Mongolian children "are transformed into socially and morally competent persons" (*hümüüjüüle*-).¹¹ The adults of the extended network of my host family and my colleagues were aware of the purpose of my research and encouraged their children to help me. I also received the support of the directors and teachers of the school and kindergarten. I explained to children that I wanted to write a book about them, ask them questions or most often simply played or worked with them. While the existing literature underlines the ethical difficulties linked to

¹⁰ Her monthly salary was 200,000MNT: in early 2008, this was equivalent about 200GBP. Two years earlier, she had earned 80,000MNT for her part-time employment at the post-office. In the village, families which had one steady income (that is anyone working in the school, kindergarten, hospital, city hall, cultural centre or post office) were considered relatively well off, though everyone I knew underlined that it was impossible to live off their salary alone. People tend to downplay their wealth as 'having' puts families under obligations of sharing as we will see in Chapter 6.

¹¹ I will further explain the term *hümüüjüüle*- in Chapter 3.

asymmetrical power positions when working with children (e.g. Gallacher & Gallagher 2012; Friedl 2004; Morrow & Richards 1996), my experience is that when at home or in our neighbourhood children felt free to refuse to play or talk with me, and simply said so or ran away when they were bored. Adults were doubtful about my research methods but trusted that studying in a university in Europe I knew what I was doing.

Children of my family introduced me to other children as the auntie who asks funny questions and gives stickers. Bilgüün and Otgono often took the initiative to teach me lessons on things they assumed I did not know. In other words, my 'research access' was based on deference and trust towards education on the part of adult and trust and fun on the part of children. I obtained the written agreements of the parents of children with whom I conducted live observations, the formal agreement of the school and kindergarten directors to conduct research inside these institutions and the informal agreement of children to write a book about them.

Given the intimate nature of the data which I expose in this dissertation and the fact that it mainly concerns young children I decided to preserve the anonymity of my host family. This decision also stems from a concern not to affect my family unintentionally given my awareness that within the Mongolian economy of attention, naming and referring to people are intrinsically potent acts as I will be further explain in Chapter 4. Protecting the identity of my family also implies that I do not disclose the name of the district in which I conducted fieldwork. Lastly, the pictures included in this dissertation are presented without names or dates and have been chosen so as not to allow to identify my host family or the district where I worked. Unless otherwise stated, I am the author of the photographs which were all taken in the Dundgobi region during my different periods of fieldwork.

Living in a district of the Dundgobi

Mongolia is administratively divided into regions (*aimag*), themselves divided into districts (*sum*). Each region and district is politically administered from a centre or village (*töv*). I lived in one of the fifteen districts composing the Dundgobi region,

which like all districts of the region was mainly populated by Halh Mongols, the majority ethnic group in Mongolia. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to my fieldwork location as a district of the Dundgobi region or Southern Mongolia.

When staying in the village, I occasionally walked around the periphery of the village and climbed one of the small sacred hills from which I could view the village from a distance. Children often joined me on my way and reminded me to pick up three stones that each one of us would throw on the cairn (*ovoo*) surmounting the hilltop. From the cairn top, I could not help but feel that the village was a desert hallucination. No water in sight, only a discontinuous scattering of sedentarized yurts separated by high compound walls and large empty areas as if people had gathered here but remained opposed to the idea of close cohabitation. Further away, at the intersection of the network of dust roads, appeared a scant collection of decrepit cement buildings, the remainder of the socialist oasis born from the age of collectivization. Even from this distance, the stately two-floor school building with a tall tree planted in the court yard stood out as if ruling over the village.



Figure 6: Walking to the top of an ovoo cairn

The village centre with its concrete buildings contrasted with the residential quarters composed of sedentarized *ger* and a few concrete or wooden houses. Despite the small number of households, the village extended over about three kilometres from east to west and from north to south. These 'residential areas' were identified by their location in relation to the centre or by the name of the administrative divisions (*bag*) which divided the district into four sections. Cars and motorbikes driving through the village had created the dust roads linking different neighbourhoods to the 'village centre' (*töv*) and to the wells, two of which had been electrified in 2007. Fierce dogs guarded the walls of personal compounds (*hashaa*); reminding passers by that proximity was to be managed carefully (see Empson 2011: 268-316; Pedersen 2004:46).

In 2008 -2009, according to the administrative registry, among the few thousand inhabitants who lived in the district, less than a third were listed as sedentary residents of the administrative centre (*töv*). The majority of the population was thus registered as herders (*malchin*) living in the countryside (*hödöö*).¹² In the countryside, people lived off mobile pastoralism herding goats and sheep, and in the case of the richer households, horses, camels and cows. People continually commuted and migrated back and forth between the countryside and the village; villagers went to the countryside to help with pastoral tasks at times of need and herders regularly visited the village to buy supplies of petrol, staple foods (rice, flour, sugar, salt) and other goods (alcohol, sweets, clothes, etc.). Moreover, like in other regions of Mongolia, given their mobile housing, people could easily decide to settle in or move out of villages.¹³

In the village centre, buildings dating from the communist period - including a small clinic, city hall, cultural centre, post office, kindergarten and school - had been more or less well maintained and continued to offer the population of the district health, cultural, administrative and educational services. After mobile-

¹² *Hödöö*, the countryside, is a relative concept. Expressed in reference to Ulaanbaatar, also called the city (*hot*), the rest of Mongolia can be designated as the countryside (*hödöö*). Expressed in reference to district centres (*sumiin tov*), *hödöö* refers to the areas where mobile pastoralists live with their herd. Unless otherwise stated, I use the term countryside in this latter meaning. See Sneath (2006b) for an historical perspectives on the relation between urban political centres and rural pastoral areas in Mongolia.

¹³ Humphrey and Sneath (1999:186-187) prefer to call district centres 'sedentary settlements' so as to highlight that they represent complex agglomerations of both fixed (houses and sedentarized yurts) and mobile housing (mobile yurts) and that their population is composed of sedentary and mobile inhabitants.

phone networks started covering the district in 2007, the post office, which was once a lively hub where people waited for phone calls and exchanged gossip, became deserted. Though the official opening times had not changed, it was rare for it to be open except on Tuesdays when the mail was delivered from the regional capital. There were also a few shops, two banks and two petrol stations, as well as some apartment blocks in the village centre. In the city centre the two most notable buildings were the kindergarten and the school. The kindergarten stood out because of its painted façade and once colourful playground, while the school with its large gymnasium, T-shaped two-storey building and concrete yard imposed itself as the heart of the village. In fact, village life was synchronised with the daily and seasonal calendar of the school.



Figure 7: Children playing on a village compound

On weekdays, households started to wake up around 7am, as children got ready to go to school. From 8am onwards, children in their blue uniforms were seen to converge towards the school. A little later, younger children accompanied by an adult were brought to the kindergarten, after which the village seemed to stop breathing until the noise of children playing in the schoolyards animated it again. In the early afternoon, the dust roads were brought to life as pupils returned home at the end of the school day. A flow of children then assaulted the shops near the school to take a look at the shelves and sometimes buy a few sweets before heading home with their friends. During the school holidays, in particular in summer, children from the countryside returned to their families and most other

children and adults went to the countryside to help, so the village became a desolate place.



Figure 8: Countryside (*hōdöö*)

Bilgüün and Otgono longed for the school holidays when Bilgüün would go home and be reunited with her brother and family and Otgono would visit one of his favourite uncles or his grandparents and enjoy taking part in pastoral activities. Batuhan was increasingly sent along with his brother. In the countryside, camps (*hot ail*) were generally composed of one or two *ger* of related people.

In summer, if enough rain fell, households established their camp around ‘grassy marshes’ (*ustai toirom*) – which were rarely more than one or two feet deep – and thus lived in closer proximity to each other. The rest of the year, they watered their herd from wells, generally equipped with a motorized pump. At the time of my fieldwork, most households owned a motorcycle, which they used to visit neighbours, to commute to the village and to herd. Although I don’t have space to present the Mongolian pastoral economy and how the transition to a market economy impacted land-use and pastoralism in Mongolia, I invite the reader to

consult Humphrey & Sneath (1999) and Sneath (2001; 2002; 2003; 2006) on this topic. Let me underline that the countryside (*hödöö*), the village (*töv*), the regional capital (*aimag*) and Ulaanbaatar city (*hot*) are economically interdependent and people navigate these different social-economic spaces along their personal networks (see Sneath 1993 & 2006b).

Summary of chapters

The micro-interactions which constitute the main object of analysis of this study are part of the continuous production of Mongolian social hierarchy through history. In the next chapter, I give the reader the background about Mongolian kinship, hierarchy and the status of children so as to locate current practices within Mongolian history. I conclude the chapter by presenting the 'theoretical tools' which I will use to connect the study of children and social hierarchy through the lens of learning and social (re)production.

Chapters 3 to 8 constitute the ethnographic body of the thesis. Chapter 3 presents the status of infants and toddlers before they are required to interact through the *ah düü* mode of relating and are treated like 'kings' whose fragility and dependency dictate the terms of their relationships with others. The following chapters are concerned with children's learning experiences once they are required to form relations according to their status as *ah/egch* or *düü* and how these experiences shape their sense of mutuality and individuality. Each chapter starts by presenting a change that occurs in how children are treated or expected to behave once they are 'no longer kings' and engages children in a process of becoming competent at the *ah düü* mode of relating.

In Chapter 4, I look at children's experiences when adults, who used to anticipate young children's needs and to prevent them from crying, start requiring that they control their own bodies and emotions. In Chapter 5, I examine how young children, who are used to enjoying the physical proximity of their mothers, are challenged to withstand the experience of separation from their mothers and home. In Chapter 6, I investigate how young children, who are used to obtain anything they ask for from older people, learn to share. In Chapter 7, I account for

the processes through which young children who are first deemed incapable to understand and not required to help, learn to become competent at domestic and pastoral chores and to become helpful members of their family. In Chapter 8, I examine the change of status that occurs when children enter school and ask whether becoming a pupil constitutes an experience when children learn ways of interacting alternative to the *ah düü* mode of relating.

In Chapter 9, I conclude the dissertation by presenting the findings of the study. I present the skills and moral assumptions which underpin Mongolian social hierarchy and which are required to become a competent Mongolian person. I further show how the examination of children's learning processes makes it possible to substantiate how 'the person' is socially constructed and suggest that such an approach opens new comparative questions highly significant to the study of personhood. I close the thesis by speculating about the future of the *ah düü* mode of relating in contemporary Mongolia.

Chapter 2. Historical and theoretical background

In the introductory chapter, I plunged the reader into Mongolian social hierarchy through the lens of young children's experience of it. The interactions I presented by which a baby was introduced to his cousins are part of the continuous historical flux of actions (Bloch 2012a:79-116) or micro-history (Toren 1993) through which Mongolian hierarchy is (re)produced from one generation to the next. In this chapter, I present some historical background about Mongolian hierarchy, kinship and the status of children so as to locate the micro-events of daily life, which constitute the main data of this research, within the continuous flux of history of which they are part. Given that thus far, the study of Mongolian hierarchy and the study of Mongolian children have been constituted as different fields of study, I present them successively. In order to bridge these two domains, I then constitute a 'theoretical toolkit' about learning on which I will draw in the rest of the dissertation.

Mongolian kinship

It is well established amongst scholars that 'Mongolian pastoral communities have been hierarchically constituted for much of their history' (Sneath 2000:249). The nature of hierarchy and the role of clans in shaping the social and political life of Mongolian pastoralists since Genghis Khan's rule in the thirteenth century has however been the object of diverging interpretations.

The 'traditional Mongolian kinship system' is characterised by patrilineal descent, exogamous clans (*ovog*) and a conception of genealogy based on distinct contributions by the male and female progenitors. A person's body is composed of 'bone' from the father (*yasan töröl*) and 'blood' from the mother (*tsusan töröl*) (Empson 2011:114). In accordance with patrilineal assumptions, bonds through bones are vertical and long lasting, while the bonds through blood are horizontal and not transmitted through the generations (Empson 2003:32-6 & 162-3).

Throughout Mongolian history, seniority has been used as the principle for ranking clans, lineages within a clan, minimal lineages within a lineage, and brothers within a minimal lineage (Szynkiewicz 1975:126). The minimal lineages consisted of agnatic kinship groups integrated by a joint cult of their nearest ancestors. These extended families were concentrated around a community of brothers. While the elder brother coordinated joint economic ventures, the junior brother was in charge of the 'religious' tasks. With the introduction of Lamaism in the seventeenth century religious activities became increasingly individualized as they became located within the household. Soon the extended family ceased to function as a cult group though it was still functioning as a corporate minimal lineage (Szynkiewicz 1977:40). Only the New Year celebrations – that Szynkiewicz (1977:41) sees as an inherited form of the clan's cairn offering of the past – were (and are still) performed without religious authority external to the family.

According to Szynkiewicz (1978), the Mongolian kinship system of practice and terminology corresponded to the Omaha type until the twentieth century. Originally the terminology distinguished people by sex and relative age within one's siblings and cousins' group exclusively, all of whom were designated by the term for siblings. The ascending generation was seen as 'superordinate', the descending generation as the 'subordinate set', and the ego's generation as the 'collaborating set' (Szynkiewicz 1978:22-23). During the twentieth century, the bilaterilization of kinship practices broke down the traditional terminology system, which now resembles the lineal type (*ibid*).

Nowadays, patrilineal clans remain important among Mongolia's surrounding populations, but they are absent in its heartland – which includes the Dundgobi region (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:26-30). Already in the nineteenth century, the genealogical knowledge of Halh people (the principal ethnic group of Mongolia among whom I conducted fieldwork) hardly extended beyond three or four generations (Atwood 2004a:314). Prior to Szynkiewicz's (1977) study, it was assumed that the absence of extended lineage and clans resulted from a recent decline of the original Omaha-type kinship system. Szynkiewicz (1977) demonstrates that the lack of segmentary lineages predated the fourteenth

century. However, he still subscribes to the hypothesis that segmentary kinship systems, encompassing nobles and commoners, existed at an earlier time.

Recent studies have shown that at the time of Genghis Khan's organisation of the Mongolian peoples on the basis of military units, clans (*ovog*) were not exclusive descent groups (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:26, Sneath 2007:113-4). Sneath (2007:39-64 and 93-120) goes further and challenges enduring underlying evolutionary assumptions which led to the contention that kinship was the organizing principle of the Mongolian nomadic stateless society (e.g. Barfield 1989; Krader 1963 & 1968). Proposing a critical reading of historical sources, such as the *Secret History of the Mongols*, he shows that standard translations of *ovog* as a 'clan' produced the myth that Mongolian people were organised in clans and tribes. Instead, Sneath convincingly demonstrates that societies of the steppes were never 'kinship societies' but rather aristocratic political organisations with state-like processes of administration, and advocates that *ovog* would be better translated as 'aristocratic house'. Given the limited historical sources available, little is known about the internal organization of the political entities described in the *Secret History of the Mongols* as *ovog* (Sneath 2007:60-64). Though villages and camps were not 'clan based', patrilineal descent was associated with flexible norms of virilocal residence. Mobile pastoralists and sedentary settlements (e.g. monasteries) were linked through social networks of exchange and patronage relationships.

As described by Szyrkiewicz (1993:165), Vreeland (1953) and Simukov (1933, quoted by Sneath 2000:97 and 214), pre-collective Mongolian pastoral encampments (*hoton*) of the early twentieth century were fluctuating residential groups, which included kin chosen among a household's kin and non-kin. The duration of common residence was highly flexible and was conditioned by interpersonal relationships of kinship and friendship, as well as economic cooperation and dependency.¹⁴ Simukov emphasises the transient nature of the camp formation by viewing the 'process of joining-up in hotons' (pastoral encampments) as its central characteristic (1933 quoted by Sneath 2000:214). Within these camps, relationships between and within households were

¹⁴ See also Humphrey (1979) on use of genealogy to validate claims to land by Buriats in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries.

hierarchically structured. The oldest patriarch, whose yurt (*ger*) stood east of the others, organised the 'junior households' division of tasks, often including his younger son(s) and/or poorer household which served as a kind of clientele to the richer senior household. Households were linked through socio-economic webs of obligations and economic interdependence, webs that 'adapted remarkably well to the non-commercialised economy of the Soviet period' (Sneath 1999:137).

After the foundation of the Mongolian People's Republic which was established as a revolutionary communist regime and lasted until 1990, the socio-economic life of people living in Mongolia transformed. Social institutions, such as marriage, family and local communities, were put under 'the pressure of de-ritualisation and of economic degradation through the deliberate decapitalisation of private households' (Szynkiewicz 1993:164). The collectivization of nomadic herds in associations (*negdel*) was completed by the end of the fifties. These associations or cooperatives were coterminous with the districts (*sum*), the sub-provincial units of rural administration (Atwood 2004b:115-6). Districts were divided into geographical subdivisions called brigades. In each brigade, work was organised in teams (*bag*), thus breaking kinship groups and networks so as to prevent kin interests being favoured over collective ones. Despite the reorganisation of work into teams, in a context where goods were available in limited amounts and unequally in the countryside and urban settlements, kin networks continued to operate as economic safety nets and to channel exchanges even during the communist period (Szynkiewicz 1993:167).

Breaking kinship affiliations and traditional rituals were part of the 'cultural revolution' orchestrated by the government to create a new society (Szynkiewicz 1993:165). However, the nuclear family remained the basic unit of production. According to Szynkiewicz (1978) as kinship ties narrowed, relatives came to be more closely integrated. The introduction of terminological practices based on polymorphism reflected the changes in economic organization where territorial solidarity had been politically forced upon kinship bonds (*ibid*). Patrilineal terms were extended to matrilineal lines (bilateralisation). The emergence of kindred groups described egocentrically and the classificatory use of sibling terms within

and outside one's kindred developed alongside the transfer of kin duties to other relations.

Like for the Buriats of Siberia undergoing Soviet collectivisation (Humphrey 1998:287-99), one of the main changes brought to Mongolian family relations under the collective period was in women's status. Traditionally, among pastoral families, women are in charge of domestic work, that is, are responsible for everything which has to do with the hearth and milk processing as well as child rearing. Men are in charge of hunting, fighting and activities related to horses, including milking mares. Meanwhile many herding activities, such as the herding of goats and sheep, producing felt, and meat producing, are carried out flexibly by men and women (Frey Näf 2007). Given the military duties of men, women's role and competences were always essential to the pastoral economy. Humphrey (1993) argues that due to men's frequent and long-term absences, women were forced to complete all household tasks, this secured a position of power within their family which together with hypogamic marriage counterbalanced the patriarchal and patrilineal ideology (1993:180-1). Women's influence in the running of the household was however not reflected in public interactions as the modesty and quietness was the way Mongolian women 'could represent themselves as respectful to men' (Humphrey 1993:191).

Throughout Mongolia, the fall of the communist regime and the liberalisation of the economy in the early nineties resulted in a 'public revival' of the importance of kinship and kin networks (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:136; Park 1997 & 2003). Formerly collective assets were distributed and privatised and rural families became 'property-owning corporations' (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:137). Park (1997) argues that in the nineties the economic instability brought by the collapse of the communist regime fostered people's reliance on larger networks, while urbanization triggered a progressive abandonment of rules of patrilocality. This resulted in the further bilateralisation of kinship practices and the increasingly descriptive use of kinship terms, reflecting a network-like way of talking and thinking about kinship.

In contemporary Southern Mongolia, although the traditional clan system and kinship ideology are taught in school, only a few people (adults and children) could attribute with certitude relations of bones and relations of blood to the father and mother's side distinctively. In 2004, the Mongolian government issued new identity cards which required Mongolian citizens to register their clan names (*ovog ner*), which many people had to (re)invent for this purpose. Like elsewhere (Sneath 2007:95-96), the large majority of people in the district where I conducted fieldwork invented a name. Though people in Mongolia are keen to trace their identity back to Genghis Khan, this administrative instigation of patrilineal clan names, reminiscent of Manchu top-down attempts in the seventeenth century to impose a system of lineages (Sneath 2007:101-5), has not (yet?) triggered corresponding social institutions.

Today, in continuity with the pre-collective and collective periods, relationships within the family group (*ger бүл*) are based on interdependence and patriarchal hierarchy. The authority of the head of the family (*geriin ezen*) varies depending on the region (Sneath 2000:179-82) and tends to be stronger among pastoralist families than among urban families. High's study of contemporary illegal mining in Övörhangai – a region bordering the western part of the Dundgobi also inhabited by Halh Mongols – (2008) argues that young herders' attraction to illegal mining is partially triggered by the opportunity to escape from patriarchal authority.

Among pastoral families of the Dundgobi region, patriarchal authority is balanced through frequent consultations of all adult family members. However, even among sedentary families living in district centres or in the capital, the head of the family (*ezen*) is the ultimate decision-maker and expects formal respect to be shown to him in everyday interactions. Women are in charge of household domestic tasks including looking after children, preparing meals, hosting guests, and maintaining the household clean, etc. Children are required to help in herding and domestic tasks depending on their age and sex (Humphrey & Sneath 1999:138).

In district centres and in the regional capital of Dundgobi, at the times of my fieldwork, men increasingly took part in domestic tasks and boys were required to help their mothers complete traditionally female tasks such as sweeping, doing

laundry or cooking. Tensions around gender roles arose within families, in particular in families where the woman was the only member to have full-time employment. Domestic violence, often triggered by alcohol overconsumption, frequently erupted around domestic matters and seemed an occasion where the head of the family imposed his authority.

In continuation with the pre-collective and collective periods, families in post-socialist Mongolia are not bonded units but rely upon a network of relations based on economic interdependence and social obligations (Højer 2003:28-9; Pedersen & Højer 2008:82-8; Sneath 1999:137-140 & 2006a:89-100). Kin obligations are centred on the household (*am бүл*, literally the 'mouth's group, or *ger бүл*, literally the group of the house) and are strongest among parents and children and among siblings. Sneath (1999:137-40) suggests that Mongolian kinship is best characterised as being based on a scheme of 'general relatedness'. In fact, Mongolian terms for kin groups 'refer to rather unbounded fields centred on the speaker, such as *hamaatan* (relatives), *ah дүү* (kin and close friends) or *töröl sadan* (kindred)' (1999:139).

In Southern Mongolia, while virilocal residence remained the ideal model, in reality families often chose their place of sedentary or mobile residence according to pragmatic concerns. After a couple established their house (*gerle-*), their personal networks merged into a singular one. Households were tied within a bilateral network of relationships within which obligations towards close kin (parents, grandparents, siblings and their children) of both spouses were seen as equally strong, conforming with the trend towards bilateralisation observed since the early nineties (Park 1997 & 2003). The core of a family's network was formed by what Humphrey & Sneath call 'the ritual family' (1999:140) composed of close kin of both spouses (parents, grandparents, siblings and their children, uncles and aunts) and possibly also a few close friends. Humphrey & Sneath underline that the 'ritual family' which includes the people who pay ceremonial visits and gather during family ceremonies such as weddings, the Mongolian New Year, funerals or special personal celebrations (*nair*), hardly ever exists as a group (*ibid*). Relationships between families of these bilateral kin networks were marked by mutual but asymmetrical obligations, depending on social hierarchy and economic

complementarity. Within this network, potential relations were selectively reinforced through the giving of goods and services.

The post-socialist era is marked by increasing differences in wealth between households. This context brings a new complexity to the negotiation of obligations among members of one's ritual and extended family. Like in earlier periods, genealogy is used selectively to create networks of economic cooperation and is also instrumentalised to obtain resources from wealthier relatives by putting them under pressure to honour their 'social obligations' (Sneath 2007:189-191). For example, in the district where I conducted research, genealogical affiliation played an important role in the recruitment of employees for the different village institutions and votes at the local elections. In the contemporary context where people have to face both market and environmental insecurity (Sneath 2012:460-1), relations of obligations and mutual help among kin represent not only a 'safety net' but the way people can access and circulate resources between the countryside, the village and regional centres and the capital city. 'Borrowing (*zeel*)' and 'pooling goods and labour' was already common practice in the collective period (Sneath 2012:467), what has changed however is that relations of obligations and mutual help have become 'entangled in monetised logics' (Sneath 2012:460).

Social hierarchy in contemporary Mongolia

The formal character of everyday life interactions enacted through the Mongolian etiquette (*yos*) or the right way of doing things according to Mongolian custom (*zanshil*) is a recurring theme in the anthropological literature on Mongolian people. *Yos* not only regulates social interactions among humans but also interactions with other animated and non-animated entities according to the general principle of avoiding 'any unnecessary disturbance' (Humphrey 1995:141). Etiquette is seen as a characteristic of Mongolian social life and also as *sine qua non* with the enactment and production of social hierarchy.

Old people occupy the highest status in the hierarchy of social seniority. Elderly people (*ahmad*) are expected to be 'the most *yostoi*' – literally 'with etiquette',

translated as polite and well-mannered (Højer *forthcoming*). Elders' composed way of behaving is in itself a reflection of their accumulated knowledge, 'purified wisdom from their many experiences' (Humphrey 1996a:29). Getting older is seen as a process of progressive acquisition of the moral and emotional qualities that conform with the *ah düü* mode of relating. In this sense, seniority is conceived as an objectification of differences in these moral qualities, and junior people's duty to show respect to older people (*hündle-*) a recognition of their lesser moral qualities and wisdom.

Daily interactions among family members and formal interactions with visitors are formalised according to the symbolic orientation of space in the yurt (e.g. Beffa & Hamayon 1983; Dulam 2006:31-82; Humphrey 1974a; Jagchid & Hyer 1979:62-72; Sneath 2000:216-235), the Mongolian corpus of body techniques (e.g. Hamayon 1970; Lacaze 2000 & 2012), the use of formalized expressions (Novgorodova and Luvsanzav 1971), and the use of terms of address and reference to mark relative seniority (e.g. Hamayon 1971:144; High 2008:36; Humphrey 1978:97-8; Sneath 2000:197). These formal practices are underlined by the same symbolic logic which applies to bodies and to domestic space alike: what is higher or north is valued over what is lower or south (see Dulam 2006:31-82).

In his study of power and respect among the Deed Mongols of Inner Mongolia, Dulam (2006) analyses interactions during visits and describes how the space is used to express people's relative statuses. He argues that the etiquette regulating interactions represents 'performative techniques of respect' which 'naturalise power' (2006:62, 65). Dulam distinguishes between 'performative respect' and 'sincere respect' so as to underline that demonstrating respect through etiquette (performative respect) is not necessarily synonymous with sincere feelings of respect, and conversely.

In his study with Halh Mongols of northern Mongolia, Højer (2004) brings out the specificity of kin relationships modelled on social hierarchy by contrasting them with other forms of sociality based on enmity and suspicion. His study shows that sociability, very much like enmity, needs to be actively produced. He suggests that

the hierarchical order of kin relations is reproduced anew in their ideal form, each year, during the New Year celebrations.

In Dulam (2006) and Højer's (2004) accounts, social hierarchy is described as being produced through formal practices which enact respect (*hündlel*). Dulam's study (2006) suggests that the hierarchical order is chiefly maintained by the upward deference of junior people towards senior people as they interact according to the traditional etiquette. In contrast, in High's study (2008), patriarchy and hierarchical relationships are presented as a regime of authority which weighs on junior people.

In her study with Halh herders and miners in Central Mongolia, High presents what she calls 'the burden of patriarchy' and investigates how this hierarchical order is maintained (2008:29-93). She describes the politics of everyday relations and demonstrates that most often the patriarch does not need to directly impose his authority. She uses examples taken from daily interactions, such as the indifference shown towards younger people (2008:45-48) and the refusal to teach them domestic skills (2008:48-53), to show how older people enforce their authority over the next junior ones. She argues that through these daily interactions, family members are complicit in reproducing a pyramidal structure of authority, such that the position of the patriarch is maintained even in his absence. High uses the concept of 'patriarchy' and of 'patriclan' to describe the hierarchical system of kin relationships. As seen in the previous section, in southern Mongolia, networks of kin were not structured into clans. Moreover, after they had married, fathers only exerted indirect authority over their children.

I suggest that Dulam (2006), Højer (2003 & 2004) and High (2008)'s explanations are complementary; arguably, the specific emphasis of their analysis stems from the different contexts of their study. Though differing in their approach, in common to these three studies is the ubiquitous absence of children. Changes are explained through historical socio-economic processes, while continuities are assumed to go without saying and the mechanisms of intergenerational processes of transmission overlooked. In Dulam and Højer's studies, the production of respect and hierarchy is chiefly seen as an emergent property of etiquette (*yos*).

However they do not address how people learn to act according to *etiquette*. In High's study, social hierarchy is described as a pyramidal structure of authority that junior people either try to escape by getting involved in mining activities or reproduce unwillingly. In this dissertation, I look at Mongolian social hierarchy as a peculiar mode of relating and propose to consider together top-down and bottom-up processes of the production of hierarchy by looking at how children learn to take the role of *ah* or *egch* and *dүү*.

The status of Mongolian children

In this section, I present the literature on children in Mongolia and contextualise it within the anthropological study of children in relation to which I define my approach and contribution. Before I turn to presenting what we know about Mongolian children and the theoretical significance of studying children, let me underline the contemporary demographic significance of young children in Mongolia. According to the Mongolian Statistical Year Book, in 2008 and 2009, people under the age of ten represented little less than a fifth of the total Mongolian population.¹⁵

The study of children in Mongolia has been framed within two different approaches. In the footsteps of Aubin's 1975 seminal studies of children's status in Mongolian society, articles written by French anthropologists (Ferret 2010; Lacaze 2010; Ruhlmann 2010) have focused on rituals and processes of socialisation through the adults' perspective. In contrast with this approach, looking at children to understand the production of relatedness (2003) and the nature of Mongolian personhood (2011), Empson examines both ritualised and everyday practices and presents the perspective of both children and adults.

In her study of the status of children (1975) and of Mongolian socialisation techniques (1997), Aubin is mainly concerned with the perspective of adults but implicitly portrays Mongolian children willingly and playfully learning to take their place within the social hierarchy. In her first article 'The child's status in the

¹⁵ The 2008 Mongolian National Year Book reports 491,200 persons under the age of ten out of a total population of 2,683,500. For the year 2009, it reports 499,800 persons under the age of ten out of a total population of 2,735,800.

Mongolian society'¹⁶ (1975), Aubin presents an historical panorama of children's status from historical and legal documents as well as ethnographic data for the contemporary period. In her section on education, Aubin underlines the absence of direct authority imposed on children and identifies the 'general atmosphere' and 'power of exemplar' as the main mechanisms through which children are socialised (1975:505). In a line of counted argument which echoes Dulam's (2006), she stresses the role of filial respect and of the observation of customary rules in establishing the submission of junior people to senior ones (1975:526). In her second article 'Wisdom of elders, wisdom of children in the Mongolian steppes'¹⁷ (1997), Aubin examines how young children who are first protected and cherished are turned into 'perfectly socialised' persons in a few years (1997:96). After underlining the role of rituals mentioned in her earlier article, she reiterates that education is largely experienced playfully be it through learning how to horse ride or by the promotion of verbal agility through riddles and proverbs (1997:98-101).



Figure 9: Cherished child

¹⁶ My translation.

¹⁷ My translation.

Aubin's work is pioneering both in the anthropology of Mongolian people and anthropological studies of childhood more generally. In fact, her first study which is entirely dedicated to children was written at a time when the study of children was mostly relegated to psychologists and education specialists (James *et al.* 1998:3). Representative of the epistemological framework of the time, Aubin assumes that socialization is a straightforward process of mimicking. In fact, until the nineties, children were largely perceived to be 'pre-sociological' or 'pre-cultural', that is, as being passive recipients who absorbed the culture in which they lived (Montgomery 2008:18-22; James *et al.* 1998:7-33).

In the eighties, sociological studies of childhood converged toward emergence of a 'new paradigm', famously conceptualized by James & Prout (1990). Inspired by Aries' historical analysis of children in medieval art (1962), studies of the 'new paradigm' demonstrated that childhood was a social construction. In the footsteps of Marxist and feminist theories, the study of children was promoted as a way to give voice to a dominated category (Mayall 2002:1-4), to render visible what James, Jenks & Prout call 'the minority group child' (1998:30-31) and to upgrade children to the status of subject (e.g. James *et al.* 1998; La Fontaine 1986; Lemoal 1981; Mayall 1995). Although this 'new paradigm' was developed by sociologists, it favoured ethnographic research as the most suitable method to account for children's perspective (James & Prout 1998:xiv).

The study of children developed around the on-going challenge of conceiving of children as both being – as social agents – and becoming – as persons caught into ontogenetic processes (e.g. Lancy *et al.* 2010:6; Qvortrup 1994:3-5). In anthropology, Toren strongly criticized developmental models of ontogeny by insisting that cognition is an historical process (1993). Toren's study of how Fijian children make sense of hierarchy (1990) represents one of the first studies which shows that children do not learn to become adults. She shows that children learn to become actors of their social groups as children and make sense of cultural practices in their own terms.

I propose that the tension between conceiving of children as being and becoming can be partly resolved by distinguishing three levels of analysis. First, the epistemological status of children within social sciences where they ought to be considered as fully-fledged actors (i.e. being). Secondly, children's status within a given society according to culturally constructed notions of childhood. Thirdly, children's experiences who like any other persons are aging (i.e. becoming) with the specificity that processes of motor and psychological development brings to this process.

Recent years have seen the publication of syntheses constituting the anthropological study of childhood as domain of research emerging from a strong interdisciplinary tradition (e.g. Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007; Bonnet 2012; Lallemand 2002; Lancy 2008; LeVine 2007; LeVine & New 2008; Montgomery 2008; Razy *et al.* 2012; Sirota 2012). Although anthropological studies of children still remain largely set apart from other theoretical domains, there is a growing awareness, stemming from anthropologists with distinct theoretical sensibilities, of the theoretical importance of studying children (e.g. Hirschfeld 2002; Lancy *et al.* 2010; Lenclud 2003; Odden 2008; Toren 1990 & 1993). In today's childhood studies, the pledge for acknowledging and accounting for children's agency has become a 'dogma' which dresses up and often obliterates empirical findings in an unexamined Eurocentric 'model for' children (Lancy 2012; see also Szulc *et al.* 2012). Beyond the ideological and often undefined use of the concept of agency, highlighting that children are active participant in the production of 'culture' has allowed to move from the conceptualisation of socialization as a top-down process of enculturation and favoured a growing interest in examining learning processes in early life (e.g. Bloch 2005; Lancy *et al.* 2010, Odden 2008; Paradise & Rogoff 2009; Rogoff *et al.* 2003; Toren 1993 & 1999).

Contributing to the new studies of children and childhood, Empson's studies are original to the extent that she does not consider children on their own but accounts for their perspectives within a study of Mongolian relatedness (2003) and personhood (2011). Like French studies concerned with Mongolian children (Aubin 1975 & 1997; Ferret 2010; Lacaze 2010; Ruhlmann 2010), Empson examines how specific rituals mark the formal integration of children within their

agnatic group from the perspective of adults. She complements this analysis by asking how children views their position within their families by using drawing tasks (2003:103-31). While Empson reports children's perspectives and underlines the importance of developing domestic and herding skills in becoming family members, she bases her analysis on verbal explanations and does not explore the actual processes through which children take position within their family or learn to develop these gendered skills.

Building on the existing literature on children in Mongolia and contemporary approaches to studying children outlined above, I now turn to present the approach I adopt in this study. Titling my dissertation 'Learning to be a Mongolian person' rather than 'Becoming a Mongolian person' reflects two assumptions which underpin my analysis. Firstly, I conceive of 'learning to be a person' as a lifelong process. Secondly, I contend that children do not learn to be adults but learn to be persons as children, which is not to say that the two are unrelated. Subsequently, I define childhood and adulthood as subcategories contained within the category of personhood.

Following this definition, childhood and adulthood do not refer to an age range or a position within the life cycle *per se* but to a certain set of skills and qualities allowing people to act as 'children' or as 'adults'. This definition differs from sociological and anthropological mainstream definitions of childhood as the socially constructed conceptions and experiences of children as children. As Empson underlines, Mongolian people do not have a term for childhood as a discrete period, but identify certain attitudes and capacities as child-like (*hüühed shig*), which people may exhibit irrespective of their age (2011:149). Although there might not be a term for childhood in Mongolian, there are many terms to designate children depending on their maturity and skills. For instance, *nyalh hüühed* (frail child), *höhүүл hüühed* (breastfeeding child), *mama/mamuu* (baby), *jaal* (little one) are all terms to describe infants and toddlers. *Baga nasnii hüühed* (child of small age) refers to children from toddlers to young children until they go to school or in contexts when they seem too young to be scolded.

As it happens, the principal actors of this study were aged between two and eight years old. This research project has however not been defined by delineating a 'relevant age range' but rather by the aim of identifying the learning processes through which children take position within the Mongolian hierarchical system of relations. The time when children learn to interact within the system of hierarchical relations depends on family circumstances and the child's own psychomotor development. More than measuring an ontogenetic trajectory, what matters in this study is to understand a period of transition whereby children who are initially encouraged to behave as 'king' (see Chapter 3) learn to interact with others according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. Although throughout the dissertation I will keep mentioning children's age in my descriptions, this information is given as indicative not normative.

Mongolians establish age through two systems. Physiological age is calculated according to the Gregorian calendar since the date of birth. The use of birth-age is a modern practice, introduced by the socialist administration and made relevant to children's education since the introduction of compulsory schooling in the fifties (see Chapter 8). Individual birthdays which used to be irrelevant, are progressively becoming significant to people. Astrological age (*hii nas*, 'abstract age') is calculated according to the Mongolian lunar calendar by counting the number of different astrological years a person has lived in. The New Year thus marks a 'collective birthday' whereby everyone moves one year forward within the astrological cycle. For example, Erdem-Tögs was born on the 22nd of January 2008, at the end of the year of the Mouse. That year, the Mongolian New Year took place on the 25th of February marking the beginning of the year of the Cow. Although not even one month old, Erdem-Tögs was said to be two (astrological) years old.

As underlined by Rogoff, using 'time-since-birth measurements' as a marker of human development is a 'recent habit' linked to the rise of education and medical care (2003:8). She contrasts this modern technology with that of Mayan villagers who instead use relative seniority (2003:155). In a similar manner to Mongolians, Mayan people encode seniority within social relation by using distinctive sibling terms to address older and younger people. Besides the expression of seniority

through kinship terms, Mongolian people use astrological signs as the most usual way to give age and to calculate relative seniority. Rather than being asked their age, young children are generally asked, “What is your year of birth (*Chi yamar jiltei ve*)?” to which they reply by giving the astrological sign of their birth year, for instance the year of the Mouse (*Hulgana jiltei*), the year of the Snake (*Mogoi jiltei*) or the year of the Dragon (*Luu jiltei*). Until they go to school, children rarely know their physiological age but always know the animal of the year in which they were born as well as those of their friends and parents. Before entering school at the age of six or seven, most children know the order of their astrological year and are thus capable of calculating seniority according to it. For instance, when I asked Otgono, “By how many (years) is Bilgüün your elder (*Bilgüün chamaas hed egch ve*)?” which is the way to ask about age difference, Otgono, who was born in the year of the Horse and knew that Bilgüün was born in the year of the Dragon recited, “Horse – Snake – Dragon,” and concluded, “Bilgüün is my senior by two (*Bilgüün nadaas hoyor egch*)!”.

Learning toolkit

As demonstrated in the above sections, in Mongolian studies, research concerned with social hierarchy and research concerned with children represent two separate domains of investigation. Following contemporary studies which emphasize the heuristic value of studying children, I see studying children as a means to examine the historical mechanisms of the production of social hierarchy and to reveal what the social skills and moral assumptions necessary to be a competent Mongolian person are. In order to circumvent theoretical black boxes such as ‘embodiment’, ‘socialization’ or ‘reproduction’, I constitute a ‘theoretical toolkit’ which will help me define and approach learning processes. Before this, let me start by defining my use of the terms learning, skills and competences.

I define learning as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. Learning is not limited to knowledge and skills acquired through being taught or to situations when people intend to learn through observation, practice or questions. Rather learning includes all the experiences by which people acquire knowledge,

including instances when learning occurs as an ‘incidental by-product of social life’ (Gaskins & Paradise 2010:85).

I approach the task of understanding how children learn to interact through the *ah dūū* mode of relating as an investigation of the different skills that children develop to be competent at this mode of relating. I use the term ‘competence’ interchangeably with the term ‘skill’, which following the Oxford Dictionary, I define as ‘the ability to do something well’. Having skills are thus defined in relation to the achievement of an objective and in relation to the moral evaluation of what counts as ‘doing well’.

In what follows, I review a few contemporary approaches to learning to establish a ‘theoretical toolkit’ which I will use to identify and analyse learning processes in the rest of the dissertation. In the body of the dissertation, I will italicize the terms which I use in reference to a specific ‘theoretical tool’ which I present in this section.

Learning as a socially ‘situated’ practice

Lave & Wenger’s theory of ‘situated learning’ builds on Bourdieu’s model of the habitus and the idea that knowledge is embodied through practices (2000 [1972]). Using practice theory as framework, Lave & Wenger shift their analytical focus away ‘from the individual as learner’ to concentrate on ‘learning as participation in the social world’ (1991:43). They conceive of knowledge as distributed among participants (see also Hutchins 1995) and embedded within the activities of any given ‘community of practice’ (1991:49-58). They adopt a processual view of learning and object to taking the acquisition of skills or knowledge as an analytical end-point. Looking at the structure of participation of people within a given *community of practice*, Lave & Wenger argue that the process of learning corresponds to a trajectory from being a ‘newcomer’ whose participation is ‘legitimate’ but ‘peripheral’ to the activity, to becoming an ‘old timer’ or ‘full participant’ who endorses more responsibilities in achieving the activity and potentially more authority towards its organisation (1991:110).

Lave & Wenger's model of *situated learning* is based on an apprenticeship model of learning and as such emphasizes the importance of hands-on participation over observing or other modes of learning. I will use Gaskins and Paradise's work (2010) on 'observational learning' to highlight this aspect of learning overlooked by Lave & Wenger. I also complement the theory of *situated learning* with the concept of 'traditions of learning' which, as I explain in the next sub-section, outlines the existence of different structures of participation in relation to different pedagogical modes of interactions (Rogoff *et al.* 2003; Rogoff *et al.* 2007; Paradise & Rogoff 2009).

Lave & Wenger's approach is extremely useful to take into account the distributed aspect of knowledge and the social position of learners as participants. However, in the situated theory of learning, participation and learning are conceived as ubiquitous and participation becomes the unique lens through which learning is analysed, leaving unexplored the subjective engagement of the learner in the tasks. I will use approaches which have identified specific aspects, skills or forms of relations involved in learning, such as theory of 'natural pedagogy' (Gergely & Csibra 2006; 2009 & 2011), 'educating attention' (Ingold 2001), 'drawing attention' (Stafford 1995), and 'cultural models' (Strauss & Quinn 1997), which I present below, so as to bring out the specificity of learning as an inter-subjective process.

Didactic and autodidactic 'learning traditions'

Rogoff *et al.* (2003, 2007)'s models of 'traditions of organizing learning' build on practice theory. Building on Lave & Wenger's theory of situated learning, they suggest that through routines and forms of regular interactions, people become used to organising their involvement and learning in particular ways (2007:493). They outline the existence of 'three widespread cultural traditions that organize children's learning and participation' (2007:490). These three models are: 'intent community participation', 'assembly line instruction' and 'guided repetition'. Intent community participation is a tradition of learning where 'people learn by actively observing and 'listening in' during ongoing community activities' (2007:497). Learning occurs by participating 'side-by-side' with others in on-going activities and by 'pitching-in', relying largely on personal observation,

emulation and imitation (Paradise & Rogoff 2009). Guided repetition is based on memorization, rehearsal and imitation of expert knowledge by the novice. Assembly line instruction involves the didactic transmission of knowledge outside of the context of productive and socially meaningful activities. It is typical of age-segregated societies and institutions such as schools.

These three archetypes of traditions of learning draw an interesting contrast between ‘models of learning’ which favour observation and the self-initiative of the learner in shared activities – models of the intent community participation kind – and models which structure learning through teaching – either on the model of assembly line instruction or guided repetition. From Rogoff *et al.* (2007), I retain the idea of ‘traditions of learning’ and the critical insights that *didactic* approaches to learning whereby novices are invited to rely on and to be shown relevant information and critical skills by a more expert person who takes upon herself to teach is a practice specific to particular *traditions of learning*. I call *autodidactic*, approaches to learning where the responsibility is on the novice to develop relevant knowledge and skills. No learning tradition is purely didactic or purely autodidactic. Rather, *learning traditions* are on a continuum of practices which favour or disfavour the intervention of more expert people.

Teaching

At the foundation of the human capacity for culture is our capacity to accumulate and transmit knowledge, in ways that no other primates can (Tennie & Tomasello 2009). The most impressive feature of human learning is that we don’t only learn practical behaviours that we can decipher teleologically, but also cultural behaviours whose meanings cannot be inferred a priori. Gergely & Csibra (2005) and Csibra & Gergely (2006, 2009 & 2011) argue that the transmission of cultural knowledge is made possible by the evolved dispositions of expert people to teach and of novices to attend to cues of teaching, dispositions which converge in what they call ‘natural pedagogy’. In Csibra & Gergely’s theory, *teaching* designates all forms of intentional action which aim to attract the attention of a less knowledgeable person to relevant information, from eye contact to pointing, from slowing down one’s movement to giving verbal corrections. I retain this definition of teaching.

The model of natural pedagogy is especially interesting because it extends the concept of teaching often reduced to didactic forms of verbal interactions or to institutionalised forms of education. On the side of the learner, natural pedagogy highlights the propensity to defer to people considered more experts, whereby 'the relevance of the acquired knowledge is presumed and not verified by the learner' (2006:258). I also retain deference as an important aspect of learning (see also Bloch 2004).

Drawing and educating attention

Although Ingold (2001) and Stafford (1995) develop their approach to learning from radically opposite theoretical models, Ingold's concept of 'education of attention' and Stafford's concept of 'drawing attention' share surprising similarities. Ingold proposes to conceive of learning as a process of 'guided rediscovery' situated in a broader intergenerational process of 'education of attention' (2001:138-139), a concept he borrows from Gibson (1979). Bringing Sperber & Wilson's theory of relevance (1986) on anthropological grounds, Stafford approaches the study of learning through the question: How is children's *attention drawn to* what is socially relevant in their environment? He looks at learning as driven by unconscious and conscious forms of 'identification' with important messages, practices or ideas present in one's environment. He focuses on the different 'roads' and 'ways of understanding' that are most prevalently presented to children (1995:12-6).

I find the analytical focus on 'drawing attention' or 'educating attention' most useful as it allows to conceptualise the process and the content of learning as one.¹⁸ Children are not just exposed to a cultural environment or didactically taught what is relevant within this environment. Rather, through practices and micro-interactions, and ostensive behaviours, they learn to tune in their social world. From Ingold, I especially retain the stress that the 'education of attention' is a learning process that incorporates all senses, and result in the shaping of emotional and sensory sensitivity (2001:142). From Stafford, I especially retain

¹⁸ See also Bateson's notion of Deutero-Learning or "learning to learn" (1972 [2000:159-76]).

the concept of 'ostention' as 'an important point of intersection between what there is to be learnt, and what children actually learn' (1995:12). Ostention is not to be understood as necessarily *didactic* but rather as the cumulative micro-cues that children receive and which guide the direction of their learning.

Schemas and cultural models

Within the spectrum of contemporary theoretical perspectives on learning, what has come to be retrospectively called the 'cultural models school' (Quinn 2011) stands on the opposite end from Lave & Wenger's theory. Although it is also built on the assumption that learning occurs through practice, cultural models theory account for how knowledge is formed and structured in people's mind. In the seventies, cognitive anthropologists moved away from 'check-list' or 'linear language-like models' of knowledge organisation and shifted to thinking about meaning and knowledge as being organised by schemas (Quinn 2011:38). Schemas are mental structures that organise pieces of our knowledge, they are 'collections of elements that work together to process information at a given time' (Strauss & Quinn 1997:49). Let me quote Quinn to describe the process through which schemas are constituted (2011:35-36):

Schemas are built up out of experience – experience to which we attend consciously or unconsciously, including experience of both the outer world and the inner world of bodily sensation, mental representations, and emotions. Once existing, they structure our memories of the past, our perceptions, and our expectations of the future – though new experience, if it is salient enough, can also modify them; schema are not set in stone.

Schemas result from recurrent experiences and it is assumed that to the extent that people share similar experiences, they will develop relatively similar schemas that can thus be called 'cultural schemas' (Quinn 2011:39). Cultural models connect and organize sets of interrelated cultural schemas; they are used as 'working models for entire domains of activity' (Strauss & Quinn 1997:440; see also Holland & Quinn 1987). Examples of American cultural models include: democracy, marriage, restaurant. Cultural models present a heuristic theoretical model which account for how knowledge is organised and shared but also for how

mental concepts are purposive, emotionally motivated and generative of practices (D'Andrade & Strauss 1992:1-17). Cultural models present the advantage of accounting of learning both as a dynamic and continuous process while offering an explanation of how meaning stabilizes and comes to be shared as people frame new experiences through models which, as a result, become reinforced. The concept of *cultural model* is thus especially useful to understand how children learn to act in appropriate ways while they are constantly exposed to novel situations.

Chapter 3. Young children as ‘kings’

It was early afternoon and all the children in the kindergarten had gone to bed for a nap. I had gone to the classroom of the youngest children and was chatting with their teacher Pagma who was making sure that all the pupils stayed in bed quietly. Zaya, her fourteen-month-old daughter was the only pupil allowed not to sleep. Like most afternoons, she had refused to go to bed and was sitting on her mother's lap when I entered the classroom.

Coming close to Pagma's desk, I noticed that the phone on the table was not hers and inquired whether she had gotten a new one. "This is not new, this is Mönkö's", she replied. Mönkö was her husband. "Last night, Zaya took my phone and plunged it into a bowl of hot noodle soup (guriltai shöl). Since then, my phone has stopped working." As she was saying this, Zaya escaped from her arms to reach out for the phone on the desk. Pagma first tried to hide the phone and to distract her attention without much success. To my surprise, as soon as her daughter started to cry, Pagma gave her the phone. "Are you not afraid that Zaya will break this phone too?" I exclaimed. Pagma smiled with resignation, "I am, but Zaya is only a little child (jaal) - she does not understand a thing (yu ch oilgohgüi)!"

Pagma was in no way an exceptional parent. No matter that mobile phones were an expensive and valued item; most parents could not refuse the request of their toddlers, most of whom loved playing with these conspicuous objects. This did not only apply to mobile phones but to any objects young children requested. Not only did young children obtain most of what they asked for, they interrupted adults and were given their immediate attention. Adults did not even try to encourage young children to share (*huva-*) or to control their personal desires (*hüsel bari-*). If, for instance, two toddlers happened to interact and both wanted the same object, their respective caretakers simply separated them from each other and tried to distract them. More generally, adults never blamed young children for behaviours which would have been considered disrespectful for any other person, such as stepping

over someone's legs, orienting one's feet towards the altar, or standing over the door threshold. Even when it directly affected other people, such as instances when young children hit an older child or an adult, no attempts were made to teach them not to.

Cultural and developmental psychologists (e.g. Greenfield & Cocking 1994; LeVine 1980; LeVine & Norman 2008; Nsamenang 1992; Rogoff 2003; Super & Harkness 1997) and anthropologists (e.g. Gottlieb 2004; Hewlett 1992; Liederman *et al.* 1977; Rabain Jamin 1994; Razy 2007; Spiro & Spiro 1975) have highlighted that culturally variable care practices and socialization techniques ought to be understood in relation to parents' rearing goals and conceptions of personhood. Mongolian adults' permissiveness towards young children however seems in complete contradiction with the *ah düü* mode of relating, whereby, in accordance with etiquette (*yos*), junior people owe respect to senior ones.

One day I was chatting with my colleagues in the teachers' room and I brought up the topic of adults' permissive attitude towards toddlers. I asked them, "Why is it wrong to scold young children but fine to scold older children?"¹⁹ The biology teacher, a woman who was in her late fifties quoted the following proverb:

*From birth to 5 years of age, love and respect your child like a king;
From 5 to 7 years of age, make your child study the etiquette like a queen;
From 7 to 13 put your child to work like a slave;
From 13 to 17 years treat your child like a friend.*

*0-5 huuhdiig nasand ni haan shig hündlen hairla;
5-7 nasand ni hatan met yos zanchild surga;
7-13 nasand ni bool shig hudulmurluul;
13-17 nasand ni naiz nöhöd shig harits.*

Although not everyone knew this proverb, it highlights shared conceptions around the special status of young children and the contrast between the position of young and older children. For instance, the above interactions with Zaya obtaining a mobile phone even though she just broke one is a typical instance of how young children are treated like 'kings'.

¹⁹ I had in fact witnessed teachers who got really angry with their pupils and hit them.

In this chapter, I look for an explanation of the privileged treatment of young children and ask when they start being required to interact according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. Although the proverb refers to specific ages of children, we will see that adults' change of their expectations and interactions is not actually strictly predicted by children's age. I use the expression 'young children' (*baga nasnii hüühdüüd*) to designate babies (*nyalhai hüühed, mamuu*) and toddlers (*jaal*) who are largely indulged and hardly expected to obey or help older people. I use the expression 'older children' to designate children who are increasingly expected to behave according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. 'Older children' and 'young children' characterize a certain mode of interactions, 'a stage' (Harckness & Super 1983), rather than an age range.

Looking at how young children are used to be treated and to relate to others before they take the role of *ah* or *egch* is critical for two reasons. First, it will help comprehend what assuming the role of *ah* or *egch* means for children in relation to their former experiences of relating to others. Secondly, it will permit us to uncover what children have to learn and/or to unlearn to become competent as *ah*, *egch* and *düü*.

The kingly impunity of young children

During the first months of their lives, the physical fragility of infants and the responsibility to protect them is a primary concern for Mongolian parents. The construction of hospitals with maternity facilities in all district centres under the socialist regime resulted in a decrease in infants and maternal mortality, with a fairly constant low infant mortality rate in the Dundgobi region (Randall 1993:223-4). In the nineties, the liberalisation of the economy caused the disinvestment of the state in health services and the increase of maternal mortality (Janes 2004). According to figures published by the National Statistical Office of Mongolia, in Dundgobi, the death rate²⁰ for children aged zero to four was 6.3 in 2008 and 6.7 in 2009. At the time of my fieldwork, issues of child mortality remained a concern, which combined with specific conceptions about infants' and

²⁰ The death rate is the number of deaths divided by the total age-group population.

mothers' fragility, resulted in the use of adapted protective practices in the care of infants.

Protecting infants

At the end of April 2009, Tuyaa gave birth to her daughter Saraa. Once Tuyaa and Saraa arrived home, for a whole month they were strictly forbidden to go outside or to be in contact with water.²¹ Both mothers and babies are extremely sensitive to the wind and the cold and should thus stay home protected, Erdene explained to me. The house was kept warm at all times, while Tuyaa also protected herself from any exposure to the cold by wearing a light coloured scarf on her head, warm clothes and winter boots. She observed a diet of meat soup (*har shöl*), dry biscuits (*tosgüi boov*) and tea without milk (*har tsai*) to help her body recover strength. She also avoided handling any frozen food or even being close to the refrigerator when it needed to be open (see also Bianquis 2004; Ruhlmann 2010).

Saraa was swaddled (*ölgiiitöi*). Tuyaa spent her days looking after her, breastfeeding her on demand and attending to her slightest signals of distress. Not only did Saraa monopolise her mother's arms and attention most of the day, but also at night she had taken the place of Saraa's younger brother at Tuyaa's side.²² In early childhood, the primary caretaker is generally a child's mother.²³ In rural areas, no woman questioned the norm of breastfeeding. Camel or goat milks were only used as substitute if a mother did not have enough of her own milk. Unlike in the UK or in France where breastfeeding is seen as a personal choice against the use of formula and prolonged breastfeeding is seen as an 'identity marker' (Faircloth 2013), in rural Mongolia breastfeeding children until they are at least a year is standard and considered to contribute to the healthy physical and emotional development of the child.²⁴

²¹ In Ulaanbaatar, many women do not respect these recommendations or do so only for a shorter period of time.

²² By contrast with other parts of Mongolia where cots are used (see Empson 2011:162), in the Dundgobi region, at night swaddled babies slept with their mothers and they were placed on a bed or on a mattress on the floor during the day.

²³ When a woman cannot take care of her child, for example if she gave birth before graduating from university, her parents usually care temporarily for the child.

²⁴ The Mongolian work legislation (art IV. 103) entitles women who have children below the age of six months to two extra hours of lunch break and mothers of children between the age of six and twelve months one hour of extra lunch break so as to make it possible for them to breastfeed their children.



Figure 10: Infant in swaddling clothes

After birth, mothers and children share a similar state of acute physical fragility, being both fragile/defenceless (*emzeg*) and weak (*hevreg*) (see also Empson 2011:155-8). The term most frequently used to designate infants - *nyalh-* in fact means 'weak' and 'frail'. Giving birth is said to cause the disarticulation of the mother's body (*sala-*) while the bones of babies are still soft (*zöölön*) and their fontanelles open (*zulai tsoorhoi*) (see also Bianquis 2004; Empson 2011:155-8; Lacaze 2000:80-1 & 2012:77-9). Swaddling infants is not only a way to keep them warm, 'sealing their body' (*bitüüle-*) by wrapping them from their head-top to their toes, it is also said to help them grow strong (*changa*) (see also Ruhlmann 2010:229). Tuyaa's aunt, who had been a medical student, explained to me that doctors used to recommend wrapping infants tightly to help them grow strong.

Tuyaa however was careful not to swaddle Saraa too firmly and after a month she started to allow Saraa free movement of her limbs for some time during the day. After a few months, Saraa was mainly swaddled at night with her arms free from the clothes.²⁵

During this initial period, family life was centred on Saraa's and Tuyaa's needs and well-being. Given that Tuyaa should not touch water, Erdene, myself, Tuyaa's aunt, Bilgüün and more rarely Otgono shared the tasks of washing Saraa's swaddling clothes, cooking, doing the family laundry, etc. With their attention constantly focused on Saraa, Tuyaa and Erdene were quick to learn their newborn daughter's personality and habits. For example, if Saraa moaned when they knew that she could not have been hungry, Tuyaa or Erdene unwrapped the many layers of wide clothing bands in which she was swaddled. Holding her in a sitting position, they encouraged her to pee by gently caressing her thighs. Erdene was especially proud of his daughter who he said was so clean that she always called so as to not wet her swaddling clothes.

Adults take it as their responsibility to learn to anticipate infants' needs and to interpret their requests. If a child weeps, even mildly (*uilagna-*), mothers immediately attend to them. Mongolian parents consider that young children cannot control their hunger, cravings and desires (*hüsel barij chadahgüi*) and not only feed them on demand but once the children are older agree to their requests for treats. Like infants and young children, after birth mothers find themselves prey to cravings and desires that they cannot control (*gorido-*) (see also Empson 2011:153-4). During this liminal period, mothers and children's emotional and physical connection, or 'umbilical connection' (*hüin holboo*), established through pregnancy and breastfeeding, is so strong that mothers become 'child-like' (*eejiin bie nyalhardag*) (Empson 2011:152-4).

When people saw Tuyaa and her daughter for the first time, they made sure to bring a gift to Tuyaa; surprisingly they often brought biscuits, sweets or preserved fruits, treats that children typically liked and that Tuyaa was in fact not supposed to eat. Erdene explained to me that on their first visit after birth, people had to

²⁵ See Chisholm (1978) for a comparative study of swaddling and cradleboards and its impact on children's development.

bring something, or the mother suffered terrible breast pains (*höh övdö*). I asked women around me whether they had themselves experienced such pain and why it could be. Nyama admitted that I myself had caused her to suffer from severe breast pains, when after the birth of her son I had brought a gift to Erdem-Tögs but nothing for her. She explained that it was not just about people's bringing gifts but also more generally about frustrated cravings (for instance, not being allowed to eat sweets) or simply false expectations (for instance, expecting a gift and not being given any).

Unlike in other parts of Mongolia, most people in the Dundgobi region did not signal the presence of a newborn baby by putting a flag on their door (see Empson 2011:158; Ruhlmann 2010:227). Nonetheless, in the weeks following Saraa's arrival home, fewer visitors than usual passed by. Visitors might not necessarily have bad intentions towards the young family but as mentioned earlier they can create false expectations in mothers and they can also be 'followed by bad things' (*muu yum daguulsan hün*) or make comments (*hel am*) which can easily affect the mother and the baby who, as I will now explain, can easily be polluted.

Fearful babies

We were getting ready to go to bed when Erdem-Tögs was affected by a strange cough. His mother lit candles on the domestic altar and placed some blessed incense in the incense burner (boipor) which she passed around Erdem-Tögs' chest three times, pushing the smoke towards his face with her hand. Erdem-Tögs seemed to feel better and we all went to bed.

A few hours later, Erdem-Tögs' cough had turned into a snoring-like nose. Realising that he could hardly breathe, his parents rushed him to the hospital. There, doctors established that he was undergoing a serious asthma attack. Erdem-Tögs was treated and kept in hospital for a few days. While Erdem-Tögs was recovering, their parents were keen to establish the reason why he had been sick.

People in the family proposed various hypotheses. Nyama's father suggested that Erdem-Tögs' crisis ensued from his parents having moved into their flat prior to their wedding day. Erdem-Tögs' father considered that Nyama had worked too hard during her pregnancy and had stopped breastfeeding him too early. His uncle, Bilgüün, who was a Buddhist lama, evoked an incident which happened a few days prior to Erdem-Tögs' asthma attack as we were all sleeping at Erdem-Tögs' grandparents.

Byamba recalled that he had been woken up by Erdem-Tögs' sudden cries in the middle of the night. When he opened his eyes, he saw a demon next to his nephew's feet. While Nyama brought Erdem-Tögs to her breasts and calmed him by intoning a repetitive lullaby: "Buu ai, buu ai, buu ai",²⁶ Byamba recited prayers to force the demon to leave.

Byamba thus advised Erdem-Tögs' parents to consult an experienced lama to purify Erdem-Tögs. His parents consulted this experienced lama who diagnosed that Erdem-Tögs had been frightened (aisan). He performed a ritual to call his soul back (süns duuda-) and read appropriate prayers (hühüdiin banzragch) to protect Erdem-Tögs from future attacks. The incident was considered closed until Erdem-Tögs felt sick again.

Adults of the Dundgobi region shared the idea that a living person is composed of different elements: the body (*biye*) which is perishable, the soul (*süns*) which accumulates experiences and after death can be reincarnated (*dahin törö-*) and the vital force (*süld*) (see also Empson 2003:54-5 & 2012:2010-3; Lacaze 2000:41-3, 2003 & 2012:45-9; Pedersen & Højer 2008:86-8). Soul and vital force are mobile principles and together keep a person alive and healthy, and are often combined within a single term (*süns süld*). People often found it difficult to explain the difference between *süns* and *süld* to me. The departure of the *süns* caused a person's death, although sometimes old people can continue living for a few days after their *süns* has left their body. When a person loses her *süld*, then she has no luck (*hiimori*) and is at risk of falling sick but her life is not directly endangered.

²⁶ *Buu ai* is a short version for "*Bitgüi ai*" which means "have no fear" and also a play on the word "*Buuvei*", which means lullaby.

The concept of vital force is in fact often associated with that of chance (*hiimori*) and combined in a single expression: *süld hiimori*.

Throughout life, one's *süld* varies depending on one's astrological sign with a given year but also depending on one's innate sensitivity to external pollution (*buzar*). The experience of fear does not generally cause death directly, but it is considered to be harmful as it creates a loss of 'vital force' (*süld*) and is a source of 'pollution' (*buzar*) for adults and children. Acute experiences of fear can even cause the departure of the soul (*süns zaila*-). Because the soul (*süns*) of young children is 'not fully secured', it is all the more likely to leave their body at the slightest fright (Empson 2011:157, see also Hamayon 1970:62). In the Dundgobi region, lay people admitted not to having a full understanding of the relation between fear, loss of vital energy and the departure of the soul but were aware of the threat posed by human and non-human pollution and careful to protect (*hamgaala*-) young children.²⁷

As shown in this ethnographic case, one of the threats that bear on children is that demons (*chötgör*) take their soul away. This threat is linked to the fact that unlike adults but like dogs, children can see supernatural entities (see also Empson 2003:53).²⁸ The ability to see demons in turn results in them being frightened which can possibly cause their soul (*süns süld*) to leave their body. Demonic threats to children are most ubiquitous at night. The home with its protected doorway (*bosgo*) and domestic altar (*burhan tahl*) on which sacred object and pictures of protective deities are placed represents a protective shell, a space difficult for malevolent entities to penetrate (see also Empson 2011:159). Adults generally prevent young children from being outside or travelling at night. When this cannot be avoided, parents trace a black line on the child's nose so as to disguise her as 'a hare with a brown nose' (*bor halzan tuulai*).²⁹ This practice is used all across

²⁷ Pedersen & Højer report the contemporary emergence of a more distinctively Buddhist definition of *süld* by Ulaanbaatar Buddhist specialists who define *süld* as a quality of the self in relative terms while *süns* is inalienable from the body (2008:88-9).

²⁸ Once I had a chat about children's capacity to see demons (*chötgör*), Pürvee, one of the kindergarten teachers hypothesized that the capacities to see entities invisible to adults and the development of language and understanding were probably inversely correlated. This is probably why dogs can also see demons", she further speculated.

²⁹ In the city, in houses without stoves, people used make-up.

Mongolia and is part of a larger set of techniques to trick demons. When I asked people to explain why they did it, they referred to the following story:

A long time ago, a woman who had a violent argument with her husband decided to go back to her parents' home with her child. Scared to walk in the steppe at night, she disguised her child by drawing a black line on his nose and recited prayers to the white Tara (the only female among Buddhist deities), while walking. Seeing the woman and her child outside at night, the devil king (erlegiin ezen) sent his vassals (erlegiin elch) to take the child. As they returned empty-handed, the king was outraged: how could they have missed the child and his mother when they were the only two people walking in the steppe? The demons explained that they only saw the white Tara holding a hare with a brown nose (bor halzan tuulai).

Apart from giving an explanation for the attacks of demons on children, this story reveals a fundamental characteristic of demons: they are fooled by appearances. As a result, many of the protective techniques used by adults consist in what Empson calls "daily acts of 'non-attention'" (2003:51& 2011:172). By disguising or masking children's identity, by mixing up attributes associated with gender, or by using derogatory terms, adults aim to protect young children by diverting the attention of demons away from the children's human quality (see also Empson 2003:51-56 & 2011:162-7; Szyrkiewicz 1982:236-7). Already during pregnancy, parents avoid talking about the baby, speculating about its gender, choosing a name or buying things which will be used by or for the newborn baby. When seeing infants, people comment on how ugly their faces are (*tsarai muutai*), how bad they smell (*ömhi ünertei*) and more generally avoid any positive comment about how heavy (*hünd*), cute (*höörhön*), intelligent (*uhaantai*), etc., a child might be. At all ages, compliments (*tsagaan hel am*) or comments (*hel am*, literally mouth tongue) can pollute the person to whom they are directed (see also Højer 2003:81-120 & 2004:50-61). However, given their fragility, infants are especially likely to be affected by *hel am*³⁰ and thereafter undergo unfortunate consequences, such as falling ill (*övdö-*).

³⁰Many ethnographic studies of other cultural groups report that infants are seen as particularly vulnerable to gossip, witchcraft or various evils (e.g. Dettwyler & Fishman 1992; Gottlieb 2004:241-249; Jenkins & al 1985:43; Strassmann 1997).



Figure 11: A child disguised as 'hare with a brown nose' (*bor halzan tuulai*)

When these techniques fail and children are polluted, adults attend to them with 'direct attention' (Empson 2003:51& 2011:172). An instance of direct attention was described in the ethnographic example above, with the lullaby that Nyama sang to her son and the prayers the lama read for him afterwards. More generally, adults react promptly to any sign of distress, especially if they occur at night. Once Erdene's sister, Tseren, was staying with us with her six-month-old son, Bat. At twilight, Bat started sobbing (*megshij uila-*) without apparent reason. Tseren immediately took Bat in her arms and rocked him gently. As Bat continued moaning, Tseren asked Tuyaa to give her some coarse salt (*tom davs*) and threw it on the stove which immediately burned with a crackling sound. Bat instantaneously calmed down. Tseren explained that 'the cure by burning salt' (*davsaa domno*) was especially efficient because the strong noise makes the fear leave (*gara-*) the baby.

A few weeks after Erdem-Tögs' asthma attack, I asked his uncle, Byamba, whether I could interview him. Contextualising my questions with reference to the recent incident, I asked him whether any encounter with demons was dangerous. Byamba replied assertively, "No, not at all, as long as you don't fear them, demons can do nothing. You can walk at night, even sing, if you don't fear them, they are powerless. Byamba's explanation suggests that the acute detachability of young children's souls is not just a stage in development but is linked to their incapacity to control fear. At the time of this interview, I wondered whether Byamba's elucidation was linked to his education in Buddhism. His explanation however echoed earlier and later incidents.

For instance, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had no awareness of the dangers of demons and did not mind walking alone at night, which surprised both adults and children. This gave me the reputation of not knowing *fear* (*aij medehgüi*). A few months after I arrived, I took a long walk outside of the village towards the sacred mountain. It was almost dawn when I discovered what looked like an abandoned cemetery. At first I enjoyed examining the stones and inscriptions on them. As the night fell, I felt increasingly uneasy and made my way back home at a faster pace than usual. The next day I felt sick. When I told the story to Tuyaa's aunt, she warned me against walking at sundown. She asked me whether I got scared (*aisan*). When I replied that I did, she concluded that I must have been polluted by demons.

As such, the detachability of people's *süns sūld* manifests itself through the propensity to experience fear; conversely, the high propensity to experience fear is the manifestation of the detachability of the soul, which is true irrespective of one's age. Given that young children can see demons and that they cannot understand (see next section), they are however more likely to be frightened and thus need to be especially protected.

The virtue of young children

The indulgence of young children by adults is not only motivated by the need to protect from the cold, from fear or pollution but also by their actual fondness for

babies and toddlers. Mongolian adults are generally keen on the presence of children, and particularly adore young children who they cannot help but find loveable (*enrhii*) and cute (*hōrhōön*) (see also Aubin 1975:480, 581). Erdene for instance was especially fond of infants because, he said, they were without bad intentions (*nügelgüi*). Adults generally find it difficult to resist young children's requests and actually often anticipate their requests and reward their visits with sweets or dairy delicacies such as cream (*öröm*) or sweet curd (*chihertei aruul*). Young children's status as virtuous is shared with elders, conferred to the latter not by their innocence but their old age and accumulated experience (*uhaan bileg*). Irrespective of how an elder person behaves, she is in fact held to be virtuous (*buyantai*) and thus worthy of respect. Upon paying a visit to elders, younger people bring them gifts, which often include sweets. These actions through which adults show respect to their elders, alike the actions through which adults make young children happy (*bayarluula-*), are considered a moral act (*sain züil*).

One of Tuyaa's uncles was employed as a driver for the development of the Tavan Tolgoi mine in the South Gobi region. By taking part in activities which involve digging the ground, one undergoes the risk of offending local spirits (*gazariin ezen*) and becoming polluted (*buzartai*) (see High 2008:129-33; Humphrey & Sneath 1999:8). Worried about protecting himself and his family from misfortune, Otgono's uncle consulted a lama and asked him to read prayers for them (*nom unchi-*). The lama did so and also advised him to perform a good action (*sain züil*) to repair his misdeeds (*nügelee tsairuula-*). Otgono's uncle thereafter decided to distribute toys and sweets to kindergarten children. When I asked him why he decided to do this, he explained, "Because children are pure (*genen ariun*) and virtuous (*buyantai*), making them happy (*bayarluula-*) is one of the best virtuous actions (*hamgiin buyantai züil*) one can do". Making children happy can be used to counterbalance one's bad deeds, and is also part of most ritualised ceremonies. In the village, when hosting weddings, funerals, or New Year ceremonies, the hostess prepared a box filled with sweets, which she distributed to the village children who passed one after the other to collect their share.

The purity (*aruin*) and virtue (*buyantai*) of children place them in a special position whereby making them happy is a way to do a good action (*sain züil*) and

ensure that 'fortune' (*hishig*) be bestowed upon one's household. *Hishig*, a Mongolian concept translated by fortune (Empson 2012) or 'good-fortune' (Chabros 1992:191) is 'something that circulates outside the subject, but can be harnessed and carefully contained in certain forms to secure the growth of people, animals and things' (Empson 2011:70). In fact as shown by Empson (2011:67-105), daily acts and interactions are all part of an economy of fortune whereby people attempt to 'contain' and 'harness' fortune. In this moral economy, children given their status of intrinsically 'virtuous agents' (*buyantai*) play the role of 'vessel' of fortune (Empson 2011:166).

Paradoxically, the fact that children are held to be intrinsically virtuous (*buyantai*) and without bad intentions (*nügelgüi*) renders adults indulgent of all their behaviours, which often in turn makes young children relatively hardnosed towards others. This will be illustrated by the following interaction which happened in May 2006 during a visit to Tuyaa's parents in the countryside. Batuhan was a year old and Otgono four.

Batuhan, Otgono and I were outside while other adults and children were inside drinking tea after the morning chores. Otgono was in a squatting position, looking for 'lovely stones' (goyo chuluu). Batuhan was walking when he stepped on a stick and fell. Managing to get up with the stick in his right hand, he walked towards his older brother, who looking in the opposite direction was not paying him any attention. Now standing within reach of Otgono, Batuhan lifted his arm and started hitting his brother's back with the stick. Taken aback, Otgono stood up, looked at his brother and started to weep mildly.

Later, as we went back inside, Otgono reported his brother's deed to his mother with a broken voice while showing the red marks on his back. "Enough, enough (Boli, boli)!" she ordered, seeming rather amused by the incident. Otgono took his place on his mother's lap but was soon displaced by Batuhan, requesting to be nursed. When Erdene came back from watering the herd, Tuyaa reported the story to him, imitating mockingly Otgono and featured him almost crying because of Batuhan's having hurt him. Turning to Otgono, Erdene asked laughingly, "Is it true that you cried?"

Thus far, I have presented the special technique of care for infants and the privileges that young children enjoy given their state of physical fragility, emotional sensitivity and moral purity. As seen in the above situation, young children's prerogatives extend beyond being the object of special care: they can also harm others with impunity. Strikingly, after Batuhan hit his brother, his parents did not blame him, nor did they attempt to teach him that his behaviour was wrong. On the contrary, the amused reaction of his parents rather encouraged his fierce behaviour with his older brother, while putting pressure on Otgono to withstand his younger brother's abuses without complaining.

Applying what I came to consider as 'French modes of interacting with toddlers' to my relations with young children in Mongolia, I generally refused to get hit or to give them everything they wanted. Adults sometimes showed their surprise at the way I firmly refused to give away my phone. I sometimes took the opportunity of seeing the disapproving gaze of adults to engage in a conversation comparing French and Mongolian ways of treating toddlers. Once, in such a situation I asked Tuyaa's aunt, who was especially keen to explain things to me and to try to find answers to my questions, "Is it not possible to raise children the way people raise dogs or foals, simply imposing things as allowed or not allowed?" to which Tögöö replied, "One should not scold young children (*zaginaj bolohgüi*) because they don't know anything (*medehgüi iom*) and they cannot understand (*oilgohgüi*). If you get angry (*urlaad*) or scold (*zaginaj*) a young child, they can only but get scared (*aina*)."

In adults' eyes, the impunity of young children is linked to their incapacity to understand what is right (*zöv*) or wrong (*buruu*) which makes them, at once, irresponsible for their actions and inherently virtuous (*buyantai*). In everyday interactions, adults however interact with young toddlers as persons who can learn, and support young children's physical and social development by helping them to walk, talking with them and asking them to demonstrate their new acquired skills. This encouragement is first offered without pressure and by and large children develop psychomotor skills at their own pace. At three, Batuhan was reputedly a poor speaker. Except for his big brother, who was an expert in interpreting his words, hardly anyone made sense of his long utterances. However

his parents did not worry about it and were confident that he would eventually speak well. His grandfather in fact interpreted lateness in speaking as a sign of intelligence as it showed that Batuhan was a keen listener and observer.

Until they develop linguistic skills (*hel oro-*) which shows their growing capacity to understand, adults see it as morally wrong and potentially harmful to scold young children because, as underlined by Tuyaa's great-aunt, they are likely to get scared as a result of being reprimanded for deeds who they cannot understand are wrong. Beyond the risks of soul loss explained in the previous section, experienced when young, fear can prevent children from developing a strong character (*huchtei, setgeeliin tehentei*) and endanger their health (*biyend muu*), in ways which can have serious later consequences. For instance, Tuyaa's younger sister, Nyama, suffered from a skin condition. Among various hypotheses proposed to explain its reason, the specialists (Buddhist lamas and shamans) she consulted most often diagnosed that when she was a child she must have experienced strong fear. Recalling her past, Nyama remembered that in fact, as a child, when she was staying at her uncle's in the village to go to school, she had been terrified by her aunt who kept scolding her.

Because young (and even older) children should not be scolded or they might get scared, special techniques are used to prevent them from hurting themselves while minimizing the chances of upsetting them. In contrast with domestic arrangements in 'child-centred societies' (Lancy 2008:11), Mongolian homes are not age-segregated social spaces and toddlers are not secluded in a 'child-proof' environment. Anxiously witnessing children crawling in between bowls of boiling tea or knives left on the floor, or reaching for electrical appliances or the central fire stove, I found myself wondering how they possibly survived such domestic environments while being so little constrained in their movements and desires.

In homes, a major source of danger is the stove (*zuuh*) occupying the central part of the yurt. Made of metal, it stands on four feet, and is surmounted by a chimney that passes through the central aperture of the roof (*toono*). When children start crawling, they are either held by adults or attached with a belt to a lattice wall or a bed foot so that they can move at a safe distance from dangerous objects. As

children learn to walk and start being left increasingly free to move in their home, adults do not intervene readily. As Batuhan walked hesitantly towards the burning stove I was generally scared that he could fall against it or decide to reach for it and burn himself. Tuyaa and Erdene supervised Batuhan's movements from a distance but did not stop him immediately. They warned him, "Hot, h-o-o-t (*haluun, haluuun*)!" with a strong stress on the second syllable and, if Batuhan persevered in reaching for the stove, took him away only at the very last instant. At times when the stove was cooling down, Tuyaa had placed Batuhan's hand on the stove repeating, "*Haluun, haluun*!" After having repeated this a few times, Batuhan hardly showed any interest in reaching for the stove.

The example of how Batuhan was taught not to approach the stove shows important aspects of children's experiences in infancy. Although young children are not expected to understand other people's feelings (*setgel*) or norms of good behaviour (*yos*), young children are expected to be increasingly able to learn from their sensorial experiences. At first, family life is organised around the infant's need, but once children start developing awareness (*uhaan*) and personal autonomy (*biyee daasan*), they are expected to learn to 'handle the world as it is' and to become capable of avoiding dangers themselves rather than being protected by their parents. The promotion of direct personal experimentation, however, cannot be said to be without its costs: it undoubtedly leaves many marks on children's bodies, which bears scars from burns or cuts from various domestic accidents.

The loss of kingly privileges

After having presented the reasons which justify the privileged status of young children, I now turn to examine how children experience the transition from being treated as 'king' to being expected to take the position of *ah* or *egch*.

Anthropologist Sara Harkness and developmental psychologist Charles Super argue that one of the primary ways through which 'culture' shapes children's experience is through the "division of the continuum of human development into segments or 'stages' " (1983:223). In fact, the Mongolian proverb quoted in the

introduction indicates a rather drastic transition with infancy during which children ought to be treated like 'kings' being followed by a period when children ought to then be treated like 'slaves'.

In Harkness & Super's theory, the term 'stage' does not imply an age-based conception of development but rather denotes the existence of broad changes in the patterns of care and expectations that adults place on children. The timeline and definition of these 'stages' depends on what aspects of children's development and what child-rearing goals are seen as critical in a given culture. However in all settings, infancy is, they argue, recognized as a specific 'developmental stage' which confers a special status on babies and young children (*ibid*). They further underline that in different cultural contexts, the factors seen as critically marking the end of infancy vary. In this section, I first investigate how young Mongolian children are brought out of infancy. I then present parents' educative precepts for bringing up children so that they become socially and morally competent persons.

The end of infancy

In congruence with the proverb presented in the introduction, studies looking at infants in Mongolia outline different phases in the way adults interact with young children (Aubin 1975:503-10 & 1997:98; Ferret 2010:161-6; Lacaze 2000:136-66, 2010 & 2012:115-33; Ruhlmann 2010). Lacaze (2000:136-66, 2010 & 2012:124-7) divides Mongolian educational practices into three stages. She suggests that the first phase when mothers and children are most strongly physically and emotionally related corresponds to a period when infants' bones are soft.³¹ The process of progressive physiological and emotional distancing from mothers is paralleled by a ritualised process of separation between the mother and her child. This culminates with the ceremony of the first haircut (*daahi avah yoslol*), when children are symbolically integrated into their patrilineal group (see also Empson 2011:174-175). She suggests that a child's first haircut sanctions the end of early childhood and corresponds to a series of physiological, social and cognitive developments: the closing of the fontanel, the fixation of the soul, weaning, and the relative mastery of language (2000:136-143 & 2010: 216). According to Lacaze, the ceremony of the first haircut marks the end of infancy and inaugurates

³¹ As explained in Chapter 2, bone is also the idiom used to designate patrilineal relations.

the period when children start 'being scolded' (2000:149) and 'socialized' (200:139).³²

Over my different periods of fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend the haircut ceremonies of two boys aged three and one girl aged two. In the days following the haircut, children were granted extra attention and questioned about their shaved head but I witnessed no significant change in how their family members interacted with them before and after the ceremony. It must be underlined that given that the ritual should be performed according to children's astrological age (*hii nas*) (at age three or five for boys and two or four for girls), the physiological age of children on the day of the ritual varies greatly.

One of the children living in our neighbourhood, Mönkö, was born just before the Mongolian New Year in January 2007. His parents decided to perform his first haircut ceremony in his third astrological year, when he was two years old according to the Gregorian calendar. In Mönkö's parents' view, the prevalent aspect of the first haircut ceremony was to inscribe Mönkö's destiny (*zaya*) in a providential course by having his hair cut on a fortunate day and receiving blessings from his relatives. The ceremony, they explained, would help Mönkö grow strong and healthy. For Mönkö, his first haircut was an occasion of delight and pride and was not followed by any significant loss of his kingly privileges. In the same way, during the first sixteen months of my fieldwork, Batuhan, who had had his first haircut in 2007, very much enjoyed the status of 'king'. He could stay on his mother's lap and receive cuddles from his mother upon demand, slept against her breasts at night, received the keen attention of other adults and exerted his kingly prerogative and impunity over older children. Batuhan however saw his status change almost overnight after his little sister took his place next to his mother and all the attention of other family members shifted towards the baby.

³² My translation.



Figure 12: A boy holding a box of gifts while his uncle cuts a tuft of his hair upon his hair cutting ceremony

The emphasis that former studies place on the importance of the first haircut ceremony as a marker of the end of infancy might be due to regional variations and historical changes, as well as a lack of consideration of children's daily experiences in favour of an emphasis on rituals and their symbolic interpretations. In the Dundgobi region, the first haircut ceremony, which is only seen as compulsory for boys, can hardly be considered to mark the end of infancy. The age at which young children stop receiving the attention of adults and start being required to control themselves depends on children's individual development (*högjil*) and, importantly, on the composition of their family. Children who remain the youngest child of their family are typically more progressively and gently introduced to losing their prerogatives as 'king'. However even for these children, the loss of kingly privileges occurs as they are required to take the position of *ah* or *egch* towards younger children as we saw in the vignette where Oyuna was introduced to her younger cousin in Chapter 1.

Learning to be a socially and morally competent person

Like every morning, Tuyaa had woken up first, lit the fire and was sitting in front of the stove preparing a large cauldron of milk tea. For once, Otgono and Bilgüün woke up before the tea was ready and Tuyaa ordered them to revise their lessons before having breakfast. Batuhan who had stayed in bed next to his father and little sister, looked at them for a little while. Seeing my empty sleeping bag on the floor, he stood up in his underwear and quickly slinked into it, looking towards his father with a large smile. Erdene who was holding Saraa took no notice of it.

Coming from the other direction, Tuyaa playfully closed the bag and tickled Batuhan. Batuhan laughed, Tuyaa tickled him once more and then ordered, "Enough now, get out of the bag and help your brother packing the mattress and cover of our bed!" Batuhan stimulated by the former interaction however remained in a playful mood. He got outside of the sleeping bag but instead of helping Otgono he started jumping on the blanket, thus preventing his brother from folding it. Otgono complained and obtained his dad's support who told Batuhan, "Stop it! You are the most useless person (hamgiin heregüi hün) here!"

Batuhan stopped immediately but protested angrily, "I am not! Saraa is the most useless one!" His father became instantaneously furious and slapped Batuhan on his bottom. Batuhan started to cry. Erdene reached out towards him, giving him another slap and ordered, "Silence (dugüi)!" Batuhan cried more loudly. "Silence!" Erdene repeated, pinching him mildly and repeating that he was the most useless of us. Batuhan, who was more and more angry, tried to kick his father with his foot and received another slap. Batuhan now screaming with his mouth wide open moved away from his father. Bilgüün and Otgono observed the scene, with a tense smile. Erdene sniffed Saraa and addressing her, reaffirmed, "My daughter, you are the most useful person of us all, isn't it true (Minii ohin manai hamgiin heregtei hün, tim uu)?"

The change the birth of a baby brings to family life is especially acute during the first month, when the fragility of the mothers' body prevents her from assuming

her usual responsibilities at home. It is then expected that the mother-in-law steps in to help or in her absence the rest of the family, first of whom is the father. At the time of Saraa's birth, Erdene's parents had moved to the regional capital and Erdene was in charge of cleaning the swaddling clothes, keeping the house warm and organising all domestic tasks. During this period, Erdene distributed tasks and requested the children's help, more than Tuyaa usually expected from Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan. It is in this context that the altercation between Erdene and Batuhan occurred.

Before the birth of his sister, Batuhan was at the centre of family life and enjoyed a quasi-absolute impunity. The situation described above illustrates how, after the birth of his younger sister, the way Tuyaa and Erdene related to Batuhan changed in four fundamental aspects. Firstly, Batuhan was no longer the centre of adults' attention but was expected to fit in family activities according to his status as *ah*. Secondly, he was expected to know when to stop playing and help, that is, he was expected to have a sense that his parents' demands should be prioritized over what he desired to do. Thirdly, his father expected him to obey and 'be useful'. Lastly, Erdene's outrage against Batuhan's turning the accusation of being useless against Saraa shows Erdene's expectations that Batuhan should not only understand that family expectations of him and of his baby sister were very different, but also that Batuhan should treat his sister in conformity with his status as older brother.

This interaction was the first time Batuhan was violently reprimanded. In fact, it was extremely rare to see parents use physical punishment to scold their children. However after the birth of his sister, Batuhan was under increasing pressure from his parents to be helpful, if only through the fact that this was now the main way that he could attract positive attention to himself. The transition that Batuhan experienced from enjoying the status of 'king', to being expected to behave well is reflected in the two Mongolian verbs used to designate the process of raising and educating children: *ösgö-* and *hümüüjüüle-*. Let me quote the definition that Jargal, the Batuhan's kindergarten teaching assistant, gave me to explain the meaning of these two verbs.

“*Ösgöh* means to be with a child constantly and to protect (*hamgaalah*) her until she is big enough; *hümүүжүүлэх* is rather when you start to teach a child what is right and wrong (*ali ni zuv buruug helj ögöh*),” she explained. In general terms, *ösgö-* means to grow or to raise and can be used for plants, animals and people alike. *Hümүүжүүл-* is constructed from the noun *hümүүs*, people or human, itself based from the same root as *hүн*, the person. The particle *-үүл* indicates a process of transformation. As highlighted by Jargal, *ösgö-* designates the physiological process of growing up and tends to refer to care practices in infancy. *Hümүүжүүл-*, on the other hand, places the emphasis on moral qualities and can be translated as ‘turning into a socially and morally competent person’, a process of transformation which I suggest corresponds to a process of learning.

“When can a child start learning what is right and wrong?” I further asked Jargal. “When they enter language (*held oro-*), when they start understanding (*iom oilgohtoi bolohoor ni*) and are capable to learn things (*yum surgaar bolohoor ni*).” Jargal’s reply helps contextualise how the birth of a younger sibling which abruptly marks the loss of kingly privileges by forcing a child into the position of senior sibling, in fact crystalizes on-going changes in adults’ expectations according to a child’s increasing psychological and physical capacities. Adults consider that children’s development of linguistic skills demonstrates their increasing capacity to learn and to understand. This changes the nature of children’s reaction to scolding as they can make sense of the fact they did something wrong and thus no longer react with fear to scolding, which then becomes a possible (though despised) technique of education. However, as hinted in the former section, adults favour that children learn through their own experiences rather than through being instructed by adults, which is part of broader pedagogical assumptions according to which adults expect and encourage children to learn *autodidactically*.

On a drive back from the regional capital to the village, I was conversing with other passengers who asked me what my research was about. “I study how Mongolians ‘educate’³³ children (*Mongolchuud hүүhdүүдее иaj хүмүүжүүлдэг ve*)?” I explained. “It is easy!” the driver replied with a laugh, “Mongolian children observe (*haraad*) and learn to be socially and morally competent themselves (*өөрсдөө хүмүүждэг*).”

³³ As explained above, literally ‘turn children into moral persons’.

At the time, I thought the driver's answer to be mainly a joking provocation. I however later realised that 'children learn themselves' was an accurate reflection of the principles of Mongolian education. In fact, when I asked other adults what they thought was the best way to 'turn children into morally competent persons', many emphasized that most importantly, parents should show the right example and invite children to participate in daily chores. Let me quote Amga, Bilgüün's father's view on this topic which I recorded during a semi-open interview:

For a child to be well educated, first of all, parents themselves need to have a cordial and exemplary relationship (aav eej örөөстөө харитсаanii soyoltoi). Children must learn to be morally competent persons as soon as possible (hүүhdiig ehnees ni l хүмүүжиhees ni). Above all, for all things they do, children must be required (zövlöh shaardlagatai) to do them with diligence (ünench hiih). For instance, when a child is asked to take a bowl, she should be made aware and shown (sain zaaj ögch sain medruulj) how to hold it, where to place it. Any action should be done with dedication (ünech). A child should not be scolded (zagnah odoo ter ni bol gol ni bish), what is needed is to demand things from the child (zügeer ter hүүhded shaardlaga tavihl heregtei). Indeed, in educating by asking to do things (Tee, yumiig odoo shaardlaga tavji hiilgej surgasnaaraa), a person develops by herself, she becomes capable of doing her own things (ter hūn үүрүү үүригүү hūgjүүleed үүриinhүү hiigeed yavj chaddag bolno).

Amga's explanation reflects three fundamental aspects of parents' modelling behaviour for children's education: the importance of children's observation and imitation in learning to behave well and thus the importance of parents as role models; the conception of teaching as an act of demonstration embedded in participation; and the importance that children learn themselves, take ownership over personal skills and learn diligence.

Adults consider observation (*gara-*) and imitation (*duuria-*) to be important mechanisms of children's education. This implies that older people should behave as models; especially parents as boys are thought to naturally identify with and to spontaneously imitate their father, and girls their mother. Tuyaa once mentioned,

“the way Otgono and Batuhan are ‘becoming persons’ is bad (*muu hümüüjjүүлсэн*). They don’t help me if I don’t ask them and even when I ask them they barely help. But this is normal because they see their father not helping.” Tuyaa’s statement shows that the flip side of relying on children’s natural inclination to imitate is to leave children with a large degree of autonomy in learning. Tuyaa portrays herself as powerless in changing her sons’ lack of propensity to help her. In fact, if adults give little instruction, they also think that scolding or forcing children to behave in a certain way is not the correct way to educate them.

The verb, *zaa-*, that Amga used when talking about teaching children how to manipulate bowls properly, literally means ‘to show’ or ‘to point’ and is also the verb used to mean ‘to teach’. This is revealing of Mongolian pedagogical assumptions which favour practical demonstrations over verbal explanations and direct supervision.³⁴ It directly echoes Ingold’s model of teaching through ‘guided rediscovery’, which he explains, ‘is most aptly conveyed by the notion of *showing*; (2001:141, *emphasis original*).

This conception of teaching through showing and the reluctance of adults to provide children with verbal explanation go hand-in-hand with the emphasis placed on participation as a way to develop moral qualities and technical skills. In his explanation, Amga emphasized the importance that children learn themselves as a way not to develop dependence on others to learn. Amga’s stress on ‘developing by oneself by learning to do one’s own thing’ is combined with his insistence that requests/pressure (*shaardlaga*) should be placed on the child. As we will see in Chapters 7 and 8, adults’ pedagogical principles which require of children to be *autodidactic* learners also have moral implications in the way children develop together a sense of responsibility and autonomy.

Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter, I examined why infants and young children are treated in ways that contradict the principle of the *ah düü* mode of relating and enjoy a privileged status. Babies are extremely defenceless (*emzeg*) and weak

³⁴ This point will be further elaborated in Chapter 7.

(*hevreg*). They are not only especially sensitive to the cold and easily polluted by others (humans and supernatural entities), they are also easily frightened which poses a threat to their self as it can cause their soul/ vital source (*süns sūld*) to leave their body. This state of extreme physical fragility in their first months of life requires special protection by their parents. As they grow stronger, young children however continue to enjoy a privileged status because they are considered to still have no physical and emotional control, no capacity to understand as well as to be intrinsically virtuous (*buyantai*) and irresistibly adorable (*enrhii*). As a result of the constant attention of which they are the object, young children develop a strong sense of individual prerogatives, while the mutuality they experience takes the form of dependency on others, on their mother and family members especially.

In the second section, I investigated what causes children's loss of their kingly privileges. Given the Mongolian proverb presented in the introduction which advocates a drastic change of the mode of interaction with children from an initial treatment as 'king' to a treatment as 'slave', Harkness & Super's idea of 'developmental stage' seemed especially adapted to understanding young children's transition out of infancy. We saw that infants' change of status was paved by adults supporting young children's increasing capacity to learn by making their own experience of the world around them. However, children's status most definitively changes once they are required to take the role of *ah* or *egch* towards younger children, especially if a younger sibling is born in their family.

I ended the chapter by briefly introducing the principles of education through adults' reflexive explanations. In the rest of the dissertation, we will observe how these precepts are or are not observed in daily interactions. It however brought out an important aspect of adults' pedagogical approach, namely the conception that children best learn by themselves. In a context where adults do not proactively structure children's activities according to educative goals, I approach the investigation of how children learn to assume the role of *ah/egch* and *düü* by taking notice of changes in their behaviour and/or in adults' expectations. In the next chapter, I start by looking at how children, initially held to have no physical and emotional control, learn calmness and self-control.

Chapter 4. Learning to hold one's body(*biyee bari-*)

In the previous chapter, we saw that adults consider young children to be emotionally and physically fragile and thus think that they should be protected through constant attention and care. Moreover, adults hold that children are incapable of controlling their desires (*hüsel bari-*) or of understanding (*oilogo-*). Thus, when young children cry or threaten to do so, adults and older children generally give them what they ask for. As a result, young children rapidly learn to make public their distress or desire in order to obtain what they want. As they grow older, however, children come to consider crying and emotional displays as inappropriate as the following examples will illustrate.

In the district centre, a majority of households were equipped with TV sets. In the evenings, people gathered enthusiastically to watch one of the on-going Korean TV series. Whether the series was a crime drama or a comedy, virtually all episodes included some highly dramatic interactions between the characters. These interactions often triggered amused comments from those watching. Children for instance made fun of how Korean people cried frenetically when a person died. In the same way, Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan found it funny when I once burst into tears after I received bad news from France. Bilgüün, who was an especially good performer, loved making her cousins and friends laugh by mimicking my weeping, her face in her hands. These examples are revealing of the fact that like adults, older children see emotional displays as inappropriate and have themselves learned that they should not make a public display of their feelings.

In this chapter, I ask how young children who used to behave like 'kings' learn calmness and emotional self-control which are fundamental skills for acting according to the *ah düü* mode of relating and to demonstrate respect (*hündlel*). I first look at how and why it is important that they learn to control their emotions. I then turn to examining how children learn to follow or rather to produce the 'rules' of etiquette.

Learning to be calm (*taivan*)

Because the ethic of calmness (*taivan*)³⁵ imbues everyday and ceremonial interactions, at first sight it is almost as if children do not need to learn to behave this way, but that they simply ‘grow into it’. However as I will demonstrate in this section, children do not only learn through observation and imitation but are actively encouraged to learn to develop self-control which represents an essential skill to act with respect to the ‘*ah düü* economy of attention’.

The ubiquity of calmness

Let me start by presenting one of the innumerable greeting interactions that children witnessed which I suggest, is one of the ways through which *children’s attention is drawn towards* the ethic of calmness (see Stafford 1995). This banal morning interaction with a friend developed into a personal admonishment which revealed in counterpoint the importance of constantly exerting emotional and physical self-control.

A little before 9am, Otgono and I were walking to the kindergarten. Zolma – a neighbour and close friend– and her nephew Dorcho who were walking in front of us, stopped to wait for us. We exchanged the usual morning greetings. She asked, “Did you rest well (Ta saihan amarsan uu)?” I replied, “Very well. Did you rest well Saihan! (Chi saihan amarsan uu)?” “Very well (Saihan)!” she answered as we resumed walking, Otgono holding my left hand and Zolma on my right side. After a few questions about the comings and goings of our respective family members, we started to exchange more personal comments about the volleyball game in which we had played together at the school sports hall the day before. She mentioned how much her mother and sister had laughed, seeing me jumping and enthusiastically screaming each time we scored. We kept talking, commenting on how drunk the school manager had been, when frowning her eyebrows Zolma looked at me and said, “The way

³⁵ I use the term ethic to mean ‘the conduct conform to moral principles’ or ‘the practice of good living’. *Taivan* is usually translated by the term peaceful, in conformity with prevalent Buddhist value. Peaceful and calm are close synonymous. I use the term calmness to stress the emotional aspect of *taivan* and avoid the political connotation of the term peace.

you walk is ugly (muuhai), why do you move your arm up and down along your body?"

This interaction presents an instance of formalized greetings exchanged upon meeting, most of which are centred on wishing or enquiring about the interlocutors' state of calm (*taivan*) and restfulness (*amar*). For instance some of the most common everyday greetings consist in asking, "Are things calm and harmonious (*Taivan baina uu*)?", "Did you rest well (*Saihan amarsan uu*)?" as in the above interaction, or "What is new (*Sonin io baina*)?" to which interlocutors systematically reply, "Things are calm and harmonious (*Taivan*)," "I rested well (*Saihan amarsan*)!" and "There is nothing new (*Sonin yumgüi*)," or "All is calm (*Taivan*)!"³⁶

The ideal of calmness made explicit in greetings is pervasive to most interactions. For instance, when parents leave their children, possibly for a long time, they avoid saying goodbye to prevent dramatic separation and children most often learn afterwards that their parents left. This avoidance of emotional display is in no way specific to farewells with children. The departure of someone who goes far away is ritualized through the giving of some gifts of food and/or money acting as blessings (*hishig*) and the spraying of milk to guarantee a safe journey to the person leaving. Good wishes are uttered - "Travel well (*Sain yavaarai*)!" - but tears are avoided and words kept to the minimum. Even when children are not directly involved in acts of separation and reunion, they witness the way in which people avoid emotive display and therefore get used to seeing emotional restraint as normal.

The amused reaction of Zolma's mother and sister to my enthusiastic and loud reactions on the volleyball pitch and Zolma's irritation at what seemed to her a disarticulated way of walking illuminate the inappropriateness of spontaneous and uncontrolled actions and motions. Although at the time of the interaction, I was looking at my friend and thus did not notice Otgono's reaction, he presumably overheard the comments, and even possibly found this exchange whereby an older person got scolded for not behaving appropriately quite striking.

³⁶ See Novgorodova & Luvsanzav (1971) for a thematic list of traditional salutations.

The stigma on unrestrained behaviours is also revealed in the contrast between the way children play outside, running and interrupting each other loudly, and the composed attitude of adults, let alone elders. Erdene's great-uncle, who had passed eighty years of age and had lost most of his eyesight and hearing, occasionally paid us a visit. The way he entered our yurt, at a measured pace, his immanent calm and controlled body movements did not appear to be so much due to the physical limits age imposed on his body; rather his composure seemed a chosen stance he used to take notice of his surrounding, a chosen attitude that elicited respect. Children did in fact notice the special manner of elders. Bilgüün's brother, Süh was especially good at imitating the way old men walked at a slow pace, their hands joined behind their backs and covered within the large sleeves of their Mongolian robe (*deel*).



Figure 13: Children playing outside without having to 'hold their body'

Jagchid & Hyer (1979:134-136) underline that a general 'pattern of restraint' is characteristic of Mongols from the time of the Mongolian empire to the People's Republic of Mongolia as exemplified by the reserved attitude the audience and the

contesters maintain even during competitive, joyful contests. Mongolian wrestling (*böh barildaан*), one of the three national sports, is itself characterised by slow controlled motions.³⁷ When adults engage small boys in wrestling combat, they show them how they should first clap their hands three times on their legs,³⁸ and slowly approach their opponent. Wrestling among themselves, older children also keep a relatively controlled attitude and claim their victory by slowly walking in circle with their arms open to imitate the flight of an eagle, in accordance with the traditional ritual.³⁹

Equally, when playing various games with jacks (*chagai*), uncontrolled enthusiasm or exasperation was not tolerated by adults. For instance, when playing at racing stallions (*azarganii uraldaан*) if children got excited because they were about to win the race or frustrated because their jack kept falling on the wrong side, adults told them off, saying, “No noise (*Chimeegüi*)!”, “Don’t interfere (*Üimüülehgüi*)!” or simply “No talking (*Bitgii yari*)!” After such an instance when his grandpa had told him to keep quiet, Ochir started winning. His grandpa took this opportunity to tell him that there was no winning when playing turbulently, thus pointing out to him that quietness was not just an attitude required by adults for their own sake but that calmness was a moral quality which conditioned personal success (*bütel*).

Learning to withstand pain

Children not only learn to be calm by virtue of the ubiquity of calmness in their environment, but they are actively requested to exert control over their body, most strikingly in instances when they undergo physical pain. Adults first promote children’s physical resistance indirectly by voluntarily withdrawing their attention when they witness children falling or hurting themselves mildly. Typically, when toddlers start walking on their own and fall, adults witnessing the scene, tend to pretend that they do not notice or downplay the pain of children by laughing kindly. As a result, toddlers are hardly ever seen to remain on the floor crying, waiting for someone to pick them up unless they really hurt themselves. Once

³⁷ I thank Dr Empson for bringing this point to my attention.

³⁸ Lacaze (1999:90) reports that this practice is used “to give courage and chase fear” (*my translation*).

³⁹ For a description of Mongolian wrestling see Lacaze (1999:90-3).

older, children who happen to fall tend to turn the situation into a joke or, at least, act as if they did not hurt themselves (whether they did or not) and soon stand up.

After having first withdrawn attention from children who cry, adults start to reprimand children who do so. They might make them feel that crying is inappropriate given their status as older children by asking them, “Are you a baby (*Chi jijig hūühed baina uu*)?” or more rarely ridicule boys by asking them, “Are you a girl (*Chi ohin uu*)?” Both girls and boys need to learn to become strong (*changa*) and control themselves (*biyee bari-*) but physical strength and resistance is seen as even more important for boys. Among peers, children use these same lines on each other. However if a younger child cries, older children tend to check that she is fine and try to console her as they know that they are likely to be made responsible for it if an adult comes. Even in cases when children are sick, adults expect them to withstand their pain as shown by the following interaction which happened on Mongolian New Year’s Eve, in February 2008, when Otgono was five and an half.

Towards the end of the afternoon Otgono, who had disappeared for a good three hours, came back home and soon fell asleep on the eastern sofa. Half an hour later, his father woke him up and told him to get ready. Otgono complained that he had earache (chih övdööd). Tuyaa told him off harshly, “It is your fault, why did you play outside for so long? Wash your hands and face and get ready!” and added, “If you keep saying that you are in pain, then you will feel pain! Stop complaining!” Otgono on the edge of bursting into tears kept quiet, trying with some effort to tie his belt around his Mongolian robe (deel). I helped him, feeling increasingly worried that he might have an ear infection and asked Tuyaa whether we could call a doctor. “This is New Year’s Eve, doctors are not working but Erdene will cure Otgono’s ears before we go,” she replied.

Tuyaa took a pack of cigarettes out of the chest and gave one cigarette to Erdene. He lit it, kept the smoke inside his mouth and blew it in Otgono’s ears. Otgono screamed. “Don’t make noise! Don’t cry (Duugüi! Bitgüi uil)!” his parents ordered him. As Otgono contained his sobbing with difficulties, Tuyaa added, “Quiet! The more you cry, the more it will hurt you”. Otgono stayed on

the couch, holding his head between his hands. Tuyaa scolded him again, "Hold your head! If you behave like you are in pain, you will feel pain (Tolgoigoo örgö. Biye chini övdöj baigaa gej bодool baival ulam l övdöh bolno)!" Erdene asked Batuhan to pee in a bowl. Tuyaa maintained Otgono's head bent while Erdene poured a bit of urine into his ears, Otgono groaned and again received reprimands: "Don't make such a noise, keep quiet (Bitgii shuugiad bai. Chimeegüi bol)!"

The harsh response of Tuyaa and Erdene towards Otgono demonstrated in the above scene can be partly explained by the fact that the incident happened in the midst of New Year eve preparations and we had to get ready to leave. It nonetheless triggers the question: why is attracting attention to oneself by expressing pain or crying so problematic? Ordering Otgono to keep quiet, Tuyaa insisted that complaining about his earache or behaving in ways that display a state of suffering actually reinforces the experience of pain. In other words, Tuyaa suggested that controlling the expression of distress is a technique which alleviates pain. This view is reminiscent of Buddhist general principles, which advocate keeping a certain distance from experience rather than engaging in raising feelings and sensations. It is also revealing of the performative power that Mongolians attribute to communication.

Many studies have highlighted the power of uttered words and sounds on others (e.g. Delaplace 2009:196-209; Empson 2011:86-7; Højer 2003:81-120 & 2004:50-61; Hamayon 1971; Hamayon & Bassanoff 1973; Humphrey 1978; Legrain 2011:412-6). Hamayon, for instance, explains that the name (*ner*) is a 'constitutive element of the person's psyche' (1971:143, *my translation*) and acts as a powerful blessing on the person (1971:147-8). Whether they asked a lama to determine an appropriate name for the baby or whether they called on family members to suggest names of which they ritually selected one, parents were concerned to choose a name for their baby cautiously, avoiding for instance giving children the names of their grandparents which would be too heavy (*hünd*) for them. Sometimes despite these precautions a name turned out not to suit a child, causing him to repeatedly fall ill and, after a lama had diagnosed the problem, the name of the child was changed. The power of words is also seen in the power of gossip (*hel*

am) which directly affects people's well-being (Højer 2004:50-61). Investigating Mongolian conceptions of sound, Legrain (2011:412) summarizes the Mongolian linguistic ideology in these terms: 'the active principle which confers words the power to influence is their enunciation. To enunciate is to act on the world' (*my translation*). As underlined by Tuyaa when Otgono suffered earaches, verbal complaints or crying also have a performative efficacy on oneself. Being capable of controlling the expression of pain helps alleviate the pain. Conversely, expressing pain and/or not holding one's body makes the pain more acute.

With infants and toddlers, adults took responsibility for minimising children's exposure to harm and of alleviating children's physical discomfort and pain. As they grew older, adults transferred the responsibility to children not to expose themselves to dangers and only intervened in cases of imminent accidents (see Chapter 3). Moreover, they consider that when hurt, children needed to learn to control their pain rather than cry and call for attention. The lesson that children learn in relation to physical pain also applies to emotions because, like pain, emotions are physical states that threaten the balance of the body and need to be controlled.

Protecting oneself and others from emotions

Like pain, adults see emotions as bodily states. To hold one's body or exert self-control (*biyee bari*) is in fact a generic expression which includes the experience of pain (*övdö-*) and emotions (*setgel hödlöl*, literally the movements *hödlöl* of feelings *setgel*). *Setgel hödlöl bari-* is used interchangeably with *biyee bari-* to designate the action of controlling or holding one's emotions. Strong emotions, such as fear (*ain*), anger (*uur*), sadness (*uitgar*), or longing/thinking (*sana-*) unbalance the self and can potentially endanger one's health. In Chapter 3, we saw that experiencing fear was conceived to be dangerous as it could cause the soul (*süns süld*) to leave the body. Outbursts of anger are seen as a condition, which requires diagnosis. For instance, one of the teachers in the kindergarten explained that when her husband had heart pains, he tended to easily become angry. She recalled that a year earlier she had left their house and moved back to her parents because her husband who had become easily irritable (*uurluuldag-*) as a result of his heart pains kept 'being

reached by anger' (*uur hürdeg*) and had become violent. After she moved out, her husband's family sent him to consult a Buddhist lama in the regional capital. The lama established that he had been polluted (*buzarlasan*) because he had not performed appropriate rituals after the death of his grandfather. After the lama had repaired the situation, her husband immediately stopped suffering heart pains and no longer experienced violent outbursts of anger.⁴⁰

In this case, anger outbursts were diagnosed as the result of social pollution which caused an unbalance in the body (heart pain) leading to an incapacity to control one's feelings. Conversely powerful emotions can cause illnesses. For instance, as I will explain in Chapter 5, frequently young children who are separated from their family and long for or keep thinking of their home (*geree sana-*) catch a fever. As with physical pain, adults train children to say that they do not miss their home as a way to help alleviate the threat posed by being sad. Physical health (*erүүл мөнд* – which means both being healthy and temperate) and emotional control (*биѳе бари-*) are *sine qua non*. In fact, given that strong emotions are a threat to the person, living long necessitates the capacity to be in control of one's emotions as epitomized by the slow and controlled behaviours adopted by elders (see next section).⁴¹

Though I am not aware that disease or illnesses could unfold from experiencing happiness (*az jargaltai bai-*), the expectation of self-control applies to sad and cheerful feelings alike in accordance with the Buddhist ideal of calmness (*taivan*). One evening at home, as everyone was ready to sleep and I was about to turn off the light, I noticed Batuhan, then just one year old, imitating the blinking light of Erdene's phone by closing and opening his eyes with his mouth wide-open. I got the giggles and could not stop laughing though I could see the amused but somewhat disapproving looks on Tuyaa's and Erdene's faces. Chantsaa, a seven-year-old neighbour who was staying with us that evening, looked at me seriously and announced, "No matter how happy don't sing in bed; no matter how sad don't cry in bed (*Hedii jargaltai ch orondoo бүү дуул, hedii zovlontoi ch orondoo бүү уил*)."

On another occasion when Bilgүүn mentioned this proverb I asked her why it was so. She explained that singing or crying was dangerous (*ayultai*) because it would

⁴⁰ See also Højer (2012:4) on the power of anger and resentment to affect others.

⁴¹ I thank Dr Empson for bringing my attention to this point.

wake up demons (*süns*) and make them come to the home. This highlights the second beneficial aspects of controlling one's emotions. Not only, as we have seen thus far, is not expressing emotions a way to protect oneself from becoming affected by them, it also represents a way to avoid attracting undue attention from malevolent entities. Lastly, as I now turn to examine, being able to control the expression of one's emotions is also an important aspect for demonstrating respect and protecting others.

Even when she had become an adult, Tuyaa's younger sister, the youngest child in her family, was known to cry easily and usually cried upon leaving her parents' home when she knew she would not return for months. When one such incident occurred, I asked her father, Dorj, and mother, Hand, whether Mongolians thought it was bad to cry.⁴² To my surprise, Dorj replied, "No, this really depends on individual inclinations (*ügüi ter chini odo huvi hünii l gol zorilgo sh dee*)," but Hand added:

"Well in general, crying is not that good. In fact it unsettles other people's feelings (setgel sanaa üimüldэг). Besides because it makes people feel bad (hyamral boldog) when people cry, if you let things pass containing your emotions, without crying, staying calm (biyee bariad uilahgüi taivan öngörөөвөл), this is how it has to be, nice and pleasant (taalamjtai). Otherwise those who leave, those who come and the others, everyone wonders about what is happening and worries (davhar hyamrald ordog), don't they?"

Dorj's statement that it was not necessarily bad to cry but depended on each person's sensitivity surprised me. While Dorj found people who made dramatic display of their feelings strange and he himself behaved in a highly composed manner, he did not think of emotional control as being commanded by a social rule. His answer reflects an intrinsic acceptance of differences in personality. For instance, parents did not consider that they could change their children's character (*zan*) but only influence it (*nölөөлө-*). People accommodate individual differences, however, as Hand stressed, they expect that each person considers others when acting in public. As Hand emphasized, in the context of family relations, people are bound through a concern for each other so that expressing one's sadness or distress results in making other people worried. Following her explanation, I

⁴² I record our conversation with their agreement.

argue that beyond the potential risks to oneself in lacking control over one's emotions, keeping calm is the right behaviour (*zöv*) towards others, so as to protect them from having to worry. Moreover, there is a concern that people should not attract undue attention for menial matters, in particular from senior people, which is part of an economy of attention regulated by social seniority.

Being introduced to the ah düü economy of attention

On one occasion, as I was pouring boiling tea in the kettle I inadvertently burned myself on the stove and out of surprise exclaimed, "Ouch!". Dorj heard me and asked, "What happened (*Yasan*)?", "Nothing (*Züger, züger*)!" I replied. It was true that I had barely burned myself but had rather reacted out of surprise. "Why do you make noise if nothing happened?!" he exclaimed overtly annoyed. I turned red and thought to myself that I had not meant to make a big fuss about the situation, but at the same time I also felt frustrated for being reprimanded. It was only later when I had the conversation with Tuyaa's parents about why it was bad to cry that I came to understand my misbehaviour: I had failed to 'suppress attention' to myself, a quality especially important for young women, as explained by Humphrey in her article, 'Women, taboo and the suppression of attention' (1978). Here Humphrey analyses the prohibitions on daughters-in-law to pronounce the nouns of which the names of her senior male affines are composed. Traditionally, residence is virilocal and upon marrying women move to live with their in-laws. The position of the daughter-in-law is ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity which generates and explains the duty of daughters-in-law not to call the attention of their male in-laws to themselves.

In the Dundgobi region, at the time of my fieldwork, daughters-in-law observed a minimal version of this taboo, everyone however observed a general economy of attention regulated by social seniority, whereby junior people should not address or refer to senior people without marking respect. As explained in Chapter 2, junior persons never address their senior by their first name only but always mark seniority with a kinship term (see also Hamayon 1971:144; Humphrey 1978:97-8). As explained by Højer in relation to the power of gossips to affect the persons being gossiped about (2004:55-58), the power of words is not necessarily in their

semantic content but rather in the way the attention of the speaker and their interlocutors is turned towards the person who is being talked about, and the way the intentionality behind their speech act (e.g. jealousy or anger) comes to affect the person. Højer (2004:58) further argues that the danger of being the centre of attention also bears on the speaker, especially when referring to or addressing people or entities to which respect is owed, which thus explains that acts of naming others be mediated.⁴³ Building on Højer, the system of address and reference by which addressing older people requires the acknowledgment of their senior position can be seen as the flipside of the avoidance of addressing them as equals. Respect is thus a form of distance instigated by not referring to senior persons by their personal names only, and by so doing, acknowledging asymmetrical positions. Furthermore, acknowledging one's position as junior when addressing senior people represents an attenuation of the imperative placed on them to pay attention to oneself.

Let me remind the reader that most people live in yurts composed of a single circular room shared by all family members. At home, people are always in close proximity and under the constant gaze of others. In this context, most behaviours, reactions or utterances are noticed. However, overt attention is theoretically only owed to the head of the family (*geriin ezen*) and elders (*ahmad*). Ideally, older men embody *yos* and wisdom, so that they only solicit attention for worthwhile matters. As compellingly shown by High (2008:45-48), for junior people, managing to get attention when telling a story, or simply trying to pass an object to someone is not a straightforward matter but rather a battle against 'the power of indifference' of other family members. Conversely, because junior people are expected to not unduly attract the attention of senior persons to themselves, they need to be in control of their feelings and reactions.

Initially, infants and toddlers are under the protective gaze of adults and barely need to solicit their attention for their requests to be met and feats to be noticed. As long as they seem too lovely (*enhrii*) and cute (*hөөrhөн*) to understand and to be told off, young children's interruptions are tolerated. As a three-year-old,

⁴³ Following to the Mongolian performative ideology of language and communication (explained earlier), it is also forbidden for anyone to utter the name of sacred mountains and other powerful places or entities (Hamayon & Bassanoff 1973:70; Humphrey 1995:147).

Batuhan did not hesitate to interject his mother if for instance he needed her to fill the water tank or wanted a bowl of tea. If Tuyaa did not immediately give him her attention, he insisted, calling her more loudly or tapping on her shoulder, “Oi, mum, oi (*Hööye, eej, hööye*)!”. Although Batuhan could call out older people and receive their immediate attention, he had already learned to address them with appropriate kinship terms according to seniority.

When talking to young children and referring to other people, older children and adults placed themselves in the position of the child so as to train them to use appropriate address terms. For instance, when making Batuhan distribute things or food to family members or visitors, Tuyaa told him, “Give this to your older brother Otgono (*Otgono ahad ög*),” or “Give this to your older sister Bilgüün (*Bilgüün egeed ög*).” Equally she referred to her parents as grandpa (*övöö*) and grandma (*emee*). Batuhan rapidly became versed in marking seniority when addressing and referring to people.⁴⁴ However assertively, Batuhan never addressed his parents by their first names but always by calling them mum (*eej*) and dad (*aav*).

By learning to use appropriate kinship terms to address and interact with others, children learn that people’s names must be used carefully. Batuhan witnessed how Bilgüün tried to charm him to share his sweets with her by calling him ‘my little brother (*minii düü*)’ with an excessively affective tone or the way his aunt or mother preceded their requests of him by tenderly addressing him as ‘my son (*minii hüü*)’ instead of simply calling him by his name. Conversely, Batuhan knew that calling older children *ahaa* and *egee* (the suffix *-aa/ee* mark both the possessive and the vocative case) put them in the position of having to acknowledge and to concede to his requests.

⁴⁴ At first Batuhan conceived of *ah* and *egch* as marking size. When at four he started going to the kindergarten regularly, he followed the usage established among his classmates to call the three tallest boys *ah* and the tallest girl *egch*. To go to the toilet, the teacher sometimes made children line up in decreasing size order, the tallest first. Towards spring 2009, Batuhan had grown a lot and found himself just behind the three tallest boys. That evening, playing with a neighbour, he asked him to stand next to him and proudly declared, “I have become a big brother” (*Bi ah bolson*). Around the same time, he reconsidered the way he addressed Oyuna (his friend and cousin and the tallest girl of his classroom) and stopped calling her *egch* but simply addressed her by her name.

As older children, Bilgüün and Otgono were simply ignored if they solicited attention when adults were busy and had learned to wait to find an appropriate moment to approach their parents. Once when Bilgüün took the initiative to participate in a conversation between her great-aunt and grandmother, her grandmother told her off, telling her that it was bad (*muuhai*) for girls to talk when adults (*tom hün*) were speaking. Although girls and boys are expected to learn to withstand pain and to adopt a modest behaviour in the presence of older people, following traditional gender roles, parents treated boys more harshly for crying and girls more harshly for 'loud behaviours' in daily interactions.

In their respective studies of the management of emotions by north Balinese and Pintupi aborigines, Wikan (1990:12-38 & 63-79) and Myers (1988) show that distribution of power in a society and prerogatives in emotional expression are related. For instance, Wikan shows how Balinese men or older people who enjoy a higher status are not under the same pressure that compels young women to show 'bright faces' (1990:23-26). Looking at the social distribution of emotional expression, the difference in Hand and Dorj's comments about whether it is bad to cry or not can be interpreted as pointing to their different social status with regards to seniority and thus their different position within the politics of emotional management. In fact, the junior status of Hand as a woman puts her in a position to constantly be more aware and worried about how her actions and reactions will be interpreted and judged by other people. Dorj by contrast, who, as a man, is under less direct social control, can consider crying or not crying a personal matter.

As well as a technique to protect oneself from the dangers of emotions to the self, showing or controlling feelings is a political matter. The Mongolian economy of attention relies on both a sincere concern for others, whereby people should be worried not to cause others to worry, and a concern with behaving according to one's position according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. As explained in Chapter 2, life in a yurt and daily interactions with others are formalized not only through the system of address but also according to the symbolic orientation of space in the yurt and asymmetrical respect commanded by etiquette. Correct behaviour (*sain züil*) thus requires to both actively control pain and emotions and to follow 'rules

of etiquette' because doing otherwise would also results in attracting undue attention on oneself.

Etiquette is not just a set of rules of good conduct (*sain züil*), but rather '*the proper Mongolian way of doing things*' based on an aesthetic of slow body motion, what Højer calls 'the aesthetics of inertia' (*forthcoming*, emphasis original). Having to move and sit according to a set of prescribed actions requires and teaches children physical control. In other words, etiquette is a mode of interacting which relies and simultaneously produces the skill of self-control; self-control on which the ethic of calmness relies. Moreover, by requiring them to pay attention to their surroundings and to watch their behaviours, etiquette disposes children to developing a strong awareness of their own and other's behaviours. In a context where communications are intrinsically dangerous and attention a political matter, Humphrey (2012:71) shows that etiquette enacted in situation of hospitality sets a tone which maintains host and guest at a safe distance from each others. Building on Humphrey's analysis, I suggest that *yos* is a versatile moral 'technology' (Dulam 2006:33) used to productively show respect, and also acts as a shield which mediates the power of others to affect the individual. In other words, enacting *yos* is both a 'relational technique' which establishes a framework for peaceful and respectful interactions and a 'technique of protection' which allows people to control the effect of emotions and the effect of others' attention on oneself.

Learning to enact *yos*

In the previous section, I investigated how children learn that expressing pain or displaying emotions is inappropriate. It showed that emotional control is an essential skill within the *ah düü* economy of attention whereby junior people should learn to 'suppress attention' towards themselves, or to solicit attention with respect by using etiquette. In this section, I investigate how children learn *yos*.

'Body techniques' under control

Living with Otgono and Batuhan, first when they were respectively three and one year old and then between the ages of five and six, and three and four, I witnessed

how they progressively learned to enact *yos* through verbal instructions, self-initiated imitation, positive and negative reinforcement. Initially, Tuyaa and Erdene had no expectation that Otgono or Batuhan would follow etiquette. However as they grew older, while children's loud and free behaviour continued to be tolerated outside, adults expected them to respect some of the rules of etiquette and to adopt a discreet attitude at home, especially in the presence of visitors. The transformation of Otgono and Batuhan was progressive and occurred through a mixture of voluntary imitation and direct teaching. The interactions described below very much resonates with Gergely & Csibra's concept of *natural pedagogy* whereby adults were keen on showing/teaching (*zaa-*) and children seemed keen on adopting and reinforcing these practices, while using their arbitrary character as a source of authority and entertainment.

The qualification of space within the yurt is both structured according to a symbolic orientation of space, and flexibly adaptable to formal situation and mundane activities. All yurts are oriented so that the door opens towards the south and organised and furnished according to the same arrangement. As a result, upon entering any one yurt, one can confidently predict how furniture will be arranged and where to sit depending on one's status (see Beffa & Hamayon 1983; Dulam 2006:33-44; Empson 2007:61; Humphrey 1974a; Sneath 2000:216-221). The northern part of the yurt (*hoimor*), further from the door, is the most 'respected', 'clean' or 'honorific' and is where the domestic altar and family picture frames are located and where older men sit during visits. The areas close to the door are used for cleaning, cooking or other mundane activities. This general qualification is adjusted to daily activities and qualified relationally, as junior should not sit higher than their senior and body should be orientated so as not to orientate one's feet or back towards them. When guests visits, they take place in the eastern side of the yurt, while members of the host family move to the eastern part.

Otgono and Batuhan seemed to spontaneously pick up on some aspects of etiquette (*yos*) and were encouraged to do so by the positive attention they received when they took the initiative of imitating men's body postures and sitting position. Batuhan, for instance, loved sitting with his legs crossed (*zavila-*), like a man. Adults never failed to notice it and to comment with amused compliments.



Figure 14: The southern part of a yurt in the village centre

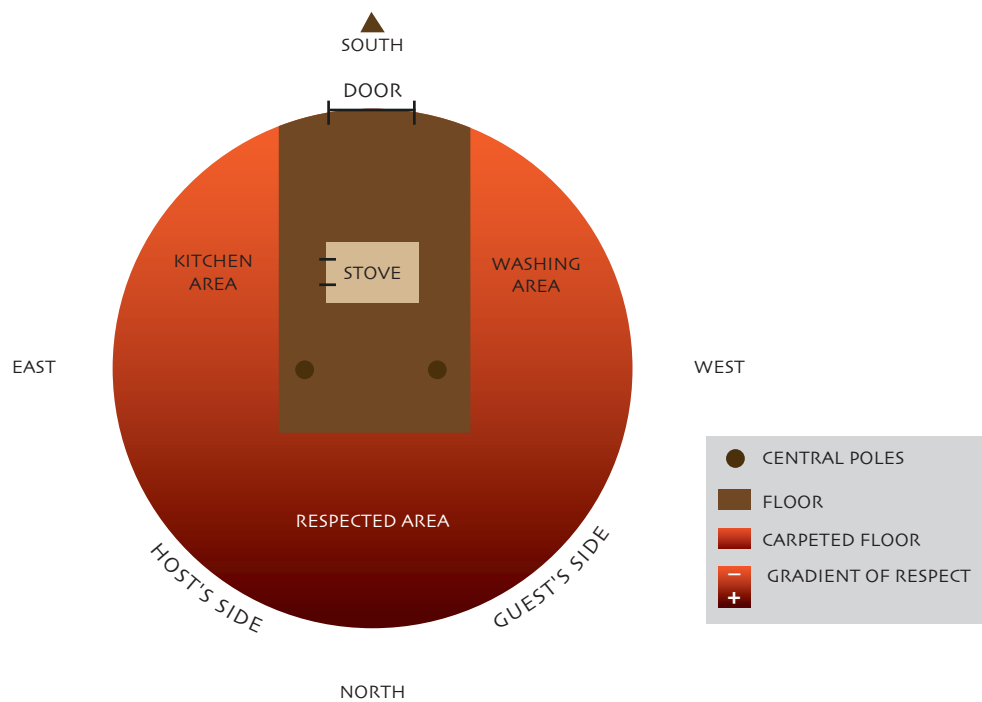


Figure 15: Schema of the symbolic qualification of the space within yurts

(Illustration by C. Calais)

Adults (their parents, grandparents or close relatives) occasionally brought Otgono and Batuhan's attention to the fact that they were transgressing specific rules. For instance, around the age of three, Batuhan and Otgono were sometimes stopped when they tried to pass over other people's legs and asked to, instead, go round their back.

Otgono and Batuhan were also made aware of specific elements or areas within the yurt that command respect. For instance once as Batuhan, aged four, was getting out of his grandfather's yurt, he tripped over the 20cm high door threshold, an action which is considered inauspicious. His grandfather asked him to come back in and place a piece of dung in the hearth to repair his action. In other instances, Batuhan was asked not to direct his feet towards the altar, not to grip or lean on the central pole. His misbehaviours were corrected but he was not reprimanded. He sometimes took advantage of his prerogatives as 'king', and misbehaved intentionally to see whether it attracted the attention of his parents. By the time he had a younger sister however, if he was caught holding himself at the pole or with his feet oriented towards the altar, he got harshly scolded. In instances of serious disrespect, such as a time when Tuyaa caught him playing with sacred objects on the altar, Batuhan received physical punishment.

Otgono was not only expected not to misbehave but also to 'pro-actively' use proper 'body techniques' (cf. Mauss 1936; see Lacaze 2000, 2003 & 2012 for the documentation of Mongolian 'body techniques'). In the presence of visitors or when visiting other people, Tuyaa sometimes told him to 'sit in a nice way' (*goyo suu*); in other instances if Erdene saw him supporting himself with his hands 'as if he was sick' when sitting or upon standing up, he mocked him. Otgono and Batuhan were given no reason as to why these rules should be respected. However, actions required of them 'to repair' (*zasa-*) their misdeed, such as placing a piece of dung in the house hearth drew their attention towards the fact that when violating etiquette, a bad action had to be compensated by a good one to establish a balance. Indirectly, it introduced children to the conception that mindless behaviour towards certain parts of the house such as the door threshold, the central pillars or the stove could endanger the family fortune (*buyan hishig*). The older they grew, the more imperative became the expectations that Otgono

and Batuhan behave appropriately. Although the atmosphere remained quite relaxed among us, Otgono and Batuhan grew attuned to seeing certain ways of positioning or using one's body as inappropriate so that they no longer needed to be told how to behave but themselves knew to exert body control and to sit appropriately rather than comfortably in the presence of visitors.

I have thus far emphasized instances when Otgono and Batuhan learned the symbolic qualification of space by being directly shown the right way of doing things. Most importantly however, in a similar fashion as Bourdieu's analysis of the intrinsically moral ordering of Kabyle houses (1972 [2000:61-82]), daily life at home was a perpetual reinforcement of the right way to perform activities in the right place. Cooking was for instance always performed in the south-eastern part of the yurt, laundry and toilet in the south-western part, when going to bed we all lay down with our feet oriented towards the door, etc. Otgono and Batuhan progressively learned to orient themselves and behave according to the symbolic qualification of space within the yurt and in relation to other people present.

The contextual enactment of yos, a learning challenge

Enacting etiquette requires and supports the development of bodily control in children, but also develops children's constant awareness of other people. Beyond the technical and emotional difficulty of learning to control one's physical movements, an important challenge encountered in learning *yos* is that the degree of formality at which etiquette is observed depends on context. Adults considered that some of the rules of good conduct were unconditional and had to be observed at all times, such as not performing 'dirty' activities in the northern part of the yurt, not sitting with one's back to others, not eating while standing, not leaving one's purse on the floor, not leaving shoes in the northern part, not leaving hats in the southern part and interactional rules such as using the right hand to give things, serving older men first, etc. But, they observed other rules contextually depending on the presence of others. For instance, *yos* requires one to sit without leaning on one's hand, not to extend one's legs and to not orient one's feet towards the hearth. However, at home, among ourselves or in the presence of familiar neighbours, sitting positions were extremely relaxed. When chatting in the evenings, we sat

and lay comfortably. When watching TV, which was initially placed in the northern central part of the yurt, orienting our feet northwards (but not towards the altar located north-east) was tolerated.

At times when unfamiliar visitors came in, if Bilgüün, Batuhan and Otgono were playing in the northern or western side of the yurt, they generally spontaneously moved from the western part where visitors sit and relocated themselves in the eastern part. They were however sensitive to the more attitude adopted by adults and knew to keep quiet unless they were directly addressed. Bat-Delger, Erdene's father, explained to me that when he was a child, he was never allowed to sit, let alone play in the northern part of the yurt. Moreover when visitors came home, his mother always sent him and his siblings outside. At the time of my fieldwork, children grew up experiencing a much more flexible use of space within yurts than their elders did. I suggest that this more relaxed attitude can be partly explained in relation to a contemporary activity, namely watching TV. Let me further explain this point to highlight the way people contextually and flexibly enact *yos*.

In the countryside, an increasing number of households – those equipped with solar panels and batteries – were equipped with TV. In the village, households were linked to the electrical grid and almost all households had a refrigerator and a TV set.⁴⁵ New appliances and modern furniture were integrated within yurt interiors in accordance with the symbolic qualification of space and as such proved the generative capacity of etiquette to frame people's relations to new items and practices. Washing machines were always placed in the south-western part next to where the soap, toothbrushes and towels were to be found in any yurt. Unless electrical installations prevented it, fridges were placed in the south-eastern part where all cooking utensils were to be found. Modern sofas replaced Mongolian beds along the eastern and western walls without changing the family's sitting and sleeping arrangements. TV sets were the only object whose location varied.

⁴⁵ The modest interiors characteristic of dwellings in the countryside contrast with the more heavily furnished and decorated interiors of yurts and houses in the village. See High (2008:101-120) on how herders manage the public display of their wealth; see Empson (2011: 268-316 & 2012:128-9) on the social tensions created by the accumulation of wealth and its conspicuous display in villages.



Figure 16: Child playing in the northern area, north of his elder



Figure 17: Guest drinking tea in a relaxed sitting position

I suggest that this is linked to the fact that being a focus of attention, it disrupts the distribution of people in the yurt, infringing on both the absolute qualification of space and relational qualification of body positions.

Not all activities performed within yurts involve interactions, however all of them are performed orienting one's body towards the hearth at the centre of the yurt (while never directing the sole of one's feet towards others) so that it is always possible for people to see each other. Only in Erdene's home did I see a TV set placed in the central uppermost northern part of the yurt. This incontestably conspicuous statement made by Erdene was also, somewhat paradoxically, the arrangement which allowed us to watch TV without disrupting *yos*. The fact that it was central and north allowed hosts and guests, men and women to watch it without having to move from the place etiquette prescribed.

In other homes, TV sets were located either north-west or north-east, occasionally south-west. In these settings, when watching TV, the goal of seeing the screen and seeking a comfortable position took precedence over respecting etiquette. Often the quality of sound and picture was quite poor so that people had to come close to watch it. At Dorj's for instance, those of us who gathered in the western part of the yurt to watch TV in the evenings often used the pole to rest our backs and so turned our backs to people sitting on the other side.

The contextual enactment of etiquette implies that learning etiquette is not as simple as learning a list of rules about how to behave but also requires an understanding of contexts and expectations of others as well as the capacity to generate appropriate behaviours in novel situations. In *Outline of a theory of practice* (1972 [2000:221-416]), Bourdieu proposes to explain how people are able to act in conformity with 'rules' without actually obeying the 'rules' of which they would have an explicit knowledge. He argues that cultural practices are themselves the product of a limited number of principles which are embedded in and can be learned through practices. Through practice, these underlying structuring principles become embodied in the form of 'habitus', a system of structured dispositions which is then mobilized to generate behaviour in new situations (1972 [2000:286]). Following Bourdieu's suggestion, in the next section,

I turn to investigate how children use and learn etiquette as a generative code of conduct.

Children's generative approach to yos

Once Bilgüün, Otgono and Batuhan had become competent at enacting *yos*, they respected etiquette selectively depending on whom they interacted with and in whose presence. Otgono for instance made sure to never step over his father's legs but liked to test whether it was important to me. At home, catching one of us (other children and myself) not respecting a rule was often a valued opportunity to gain authority. The fact that I was senior to them made correcting me incongruently fun for them, for instance when they caught me supporting my head with one of my hands. At times they even invented 'new rules' to try and impose them on me. The way they created these new rules was actually indicative of their understanding of etiquette and generative capacity to apply it to new contexts. Let me illustrate this point by describing an interaction with Otgono.

In spring 2009, Erdene and Batuhan had gone the countryside to help comb cashmere from goats (*yamaa samna-*) and Tuyaa was in the regional capital waiting to give birth. For nearly a month, I was left in charge of Bilgüün and Otgono at home. During this period, I generally served food to Otgono first and sometimes referred to him, most often jokingly, as the head of the family (*geriin ezen*). Etiquette commands that the head of the family is served first – Erdene being absent, Otgono was de facto replacing his father in this position – and in any case, women serving food always help themselves last. Four months later, as we were about to enter the yurt after coming back from a visit to Otgono's great-grandmother, Otgono stopped me and told me to let him pass first. I asked him why. He replied, "I am the head of the family (*Bi geriin ezen*)!" I retorted, "No, your dad is!" while Otgono passed in front of me.

This interaction represents one of the several instances when Bilgüün and Otgono invented rules to test my ignorance and deference to their knowledge. Otgono improvised a rule to enter first by invoking the concept of head of family (*geriin ezen*). I had a different understanding of to whom and in what context the concept

of *geriin ezen* applied. From Otgono's utterance, it seems that Otgono considered that notwithstanding the fact that his father was back, he too was a head of the family. The common element between Otgono's understanding and mine was the fact that the status of *geriin ezen* conferred certain prerogatives. Justifying that he should enter first because he was a *geriin ezen*, Otgono tried to establish authority over me.

In everyday contexts, we did not observe seniority precedence upon entering and leaving the yurt, although such 'a rule' exists. I had myself learned 'rules of etiquette', prior to my first visit to Mongolia, from reading anthropological studies (Beffa & Hamayon 1983; Hamayon 1970a & 1970b). The only time when children were exposed to a correct order for entering was upon formal visits such as those paid during the New Year, but even in this context, 'the rule' was not perfectly enacted. Older men always entered first but it was not rare for children to come in together with them, while women and young men entered in mixed order after them.

In this instance, I speculate that Otgono creatively explored the possibility of applying *yos* to a novel situation. I suggest that Otgono did not need to conceive of entering home as regulated by a rule to exploit the fact that the situation of entering a yurt lent itself to be 'ordered'. By invoking the fact that he was *geriin ezen*, a status which in our past interactions had been associated with the fact he received food before Bilgüün, Otgono claimed prerogatives based on social seniority. By doing so, Otgono turned the neutral fact of having to enter second or first, into a socially meaningful practice, ordered by and generative of social hierarchy.

We have seen that Otgono and Batuhan learned *yos*, both through pedagogical interactions with adults as well as spontaneous imitation, and personal inventions. We have also seen how Otgono used the concept of head of the family (*geriin ezen*) in a novel situation to justify the production of hierarchical practices. When I questioned why Otgono should enter before me, Otgono's answer showed that he was able to mobilize instantaneously the logic of etiquette to interpret and justify his actions. Bringing all these elements together, I suggest that etiquette is a good

example of a *cultural model* (Strauss & Quinn 1997). The concept of *cultural model* makes it possible to explain that *yos* can both be rendered as a set of rules or code of conduct which seemed given and fixed (see Humphrey 1978), and be constituted of implicit knowledge generative of new practices. In fact, as we saw, *yos* is not learned as a set of rules that children memorize and then replicate in identical contexts. Rather, children develop a more flexible understanding, a set of assumptions about how it makes sense to behave. They use these assumptions to interpret and act in novel situations and refine their understanding of *yos* as they are corrected and observe other people's behaviours.

By developing knowledge of etiquette through the ceaseless enactment of daily interactions in homes, children's constitute a *model* of etiquette which is both personal, the product of their unique experiences, and *cultural*, the product of shared experiences guided through others. On the one hand, the inter-subjective processes through which etiquette is learned from others guarantee that etiquette be re-produced from one generation to the next. On the other hand, the way etiquette is not taught as a set of rules but generatively learned and produced through practices also makes etiquette adaptable to changing historical contexts, that is, guarantees that *yos* is a dynamic *cultural model* which can accommodate the largely different experiences of family life in which children grow up from one generation to the next.

The production of respect (hündlel)

My analysis of how children learn *yos* is based on the assumption that enacting etiquette is learning etiquette. Beyond the acknowledgment that practice is knowledge (cf. Bloch 2012a:143-185; Bourdieu 2000 [1972]; Lave & Wenger 1991), it also implies that the approach that adults take to 'teaching etiquette' or rather the process through which children learn etiquette is an integral part of what enacting etiquette comes to mean and of the way Mongolians conceive of relations. I propose to further investigate how the process of learning *yos* – the pedagogy of etiquette – informs the meaning of etiquette by drawing a comparison with how Japanese children are trained to enact social hierarchy by learning to speak High Japanese.

Javanese people use a distinct language- High Javanese (*Kromo*) - when they talk to anyone older or situated higher than them in the social hierarchy. Young children first enjoy a very close intimate relation with their parents and learn Low Javanese (*Ngoko*) as they interact with them (Keeler 1983). As they grow older, adults encourage them playfully to imitate the correct way of addressing them in High Javanese. By age six, it is expected that children address their parents and any adults (except their mother) by using some measure of High Javanese. Children's failure to do so is then sanctioned by disdainful corrections (Keeler 1983:157). After children start being reprimanded when interacting with adults, their attitude in the company of adults changes drastically: they become 'self-effacing' and 'hesitant to express [their] wants'. Keeler convincingly argues that having to interact in High Javanese is a way through which children are socialised into *isin* or social fear (1983:158), the emotional counterpart of showing respect towards senior people.

By contrast with Javanese parents, Mongolian adults use a lot of positive reinforcement to prompt young children to enact *yos*. Moreover, the way children are later reprimanded, most often simply abruptly ordering them to do or to stop doing an action, is not done in a way that induces 'social fear'. In fact, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, fear is a dangerous emotion and adults are careful to wait for children to be able to understand the impact of their actions on others before teaching them appropriate behaviours. Learning etiquette happens first through children imitating others and adults correcting children in cases when they impinge on other people's space or demonstrate a lack of respect towards sacred attributes of the house.

Contrary to Javanese children who learn respect through the experience of shame and fear, Mongolian children start learning etiquette as a rewarding way to gain adults' attention. Then, once they start being scolded, enacting etiquette represents a way to avoid attracting the negative attention of others and to be indirectly acknowledged as a child who behaves well. In fact, in general, Bilgüün, Otgon and Batuhan found etiquette rather funny. In their pretend play, they liked to stereotype behaviours, imitating old men walking with their hands behind their

back and speaking slowly, playing scenes with a mother scolding her child for not sitting correctly, using handkerchiefs as ceremonial scarves to simulate New Year greetings, etc. Children's choices to re-enact these practices in particular proves their salience. Children seemed particularly amused when imitating them and loved teaching them to younger ones, which I suggest, might have been linked to the fact that they could see no function to these practices and thus found them funny (see Csibra & Gergely 2006 & 2011 on the opaque nature of cultural practices). Let me describe such a pretend play scene which occurred at home on the 19th of February 2008, ten days after the beginning of the Year of the Mouse.⁴⁶ Only Otgono, Batuhan and I were at home. They thus felt free to play, running within the yurt in ways that they did not do in the presence of other adults.

Otgono picked up a toy cell phone and sniffed it as if it was a snuff bottle. He then offered it to Batuhan with his left hand supporting his right elbow. Batuhan seized it, brought it toward his nose and gave it back to his brother. Batuhan then picked a book from the table and showed me the drawing of a horse which he started imitating by running round the stove. Otgono stopped him and took a handkerchief which he put on his arms as if it was a ceremonial scarf (hadag), "Are you at peace (Amar baina uu)?" he asked his brother while taking his brother's head and sniffing him. Otgono made his brother keep his arms straight palms up, placed the handkerchief on them and ordered him, "Greet me ceremonially (Namaig zolgyo)!" and obviously amused by mimicking the behaviours of adults, sniffed Batuhan.

Anthropological studies have highlighted the role of pretend play as a preparatory stage through which children practice social skills before making use of these skills in 'real interactions' (for reviews see Lancy 2008:162-5; Montgomery 2009:134-54). The above interaction demonstrates that Otgono had carefully observed how adults perform ceremonial greetings. Otgono found it extremely funny to enact ceremonial greetings at home and play the role of an older man. The week before this scene took place, as we were paying ceremonial visits to family members Otgono had however refused to take the ceremonial scarf that his mother had

⁴⁶ I will further describe and explain New Year celebrations in Chapter 6.

offered him and throughout the visits did not enact the ceremonial greetings but simply let adults kiss him, while remaining silent.

The New Year visits represent the occasion when etiquette is most formally enacted (see Chapter 6). While they are themselves concerned to demonstrate respect by closely observing etiquette, adults put no pressure on children to enact greetings properly. I suggest that this is due to the fact that during ceremonial occasions, children are mainly interacted with as ‘vessels of fortune’ (Empson 2011:166) in their quality of virtuous person (*buyantai*) to whom adults give gifts (see Chapter 3). As a result, rather than being a moment when adults insist on them behaving as *ah* or *egch*, during the New Year visits, older children enjoy some of the prerogatives they enjoyed as ‘kings’. I suggest that this has some important implications about the way children come to see etiquette and learn to enact respect. When young, during ritualised gatherings, children do not experience formalised ways of interacting as a constraint on them but as a ‘funny way’ of acting while their attention is mainly focused on the gifts that they will receive. Only later, once children themselves want to affirm their status as older exemplary children, do they start enacting formalised greetings. I suggest that the way children come to learn the most formalised enactment of etiquette through their own observations in circumstances when they are given gifts and explicit marks of affection by their close kin contributes to making etiquette not only the correct way but a meaningful way to show filial love (*hair*) and respect (*hündlel*) while keeping one’s emotions under control.

Conclusion

I started this chapter by asking how children, who were used to using direct requests and emotional displays as a means to obtain what they want, come to see self-control as the appropriate way to behave. In the first section, I examined how the ethic of calmness is not only pervasive but taught to children by requesting them to withstand the expression of pain. I explained how self-control is important given the dangerous nature of strong emotions for oneself and others. I further demonstrated that being able to control one’s body and enact etiquette is an

important skill within the *ah düü* economy of attention whereby juniors should avoid soliciting seniors' attention.

As such, learning to exert control over one's body and enact etiquette represents an important lesson in becoming competent at the *ah düü* mode of relating. Exerting self-control is a skill which allows the virtuous articulation of mutuality and individuality, whether one endorses the status of *ah/egch* or *düü*. It enables a person to protect herself from the dangers that uncontrolled emotions pose to the self and to prevent others from getting worried. Moreover, behaving with calmness and enacting etiquette makes it possible to preserve others and oneself from the dangers of communications and to safely manage the politics of attention. As they grow older, children will need to keep perfecting these skills so as themselves become exemplars of calmness irrespective of their personal feelings. As shown by Humphrey in her analysis of situations of hospitality (2012), formal respect is owed to visitors and to hosts whether people are strangers, like or hate each others. In a context where visitors bring with them the potential for pollution, and where communication is intrinsically powerful, enacting etiquette constitutes a technique of interaction which acknowledges that being the object of others' attention is inevitable and that people can only but try to protect themselves and protect others by controlling their emotions and treating each other with respect.

In the second section, I investigated how children learn etiquette. We saw that children are taught correct 'body techniques' (cf. Mauss 1936) but that the contextual nature of the enactment of etiquette requires them to develop a personal understanding of when and with whom to act formally. I presented how through the daily interactions within yurts, which are both spatially and socially structured through etiquette, children develop an understanding of *yos* which they generatively apply to new situations. I suggested that this process of learning etiquette inter-subjectively make *yos* both the basis of a cross-generational shared understanding and a practice whose meaning is produced anew by each generation in a changing historical context. Lastly, I suggested that the way children learn etiquette mainly without being authoritatively taught or being told off initially makes *yos* a funny way to enact relations and later, when enacted towards beloved kin, becomes imbued with feeling of 'sincere respect' (Dulam

2006) and love while observing the ethic of emotional control characteristic of the *ah düü* mode of relating. In the next chapter, I further enquire how children develop emotional control when they experience separation from their home and family.

Chapter 5. Learning to miss home

By the time they go to school, children are expected to be capable of handling prolonged times of separation from their home without being distressed as the following situation, which occurred in May 2008 when Bilgüün was seven years old, illustrates.

Bilgüün, who was lying alone on the eastern wooden bed, whispered, "I think of my home (Bi geree sanaj baina)". Tuyaa generally ignored Bilgüün's moaning. Sometimes she replied to Bilgüün affectionately, telling her that she should work hard in school to make her parents happy. On that evening, like in most cases, Tuyaa abruptly told Bilgüün that she should sleep.

The day after, Tögöö, Bilgüün's great aunt passed by as she often did. We started chatting and I mentioned that Bilgüün had appeared to be quite sad in the past few days. "Poor thing, it has been more than a month that she has not seen her family", I exclaimed. Tögöö expressed no such empathy, "Bilgüün is seven, she is old enough, and she has to learn to be away from home! She will soon have to go to school in the regional capital and then to university, in Ulaanbaatar."

The situation of Bilgüün having to be apart from her parents and brother was in no way exceptional, nor was it gender-specific. Children whose parents were herders in the countryside all experienced prolonged separation from their family when they were sent to school between the age of six and eight. Conversely, children whose parents lived in the village were familiarised with the experience of separation as they visited their relatives in the countryside and were soon required to spend their summer holidays helping with pastoral work (see Chapter 7). As Legrain notes (2010:56-57), the continuous migrations of people, adults and children alike, between the village and the countryside make separation and absence a structural aspect of family relationships in Mongolia. In this context of high mobility, being capable of withstanding separation from absent family

members and of oneself living in a household that is not one's own are essential emotional skills.

As explained in Chapter 2 and developed in the previous chapter, the space in every yurt is structured and used on a similar template, along a double axis (north/south and west/east) so that 'gender, hierarchy and status define the interior' (Empson 2007:61). The adaptability and common structure of domestic interiors combined with etiquette regulating interactions according to seniority allows for 'the incorporation of different configurations of kin members, as well as outsiders, at any given moment' (ibid). Conversely, by becoming competent at *yos* in using the space within their home and in interacting with others according to relative seniority, children develop a template for relationships applicable to any home. Mastering etiquette is thus the first set of skills that allow children to move between households.⁴⁷ The second aspect concerns the emotional capacity to withstand separation from their mother and their home which is the object of this chapter.

As illustrated in the above situation, adults expect older children to have the capacity to stay away from home without showing distress. This largely contrasts with the adults' compliance with the physical and emotional dependence of infants and toddlers. In Chapter 3, we saw how children are intimately related through an 'umbilical connection' (*hüin holboo*) with their mother (and siblings). This connection is however 'too close' to be sustained in its initial state (Empson 2011:153). In fact, as we will see in this chapter, children's attachment to their mother is so strong that the distress they experience upon separation makes them vulnerable to falling ill. Excessive attachment thus represents a threat to oneself from which children need to protect themselves by developing autonomy.

Since the development of attachment theory by Bowlby (1984) and Ainsworth (1979), a large body of psychological studies have been concerned with understanding children's attachment to their primary caretakers, and the processes through which children develop autonomy from them. Attachment theory advances that children, around nine months old, develop emotional

⁴⁷ I thank Dr Empson for emphasising this aspect to me.

dependence on their primary caretaker whose responsiveness is essential to their optimal development. Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) argue that depending on whether toddlers can trust their caretaker to be responsive, they develop one of three patterns of attachment: secure, anxious and avoidant. Anthropologists have scrutinized these findings and demonstrated that attachment theory is underpinned by a normative agenda which is blind to cultural variability in children's social environments and to parents' goals in raising their children (e.g. Lancy 2013; LeVine & Norman 2008).

In line with this critique, I investigate how children develop autonomy and experience separation during the period of transition when they lose their prerogatives of 'kings', without assuming a pre-existing trajectory or norms of attachment. Following Stafford (2000 & 2003), I look at separation as an experience which exposes people to the irresolvable tension between autonomy and dependence and reveals how such dilemma ought to be handled in a given cultural context. Looking at the way children learn to handle separation from their mother and home shows that separation is not only a 'universal constraint' revealing relatedness (Stafford 2000:4-5) but also a mechanism of its production. In fact, as we will see, the way children are challenged to develop autonomy through separation proves to be a process which makes them competent at the *ah düü* mode of relating. I first look at how children are progressively challenged to demonstrate autonomy from their mothers when at home. I then consider children's experience of separation from their home and family.

Teasing children apart from their mother

In this section, I look at interactional and teasing routines which invite children to define their social identity while challenging their relation to their mother. I start by giving an example of such routinized interactions with young children. Lhagva, the husband of one of Erdene's cousins, regularly came to the village to buy petrol. Upon these visits, he often stayed overnight at our yurt, playing dominos with Erdene and a few neighbours. The following situation occurred at the beginning of March 2008, when Batuhan was three years old.

Lhagva entered and sat down in the western side of the yurt. He greeted Tuyaa, who realising that the thermos was empty, turned the kettle on to make some tea for Lhagva. Lhagva called to Batuhan who was playing in the northern part of the yurt, "Come and kiss me!" Batuhan obeyed. Taking Batuhan on his lap, Lhagva asked him, 'What is your name?' "Batuhan!" he replied, pronouncing his full name emphatically. "You are Erdene Tögs' son, aren't you (Chi Erdene Tögsiin hüü, mön uu)?" "True (Mön)!" replied Batuhan. "What is your father's name (Aav chin hen bile)?" "Eden Tögö," replied Batuhan with a confident smile. "What is your mother's name?" Lhagva further asked. "Nan Taya!" said Batuhan. Lhagva smiled and looking at Tuyaa repeated with Batuhan's pronunciation the names of his parents.

Lhagva continued his interaction with Batuhan, "Will you sleep with me tonight (Minii övört untah uu)?" "No," Batuhan replied, freeing himself from Lhagva's embrace. Lhagva turned towards Tuyaa and announced with a large smile, "Batuhan said he would sleep with me tonight!" Batuhan objected, "No!" "Sleep with me and I will give you a big sweet (tom chiher)!" Batuhan observed Lhagva, as if pondering at how serious the offer was. Lhagva reached for Batuhan's trousers and pulled them down. "Do you have a willy (Chi shombogotoi yu)?" Lhagva asked. Batuhan amused but not familiar enough with Lhagva to remain close to him ran towards his mother. Smiling at Lhagva from behind his mother's back, he reached for her breasts. Lhagva teased him further, lifting his own shirt he called, "Come, hold my breasts! (Nash ir. Minii möömiig bari)" Tuyaa laughed. Batuhan turned his head in his mother's neck while keeping his hand in her collar.

This interaction was typical of the keen joking interactions that visitors initiated with Batuhan after he started talking. To a large extent, interactions with young children followed a similar format. In the above situation, Lhagva combined four forms of routinized interactions: questions related to family names and genealogical relations, the "sleep-with-me" teasing routine, the "have-you-got-a-willy" teasing routine and the "hold-my-breasts" teasing routine, which as I turn to

examine, challenged Batuhan to alternatively demonstrate his affiliation to his family and to show his capacity for autonomy.

“Are you your fathers’ son?”

At home, people’s full names were hardly ever used. Erdene for instance was short for Erdem-Tögs. Tuyaa’s full name was Naran Tuyaa but she was called Nara by her close relatives and Tuyaa by familiar people. It is therefore not obvious that children who only called their parents by kinship address terms *aav(aa)* (daddy), *eej(ee)* (mum) would know their parents’ full first name. One of the main contexts in which Batuhan learned his parents’ full name was in fact through being asked, “Is your father Erdene-Tögs?” and then, “What is your father’s name?” as in the interaction described above.

Batuhan was generally initially reserved with visitors he did not know, but seemed happy and proud to be at the centre of adult attention. Adults were always amused by how Batuhan (mis)pronounced his parents’ names. Their recurring questions worked as language training and contributed to children’s learning to address people appropriately according to seniority (see Chapter 4). Questions concerning names and kinship relations are some of the ways through which children are made aware that their intimate bonds to their parents and siblings also define them socially. Adults’ genealogical questions often turned into teasing interactions whereby the adult pretended that someone else was a child’s father, mother or sibling. Batuhan was for instance regularly asked, “Your older sister Aude is your mother, isn’t she (*Od egee chinii eej, mön uu*)?” or, “Your older brother Dorjoo is your older brother, isn’t he (*Dorjoo ah ni chinii ah mön uu*)?” With the second question, the term older brother (*ah*) is used twice. Firstly in *Dorjoo ah ni*, *ah* is a generic marker of seniority that Lhagva uses to designate the position of Dorjoo from the viewpoint of Batuhan. Secondly in *chinii ah*, the use of the possessive pronoun *chinii* induces to envisage *ah* as designating a kin relationship. The use of the suffix possessive forms *-aa* when referring to Dorjoo *ah* induces that the answer ought to be yes. In fact, Dorjoo was a beloved cousin of Batuhan that in other contexts he referred to as one of ‘his *ah*’. However, when Batuhan was asked

whether such or such person was his *ah*, he interpreted with no hesitation that the term *ah* designated Otgono and Otgono only.

It is striking that despite the ambiguity of the meaning of Mongolian sibling terms, which were used ubiquitously to mark seniority with kin of various genealogical relations and non-kin alike, Batuhan interpreted the question as designating the special relationship he entertained with Otgono. On the other hand, it is also true that kinship terms for parents set apart sibling relations. For instance, only Otgono and Batuhan called Erdene and Tuyaa, dad (*aav*) and mum (*eej*) while Bilgüün called Erdene and Tuyaa, Erdene *ah* and Tuyaa *egch*. As demonstrated by Schieffelin (1990:112-35) and Goldfield & Snow (1992), socialization through language and the use of kinship terms play a part in learning to distinguish different categories of people, however they only represent one of the many practices through which children come to understand the obligations and forms of relatedness that bind people in different ways. As we will see, sleeping arrangements, separation from home, sharing, helping, etc. were practices that Batuhan, Otgono and Bilgüün associated with the production of kin relatedness (see Chapter 6).

Social and administrative practices identify a child through his father and patrilineage. Being regularly asked whose son or daughter they are is a feature of children's interactions with adults throughout their childhood. The genealogical questions which young children are asked at home precede practices in the kindergarten and in school where teachers, school staff and older children ask children to identify themselves through their father's name.⁴⁸ In the same way, among adults, when referring to a person with whom their interlocutor is not familiar, people present the person as a member of a man's family, for instance "One of Erdene's (*Erdeniih*)". Not only do names mark an essential relationship with one's father, but from the moment people start speaking they learn to define their personal identity through their affiliation to their father, a form of social identity whose prevalence changes over the life-cycle but which cannot be replaced, even for women who marry in their husband family group.

⁴⁸ The use of father's name as family name dates from the socialist regime (Delaplace 2009a:200).

Before the wedding (*gerle-*), the bride-taking ceremony (*ber avah yoslol*) operates the ritualised transfer of the bride to her husband's family group. On becoming a member of her husband's family group, the bride does not however change her family or clan name. Watching Western movies on TV, people noticed that Western women (*baruunii emegtei*) took their husbands' name, which left them puzzled. While marrying does not occasion a change of filiation for the bride, it establishes the detachment of the bride and the groom from each of their fathers' families. The married couple in fact becomes an independent unit (*ger bül*), and people refer to it as such, using the name of the head of the family. By getting married and having children, people's social identity changes from being defined as sons or daughters to becoming defined as family head (*geriin ezen*) or wife (*avgai, ehner*), and as the father (*aav*) or the mother (*eej*) of one's children, but these are additional identity attributes which do not overwrite the primordial filiation and social identification to one's father.

"Won't you sleep with me?" and other teasing routines

After having questioned Batuhan about his father's and mother's names and thus stressed Batuhan's identity as a son, Lhagva switched to a different set of routinized interactions which challenged Batuhan's physical and emotional attachment to his mother. As we saw in Chapter 3, in early childhood, the primary caretaker is generally a child's mother.⁴⁹ Infancy is the only period when children's daily rhythms are notably different from the rest of the family. Afterwards, children tune in the activities of family life: they can sleep and eat throughout the day but no special arrangement is made for them to sleep separately from others, or have an earlier bedtime at night. If children are tired, they generally fall asleep on the floor and are later woken when everyone goes to bed. Even after being weaned, children were allowed access to the comfort of their mothers' breasts and could freely lean on them and caress them by day or night until a younger sibling took their place alongside their mother.

⁴⁹ When a woman cannot take care of her child, for example if she gave birth before graduating from university, her parents usually care temporarily for the child.

Young children are keen on these moments of shared intimacy with their mother which prolong the intimate relation established in infancy through breastfeeding (see also Empson 2003:69-73). At bedtime, as Batuhan laid against his mother caressing her breasts before falling asleep, she often asked him questions or told him little stories. In the mornings, while waiting for the home to warm up after Tuyaa had risen to boil tea, Batuhan enjoyed being playfully caressed and teased by his father, or turned to tickle Otgono still sleeping on the other side of the mattress. Adults and children alike dislike sleeping alone. As such sleeping is a social activity, one which establishes bonds and reveals relationships, as only family members and close relatives sleep together. As illustrated in the above encounter between Batuhan and Lhagva, as children grow older, men start teasing them for holding their mothers' breasts and challenge them to sleep with someone else. The way sleeping is experienced as a shared family moment makes asking a child to sleep with someone else a double challenge. Not only does the child need to feel comfortable to establish an intimate relationship with the person offering them their company, but it also requires children to relinquish the cherished intimacy with their mother and family.

The pressure on children to 'detach' themselves from their mother is mostly exerted on children indirectly by being invited to form relations with others. The way young children are made to experience separation from their mother as an instrument for extending personal relations to a larger group of familiar persons is instructive of the Mongolian production of individual autonomy within mutuality. In this respect, the comparison with how German and American toddlers are from day one encouraged to develop individual autonomy is instructive.

LeVine & Norman (2008) and Morelli *et al.* (1992) report how infants and toddlers in German and American middle-class families are required to sleep alone on their own from the time of birth and later to be able to stay alone and play in their bed as a way to develop their independence and capacity to be self-sufficient. For Mongolian children, by contrast, learning to be autonomous from their mother happens through a process of the extension of family intimacy to others. Prior to being teased, young children are used to be tenderly cuddled by the parents, grandparents and other close relatives, these same persons who then ask them to

sleep with them rather than their mother. Before teasing children as to whether they have a willy and thus inviting them to *identify* as boys, adults like to tenderly pretend that boy's penises are snuff bottles from which they take a smoke (*tamhi tata-*).⁵⁰ Later, less familiar people such as Lhagva in the above vignette enact the "willy-teasing routine" in a challenging way. Turning a cuddling practice into a teasing interaction, adults associate the pressure on children's to affirm their individual identity as boys with the form of physical intimacy which young children have thus far experienced with their close kin.

By contrast with genealogical questions, teasing interactions were almost exclusively conducted by people with whom a child was already quite familiar and mostly by adult men and older women. Teasing interactions present some of the features of joking relationships. In his seminal article, Radcliffe-Brown (1940:195) defines a joking relationship as 'a relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instance required, to tease and make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence'. In Southern Mongolia, teasing relationships are asymmetrical; children do not return adult's provocations. However children decide whether they want to engage in these interactions. Children are in fact selective regarding the persons with whom they engage in teasing and the younger one often refuses to respond to teasing initiated by people who they do not know well, or teasing initiated by children who are only slightly older than them. Once older, children are however expected to understand teasing interactions to be playful and to engage in them. In the summer of 2012, I went back to Mongolia for a quick visit. Erdem-Tögs was now five years old and had been staying in the countryside with his grandparents for a month. Erdene, his uncle, had established a confident joking relation with him. After Erdem- Tögs' mother had arrived in the countryside to pick him up, Erdene teased the boy for holding his mother's breasts. Erdem- Tögs became upset and started weeping. Erdene, surprised and irritated, told the boy he was totally stupid (*shal teneg*) while Nyama ordered Erdem-Tögs to calm down.

⁵⁰All children are tenderly cuddled by their close kin. However, only boys' genitals are the object of caresses and teasing. This practice points out and then challenges the identity of the child as a boy. Growing older, children affirm their identity as boys and girls through work (see Chapter 7) and willy-teasing routines are no longer played by adults.



Figure 18: A young boy happily cuddled and teased by his great-grandmother

Strikingly, the ‘sleep-with-me’ and ‘take-my-breast’ teasing interactions played by non-members of their nuclear family establish a relationship with children by challenging their physical and emotional attachment to their mother. By being engaged in these teasing interactions, children are thus progressively made aware that establishing relations with others require them to gain autonomy from their mother. When Erdene’s father was visiting us, he relentlessly asked his grandsons which one of them would sleep with him: “Won’t you sleep with me? Don’t you love your grandpa?” To make things worse (or more amusing), if Batuhan had agreed to sleep with his grandpa and his grandma was also present, she took the relay and asked him, “Won’t you sleep with me tonight?” Batuhan enjoyed the game and changed his mind repeatedly, alternately announcing he would sleep with his grandmother or grandfather. At bedtime however, he headed towards his

mother's bed. The next morning, upon waking, Batuhan was almost guaranteed to be asked by his grandfather, "Why did you not sleep with me?" Batuhan generally remained silent until further asked, "Don't you love your grandpa?" to which he immediately replied, "I do (*Hairtai*)!"

These scenes of teasing always occur in a context of mutual amusement between the person teasing and the persons witnessing the scenes (including older children). If a child came up with a particularly funny answer or reaction, they become an anecdote that adults enjoy narrating in later conversations. It is rare that, like Erdem-Tögs, children react by crying when they are teased and this is not adults' intention in teasing children. As in Southern Taiwan, Mongolian adults want children to gain emotional strength. But unlike Taiwanese parents they do not intentionally push children to tears (Stafford 1995:51-52). Like Batuhan, young children at first tend to feel a little intimidated. But most often, children enjoy the attention that their classificatory aunts, uncles or grandparents demonstrate by teasing them. When his uncles or grandparents stayed (or pretended to stay) overnight, they always and repeatedly asked Batuhan whether he was going to sleep with them and attempted to 'verify' whether he had a willy, as Lhagva did in the above vignette. However, with them Batuhan rarely ran towards his mother, but felt comfortable enduring more teasing, laughing, replying back and finally succumbing to being cajoled and tenderly caressed. The 'sleep-with-me', 'have-you-got-a-willy' and 'hold-my-breasts' teasing routines produce and test adults' familiarity with a child. In other words, teasing interactions presume and produce familiarity, while producing an asymmetrical relation between young children and their elders.

Besides the creation of familiarity, two factors contribute to the prevalent use of teasing with young children. Firstly, adults enjoy teasing young children and are amused by their reactions. Secondly, teasing is an especially appropriate educative technique at a time when children gain intelligence (*uhaan oro-*) but are still too young to be forced to obey or to be scolded. During this period of transition, teasing represents an ideal form of pedagogical interaction which accommodates children's intermediary status, while making *ostensive* and *drawing children's attention* to adults' new expectations (cf. Stafford 1995). As demonstrated by

Briggs (1998) in her analysis of routinized teasing interactions as experienced by a three-year-old Inuit girl, teasing is especially efficient in teaching morality. In the above case, we have seen how the 'sleep-with-me' teasing routine introduces children playfully to the dilemma of gaining autonomy and establishing relations: how to reconcile the desire to act as an older child with the desire to sleep in the comfort of a mother's embrace, and how to gain the love of other people while keeping the security of mother's proximity. When Lhagva engaged Batuhan in a 'sleep-with-me' teasing routine, Batuhan was made to state publicly with whom he wanted to sleep and to thereafter face the consequences of his decision: disappointing Lhagva, risking the fact he won't like him anymore or that he won't give him sweets. The joking tone of the interactions and the relative familiarity with Lhagva allowed Batuhan to face this dilemma without it being too emotionally distressing.

In the second year of my fieldwork, Tuyaa fell pregnant. As her belly grew rounder, she encouraged Batuhan to touch it and repeatedly explained, "Your baby brother or sister is in there (*Duu ni eejiinh ni gedsend baigaa*)."

When Batuhan's parents talked to him about the baby in his mother's tummy they often referred to the fact that he was going to become an older brother (*ah*). They associated this new status with a series of changes that they encouraged in his behaviour, namely: to stop clinging to his mother's breasts, not to sleep with mummy at night, to visit his grandparents or uncles on his own, and to help at home. Batuhan was well aware that not touching his mother's breasts in public and agreeing to sleep with his uncles or grandparents would make him an older boy. Irrespective of how much he claimed to have become big (*tom*), he could however not resist the pleasure of nestling himself against his mothers' breasts before falling asleep. The arrival of his little sister marked the end of Batuhan's access to his mother's breasts and proximity at night. As with visitors who attempted to tease Batuhan away from his mother, the way his little sister forced Batuhan to gain physical and emotional autonomy was relational. Losing his 'status of king', Batuhan was *de facto* placed in the position of older brother (*ah*), and the intimate relationship with his mother replaced by his obligations towards his little sister.

Missing home, a shared secret

In the summer of 2009, both Otgono and Batuhan stayed with their grandparents in the countryside. When the adults relaxed during the day or at bedtime they enjoyed teasing the children. Batuhan being the youngest one was often provoked physically and verbally.

We were almost all in bed and as usual Batuhan had decided to sleep with his brother. Otgono had already fallen asleep tired after a long day at the well but Batuhan was still awake thoughtfully gazing at the moths circling the lamp bulb. Batuhan's uncle, Süh, lying on the bed in the other side of the yurt, took this opportunity to tease Batuhan. Addressing Batuhan cheerfully he asked, "Is Auntie Aude your mother (Od egee chinii eej mön uu)?" "No!" replied Batuhan vehemently. "Do you want to sleep with me?" continued Süh. "Tomorrow!" replied Batuhan. "But yesterday you had already said tomorrow!" exclaimed his uncle whose tone oscillated between playful teasing and serious disappointment. Süh's last question: "Do you think about your home (Chi geree sainj baina uu)?" remained unanswered.

Throughout the following week Süh and other adults kept asking Batuhan similar questions. During a sunny afternoon as we had finished milking camels, Batuhan was sitting on his grandmother's lap and being cuddled. His grandmother following what had become an usual routine asked him, "You don't think of your home any more, do you?" "I don't think of it (Sanahgüi)." "Good, my son has become a big boy (Sain, minii hüü tom boljee)!" Batuhan smiled and thereafter left.

My initial reaction was to be puzzled by adults repeatedly asking young children whether they thought of their home.⁵¹ By constantly bringing the absence of their mother and father to the children's mind, did these questions not increase their longing for their family? The second surprising aspect of these questions is that

⁵¹ The verb *sana-* used in the question asked to children literally means 'to think of' but in this context takes the more specific meaning of missing and longing. I translate it as 'to miss', 'to long for' or 'to think of' interchangeably.

they seemed totally at odds with the Mongolian ethic of interactions. In fact, when people greet each other, they do not enquire about how the other person is feeling but rather ask about and thus induce their interlocutor's state of calmness and health. In Chapter 4, we saw how, in accordance with the *ah düü* mode of relating, children are trained to exert self-control and required not to attract attention to themselves by expressing feelings. Enquiring about whether children think of their home thus appears to contradict the precepts of interaction that children learn as they start to form relationships according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. In this section, I seek an explanation for this apparently anomalous routinized interaction and examine how it shapes children's sense of self and relatedness to their home and family.

The dangers of homesickness

When I asked Batuhan's grandmother and aunts why they kept asking Batuhan whether he missed his home, they replied that they asked out of real concern, because they knew that it was hard for him. One of Batuhan's aunts explained to me, "When I ask this question, I don't like hearing that Batuhan is missing home. Even if I know that it is difficult for him to be away from his family, I hope that he will say no." In fact when Batuhan took the question seriously and admitted to missing home, his grandma comforted him tenderly.

Adults know that the experience of separation is distressing and thus progressively expose young children to it. For instance, Nyama first sent Erdem-Tögs to her parents in the countryside when he was two years old, hoping that he would stay there for at least three weeks. After a few days, he caught a fever. It was immediately decided that Erdem-Tögs should be brought back home. The fact that his fever was caused by homesickness was confirmed by the fact that as soon as the little boy stepped onto the public bus to Ulaanbaatar his fever disappeared. The next summer, Erdem-Tögs was sent to the countryside again and managed to stay with his grandparents for a month. As he started to show signs of sadness (*uitgarla-*), his grandmother judged it was time that he returned home. Nyama told me how proud she was that though Erdem-Tögs really missed his home and asked

to talk to her regularly on the phone, he had accepted and managed to stay in the countryside for a whole month.

The holiday during which the above interaction between Batuhan and his grandma took place marked Batuhan's realisation that he should not admit to missing his home. During the first week, when asked, Batuhan openly stated, "I miss my home (*Bi geree sanaj baina*)". By the second week Batuhan stopped admitting he missed his home. Batuhan's grandmother kept complimenting him for having become a big (*tom*) or good (*sain*) boy though she did not actually believe that Batuhan had stopped longing for his home. Actually worried that he did, she applied Chinese suction pads on his lower back and interpreted the red marks which appeared (*jin*) as a confirmation that he was homesick. She called his parents and Erdene came to pick him up the next day. The morning when Batuhan was told his dad was coming, he immediately packed his clothes in his bag and sat quietly on his great-grandmother's bed ready to leave as soon as he would arrive.

By exposing children to repeated and increasingly prolonged experiences of separation from their home, adults encourage them progressively to acquire autonomy. They however closely monitor children's distress and make sure not to overstretch their physical capacity to withstand separation. The emotional distress that children experience upon being separated from their home materializes the strength of their attachment to their family. It also shows that as they grow older and are required to spend time away from their home, children discover that the strong attachment to their home and family results in a state of emotional and physical vulnerability.

Young children first enjoy their growing physical autonomy as a prerogative to explore the world within and in the vicinity of their home (see Chapter 7). As they grow older, children discover that autonomy is not just a prerogative but a competence that they need to develop and which requires them to transform their relation of dependence to their mother and family. Being autonomous (*biyee daasan*) literally means to be able to endure physically. Very much as controlling emotions (*biyee bari-*) is conceived as a way to acquire physical self-control, becoming autonomous is envisaged as a physical process through which children

learn to develop emotional strength in order that their longing for their home no longer affects their thoughts and bodies.

Learning to keep emotions secret

When going to bed alone, while her cousins joined their parents on their mattress, seven-year-old Bilgüün sometimes admitted to missing her home but was generally ignored or told off when she did so. After such an evening, I asked whether it was hard to be away from her family. She first admitted to missing her home but soon added, “I don’t like explaining this to you auntie. Missing home is a secret (*geree sanah nuuts*)!” and finally took her admission back, “It is not true (*Hudlaa*)! I don’t miss home. It is easy to be in the district centre. I have learned (*Bisursan*). Two days after my mother leaves, the thought of her goes (*eejiigee sana boljee*).”

In his book *Children and Emotion*, developmental psychologist Paul Harris dedicates a chapter to the art of ‘hiding emotions’ (1989:127-148). He proposes that there are two ways through which children can hide emotions. Firstly, children can apply ‘rules of politeness’. In this case, emotional expressions are controlled in a behaviourist manner whereby children are conditioned to react with a given expression on cue. It does not require children to understand the difference between their real and apparent emotion. Alternatively, children can adopt the right emotional expression with the intention to avoid other people’s laughter or anger or to protect other people from knowledge that would distress them. For children to hide their emotion with the intent to manipulate others’ perception of them or their effects on others’ emotions, children need to have developed an understanding that people have mental states which determine their intentions and actions, what psychologists usually call ‘theory of mind’.

Synthesizing data from experimental studies, Harris suggests that children’s capacity to hide their emotions moves from relying on masking their feeling in a ‘semi-automatic fashion’ around the ages of three and four to understanding the potential to deceive others by the age of six (1989:146). Harris highlights that being capable of controlling one’s emotions intentionally is far from a mundane skill but is nothing less than the discovery of the existence of ‘a barricade between

the private world of experience known only to the self, and the public world in which behaviour and facial expression are visible to others' (1989:141). In other words, learning to hide one's emotions amounts to discovering or rather to bringing to life a 'private self'. In what follows, I examine how routinized teasing interactions about whether he thought of his home might have led Batuhan to make such a discovery, while at the same time shaping his sense of relatedness to home and bring to his attention social expectations about how he should present himself.

As I have mentioned, in the course of his holiday Batuhan, who was regularly asked whether he missed his home and family, came to change his reply to this question. While he initially admitted that he thought of his home, he later affirmed that he did not. I can only conjecture what motivated Batuhan to change his answer given that his other behaviours (e.g. finding it difficult to fall asleep, staying alone for a little seemingly caught in his own thoughts, admitting to his parents that he missed them on the phone, etc.) suggested that he at least occasionally longed for his home. I shall consider Harris's two hypotheses in turn. Firstly, this change might have happened because he understood 'a rule' commanded that he reply that he did not miss his home. Secondly, Batuhan might have hidden his emotion because he understood that he could manipulate other peoples' minds.

As highlighted by Gaskins & Paradise (2010:108), many rules about emotions are learned by observing others. Hearing older children, particularly his brother, stating that they did not miss their home probably influenced Batuhan in reconsidering his public position. Batuhan might also have interpreted the mere fact that adults kept asking him more than they asked older children as a form of pressure on him to state that he did not long for his home. Moreover, although not directly instructed in this, Batuhan received some cues as to what the expected answer to the question was. In the above vignette, Batuhan's grandmother used a negative form and a question tag so as to encourage Batuhan to state that he was not homesick, "You don't miss your home any more, do you?" and as soon as Batuhan replied that he did not miss his home, she complimented him. Through compliments and observations of others, in a broader context where complaining and expressing emotions is frowned upon (see Chapter 4), Batuhan might have

come to answer that he did not miss his home because he understood it to be the right response according to 'implicit social rules'. Alternatively the playful tone used by men combined with his increasingly sophisticated capacity to read other people's minds might have prompted him to discover the possibility and necessity of keeping secret his longing for home.

I thus suggest that, at times, Batuhan answered that he was no longer missing his home when he actually did. In these instances, by being congratulated by his grandmother for stating that he was not longing for his home irrespective of his own feelings or by observing that men stopped teasing him when he stated assertively that he did not miss his home, Batuhan was exposed to the everyday politics of social life whereby one's statements do not necessarily correspond to one's feelings, but correspond to the management of what Goffman calls 'the presentation of self' (1971).

Like the 'sleep-with-me' or 'take-my-breast' teasing routines, the teasing routine about homesickness potentially confronts children with a moral conundrum linked to self-presentation as older children. In all cases, the challenge is to avoid a negative self-presentation. In the above interaction with his uncle, Batuhan had to choose between voicing his longing for home and behaving like a small child, or imitating the behaviours of older children but, by doing so, possibly betraying his own feelings. Unlike with other teasing routines, the 'do-you-miss-home' teasing routine has no consequences but a verbal answer. In the 'sleep-with-me' or 'hold-my-breasts' teasing routines, children's emotional capacity not to withstand separation from their mother can be tested by their actions. In the 'do-you-miss-home' teasing routine, by contrast, people have no means to directly assess a child's feelings. As a result, unlike other teasing routines, the 'do-you-miss-home' teasing routine presents children with the potential to lie or rather craft their answer. Children are thus exposed to the experience that social interactions are a game in which they need to learn to play their role while facing a serious moral dilemma. Conversely, learning to play social games comes with the realisation of the potential disconnect between their private and public self.

This capacity to control the expression of one's feelings and manipulate others' impressions of oneself is essential when demonstrating that one no longer behaves like a 'king'. Moreover, the skill of reading and anticipating other people's impressions will later prove essential in a context where communication with others is never safe but requires the manipulation of others' feelings and opinions so as to avoid being the victim of malicious words (*hel am*) (Højer 2004:54-61) and where 'lying' or crafting stories is a valued personal skill through which people assert their position of authority and produce 'shared sociality' (High 2008:42-5). Although suspicion underpins relations with people outside of the family (Højer 2003:48-120), as underlined by High (2008:110), people are inevitably part of an 'intense and mutually implicated sociality' which makes exposing oneself to the power of malicious gossip inescapable. In this context of ubiquitous relatedness, emotional control helps craft a space for oneself at a safe distance from others and creates a 'radical division between self and other, inner and outer' (Højer 2004:61). Højer shows that this division is essential to sustaining relations outside of the family circle. As demonstrated by the analysis of teasing interactions played with children, the disconnection between self and others is in fact learned through and essential to relating to one's closest kin too.

I have no means to know what Batuhan was actually thinking when he kept silent after his uncle asked him whether he was missing his home. I speculate that he might have been troubled by the fundamental relational problems his uncle's question raised: should one answer according to their own feelings or according to others' expectations? In this context more specifically, Batuhan maybe envisaged: "What would my brother, uncle and grandparents think if I admit that I am missing home?", "What would my mother think if she heard that I say that I don't miss home?", "How can I keep receiving my grandma's comfort and be recognized as a big child by my uncle?". Or he maybe found himself thinking of his home and disconnected from the interaction with his uncle. Either way I suggest that teasing routines play an important role in children's developing the capacity to read other people's minds and in their apprenticeship in keeping certain personal thoughts and feelings secret. This has two effects. Firstly, it helped Batuhan develop emotional control and safeguarded him from the hazards of strong attachment. Secondly, it taught Batuhan that in conformity with etiquette, personal feelings

should not be expressed without this implying that these feelings cannot be sustained secretly. In fact, as I now turn to explain, by continuously asking children whether they miss their home, children are also made to experience separation as an experience that reinforces their attachment to their home and family while allowing for the development of their autonomy.

Separation without detachment

When his uncles asked Batuhan whether he missed his home, their tone was overtly playful. I asked Süh why he kept asking Batuhan this question. Süh said it was ‘just a game’ (*züger togloom shogloom*). I further enquired, “But don’t you make Batuhan more sad (*uitgartai*) by asking him all the time whether he misses his home?” Süh replied, “Batuhan needs to get used to being away (*dasah heregtei*).” What mattered to adults in these interactions was not to suppress children’s feelings – his uncle and his grandmother had no doubt that Batuhan still missed his home and family – but that they become capable of controlling them. Paradoxically, the routinized teasing of children, by bringing their attachment to their home constantly to their mind makes longing for home a salient emotion.⁵² The way adults constantly check whether they miss their home prompts children to actually identify some emotional state or aspect of their experience as ‘missing home’. It gives a name or social label to a personal experience which thus becomes social. Furthermore, teasing works as a technique that promotes children’s emotional control by making homesickness prevalent. In fact, it teaches them that they should miss their home but that they should not allow themselves to be affected by this feeling.

The skill of emotional control is not only valuable for the feeling of homesickness but prevails in everyday interactions and reflects shared assumptions about the potential harmfulness of emotions and the value of calmness. I suggest that by the same principle that we saw in Chapter 4 when Tuyaa ordered Otgono to stop crying because it would cause his pain to be stronger. Following the same performative effect of language, by inviting children to state they do not miss their home, adults help them control the effect of their feelings, while at the same time,

⁵² I thank Dr. Legrain for bringing my attention to this point.

inviting them to constantly think of their home. I argue that by training children to miss their home, this routinized interaction prevents that children become attached to the place and the people with whom they are living temporarily.

Given that being competent at etiquette allows children to find their position and fit into any family, the constant movements of children between households combined with children's increasing autonomy threatens their affiliation to their family. The fear that children affiliate to others and the importance that they demonstrate their allegiance to their family is most explicitly expressed when children spend too much time outside or eat at neighbours and are scolded for behaving like 'a child from another family (*ailiin hüühed*)' (see Chapter 6 & 7). By being continuously asked whether they miss their home, adults encourage and insinuate that children long for their family. This teasing interaction thus operates as a mechanism by which adults ensure that children's mobility does not result in them developing a form of anomic 'autonomy without attachment' or in developing bonds of filiation to others. Instead, by repeatedly reminding children that 'they should miss their home but deny it', this teasing interaction makes separation an experience which reinforces children's connection to their home while also encouraging that they gain emotional autonomy.

Throughout childhood, the visits that children pay to their relatives during the school holidays and sometimes at weekends create special relationships, which often remain emotionally and morally binding throughout life. In certain cases, the regular visits during school holidays become a form of quasi-adoption. Tuyaa's father Dorj had a son Tsengel from a previous marriage. After getting married, Tsengel lost most of his herd and could hardly feed his three sons and two daughters. Since Tsengel's second son, Bat, was five years old, he spent all his school holidays at his grandfather's home where his contribution to pastoral work came to be relied on. Besides relieving Tsengel's household of the burden of an extra mouth to feed, Dorj and Hand paid for Bat's boarding school fees and bought him clothes, school equipment and uniform. Bilgüün, whose parents often shared her grandfather's camp, grew up accustomed to Bat's presence. When I asked her who the members of her family were, she included Bat as 'one of our people

(*manai hün*)'.⁵³ No matter how he felt towards his grandparents and his cousins, Bat kept referring to the place where his parents' established their camps as his home/homeland (*nutag*).

Very much like women who have to move out of their family when they marry but never change their name, children learn to establish relations outside their family and to move within their kin network but they do not lose the sense of attachment to their home. As we saw with the sleep-with-me routine, developing autonomy from one's mother and family is not only a gain in personal autonomy but opens the possibility for children to form relations with people outside of their family. During this holiday, Batuhan partly compensated for his longing for his home and parents by seeking emotional comfort from his grandmother and to a lesser extent from his aunts. When he was tired or upset, Batuhan was first invited and then spontaneously took refuge on his grandmother's lap and just as he would do with his mother, felt comfort in caressing her breasts. This progressive process through which Batuhan developed intimacy with his grandmother was all the more meaningful that Batuhan was in fact acutely sensitive to the meaning of intimacy and knew to manage his carefully. Throughout the summer he refused to sleep with anyone but his brother, which his grandparents both regretted for their own sake but regarded keenly as showing the strong relation he had with Otgono.

In Chapter 3, I described the strong emotional and physical bond which exists between children and their mothers during infancy. Empson (2011:153) suggests that the umbilical bond (*hüin holboo*) which binds children to their mother (and sibling) is too strong to be sustained in its initial state. Separation is thus a productive way through which children learn to detach themselves from their mother while mothers maintain the connection to their children through the technique of metonymic containment (*ibid*). Empson shows that a same logic underpins the burial of the placenta of children near to their home and the keeping of the extremity of children's umbilical cords and a tuft of their first hair protected within the home chest. Umbilical cords and tufts of hair are all parts which were once attached to children. Empson demonstrates that the modality of 'attachment through separation', allows mothers to relate to children in their absence (2011:

⁵³Like the term *ah düü*, *manai hün* allows to extend kinship beyond blood relations.

147-55). She further argues that the mode of connection which exists between a children and their mother extends to their home and homeland (*nutag*) through the burial of the placenta which creates a life-long physical link between a person and her homeland (2011:152). In southern Mongolia, most women gave birth in hospitals and did not follow the traditional practice of burying their child's placenta in the vicinity of their home. Nonetheless, like elsewhere in Mongolia, people in the Dundgobi experience attachment to one's homeland as a relation which defined them as individual person, while also making them typically Mongolian.

Longing for one's home and family is in fact a prevalent emotion which not only attaches people to their natal family and homeland but is a defining characteristic of being Mongolian to the extent that it is an emotion to which all people relate intimately. In 2008-2009, one of the most popular songs on TV and radio was a ballad by Javhan called "My mother's tea (*Eejin chantsan tsai*)". The song narrates the nostalgic longing of a man for his mother and his homeland which he evokes by praising the taste of his mother's milk tea. The song was an addition to the most popular theme of the Mongolian song repertoire, namely the longing for one's homeland, home and mother (Legrain *personal communication*). Most people knew at least part if not all of the lyrics. At ceremonial gatherings, as people sing and drink together, the song brought people to tears. By joining in singing a song and sometimes weeping, emotional displays were not expressed personally but mediated through a public medium. In this sense, songs very much like etiquette allow Mongolians to communicate and share feelings without expressing them as personal sentiments.

Learning to keep 'nice feelings' upon separation

In this last section, I extend my analysis to the experience of separation through death which will bring into perspective the importance of children learning to control their feelings, in order to relate to others without undergoing the dangers that close relatedness poses to oneself. In Chapter 4, I showed that the predicament of emotional control is an instrument in the production of a sociality whereby the emphasis is not on the actors' personal feelings but on the

management of public display according to the position of oneself *vis-à-vis* others. This concern with the impact of one's actions on others also needs to be understood in the context of the state of strong interconnectedness which exists between people through the circulation of fortune (*buyan hishig*) as revealed when mourning a close relative. At time of death, the importance of controlling not only the expression but also the very existence of sadness and longing for the person proves that emotions are not only personally but also socially potent.

When Bilgüün's mother announced to her that her grandmother, who had been sick, had passed away, Bilgüün started crying. Her mother dried her eyes and told her that she should not cry or her grandmother would not become a burhan (divinity). In the following days, seven-year-old Bilgüün shared with me how sad she was, explaining to me that her dear grandma had gone to the sky (tenger ruu yavsan) and would not come back. I asked Bilgüün why it was bad to cry even if she was sad, she replied, "How to say. If you don't cry, if you make people happy with your feelings (setgeliig ni bayarluulaad), people go to the sky happy (goe az jarlgaltai Tenger ruu yavna). If you cry, they go with bad feelings (Uilah yum bol muu segeltei yavna). I sent my grandma to the Sky with nice feelings (Bi emeegee goyo setgeltei yavuulsan)."

As explained by Bilgüün, in the case of mourning it is not only the display of emotions but the actual control of one's emotions which is at stake, as they bear on the destiny of the deceased person's soul (*süns*). A year later, Erdene's grandfather passed away. For three days after the funeral of Erdene's grandfather, his relatives gathered daily to recite prayers together. I asked Erdene whether I could join the prayers and he welcomed my offer as he said it would help 'make virtue' (*buyan hii-*) for his grandfather's soul (*süns*). He further explained that reading prayers helped his grandfather's soul (*süns*) to have a good rebirth but also helped him feeling less sad which in turn eased the separation of his grandfather's soul (*süns*) and its quick rebirth.

The various ritualized actions operated after the death of kin aim to help and guarantee the separation of the deceased person's soul (*süns*) from her body (Delaplace 2009a:197-205). This separation is important both for the dead person

to find a good reincarnation and for the living not to be polluted or follow their beloved kin in death. Not only the feelings of the living impact the next life of the deceased person, but also the feelings of the deceased person can continue affecting the livings if separation is not fully consumed. For instance, after the death of one of her brothers-in-law, Tögöo went through a long period of illness. She later explained to me that it was because her brother-in-law loved her so much that after he died he kept being attached to her, and polluted her (*buzarlsan*).

Emotional control is in this context a technique which helps the separation of people's souls interconnected through love (*hair*). It helps free the soul (*süns*) of the deceased person for its next rebirth while allowing his kin to keep living in peace (*taivan*). Delaplace (2009a:200-5) further argues that the taboos surrounding the evocation of dead people, such as not saying their name, aim to avoid relating to the deceased person as dead. It is by contrast unproblematic to evoke memories of the living person or keep pictures of them displayed at home. In other words, memories are kept and can be shared, but people avoid expressing their sadness in a personal manner, creating distress for themselves and others, including the deceased person. When people fail to contain their sadness, like the herder described by Delaplace (2009b:523-7) who could not accept the death of his younger brother, their emotional display is met with uneasiness and answered with silence, as if accepting that the most personal emotions cannot be shared or eased or changed, only muted or contained. In a context where the display of sadness impacts upon the post-mortem existence of one's relatives, learning to withstand separation is thus not only a personal concern but also a moral duty to the living and dead alike.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that during the period of transition when children lose their status of kings, their experience of gaining autonomy is marked by contradictory messages from adults. On the one hand, adults' routinized genealogical questions invite children to define their personal identity in terms of their affiliation to their parents. On the other hand, teasing interactions with adults challenge children to demonstrate autonomy from their mothers while inviting

them to develop intimate relations outside of their families. The dilemma faced by young children who wish to be close to their mothers but also increasingly aware of the need to behave like 'older children' is further brought to the fore during the experience of separation from home.

During their visits to relatives, adults repeatedly ask children whether they miss their home. This question stems from the adults' real concern for the distress experienced by children when they are separated from their family. Paradoxically though, by repeatedly asking children whether they miss their home, adults make longing for home a prevalent aspect of children's experience of separation and thus teach them to miss home. Turned into a teasing interaction, this question challenges children to affirm that they do not miss their home. This has two effects. First, it turns the experience of separation into an apprenticeship in emotional control and helps children not to be affected by their feelings. Secondly, it encourages children's discovery of the possibility of disconnecting intimate feelings from public self-presentation. The crafting of a public self and the discovery of an intimate self are thus the two sides of a same process by which children learn to craft the expression of their emotions according to social expectations. Moreover we further saw that by constantly bringing to mind children's affiliation to their home, adults draw children's attention to the fact that they 'should not feel home' anywhere but at home. Doing so, the experience of separation is turned into an experience of secret connection with their family. This is to say that children's sense of individuality is produced and shaped in relation to their intimate attachment to their home. This routinized interaction thus operates as an interactional mechanism that brings out and resolves the tension between the necessity that children become autonomous and extend their relations out of their family while maintaining their connection to their family.

By looking at how children are invited to grow out of the bond of dependency to their mother and family, this chapter shows that the way children are challenged to develop autonomy through separation is a process which makes them competent at the *ah düü* mode of relating in three aspects: firstly, by reinforcing their competence in emotional control; secondly, by making personal feelings a private matter which children learn not to display (by doing so they protect

themselves from strong emotions but also learn not to attract attention to themselves but to manipulate other people's impression of them so as to behave according to social expectations); and thirdly, by teaching them to maintain their relationship with their mother and family at a distance and to form relationships with others. In fact, in a context of high mobility and economic interdependency, autonomy is not only an essential individual skill which allows one to protect oneself from the distress of separation, but is also primordial as a relational competence. Learning to control and keep emotions secret in fact allows children to become useful members of their family group, by making them capable of moving seasonally between the village and the countryside to help with herding activities (see Chapter 7) and to go to school (see Chapter 8) without imposing the burden of personal distress on their host family.

Chapter 6. Learning to share without being generous

Mönkö, with his long blonde hair and chubby cheeks, was a very self-confident two-year-old who had become a frequent visitor to his neighbours' households. At first, he would be accompanied by his elder sister. She helped him walk over the uneven ground, kept him away from the dog that guards each compound and helped him open doors and step over thresholds. Once the dogs became familiar with Mönkö and ceased to growl at him when he approached with his sister, Mönkö started to come to our yurt on his own. At two, he spoke a lot better than most children of his age and adults loved asking him questions, teasing him playfully and were amused by his immature pronunciation and cute answers. Tuyaa and Erdene enjoyed his visits and had no problem with the fact that they were clearly motivated by his desire to get treats. The following vignette presents such a visit.

After having stepped acrobatically over the 20 cm high wooden threshold, Mönkö gazed through the yurt and walked towards the biscuit bowl placed on the kitchen shelf. Tuyaa who was sitting in front of the stove, preparing some rice-tea (budaatai tsai), said to him with a large smile, "Eh, how are you? Come to me and receive a kiss (Hööye, sain uu? Naash ir ünsye)!" Mönkö, ignoring the request, pointed at the biscuit bowl and ordered, "Give it to me (Nadad ög)!" Erdene, Tuyaa, Bilgüün, Otgono and I turned our attention to the unfolding scene, all expecting some amusing interaction. Batuhan however, kept playing with a figurine. Tuyaa inviting Mönkö to come to her with her arms open towards him repeated, "Come get a kiss (Ünsye)!" Mönkö complied, but just after receiving the kiss, he reiterated his order, "Give me a sweet (Nadad chiher ög)!" Tuyaa laughed and took the ceremonial bowl from the cupboard.

In preparation, Mönkö had put his little hands together, palms up, but as Tuyaa handed him a dry homemade biscuit, he decided to pull the bowl down

to look for a better option. He found a sweet that had slipped below the biscuits. Tuyaa told him, "Take it, take it, this will be the only one though or you'll catch a cough!" Mönkö took the sweet, threw the wrapping paper in front of the stove and turned to play with Otgono while Batuhan approached his mother and was given a sweet too.

After he had played a little with Otgono, Mönkö enacted the same scenario, coming close to Tuyaa and asking, "Give me a sweet (Nadad chiher ög)." Tuyaa smiled, opened the locked chest to get a sweet for Mönkö asking him to prepare his hands, "Take it nicely (Goyo avaarai)," she said and gave it to him under the condition that it was the last one. After receiving this sweet, Mönkö decided to leave. Half an hour later, Mönkö was seen to cross our yurt threshold again, directly going toward Tuyaa. He was welcomed with general hilarity and given one last sweet.



Figure 19: A boy crossing the threshold of his home

In this chapter, I examine the processes through which children discover that they can no longer obtain what they want upon demand and learn to take their place in the domestic economy of sharing within which they have both asymmetrical prerogatives and asymmetrical obligations. Sharing practices have been shown to be cross-culturally significant in teaching children to form relations with others according to local moral values (e.g. Ahn 2011; Corsaro 2003:36-65; Mosier & Rogoff 2002; Morton 1996:80-9; Rabain 1979:61-77; Schieffelin 1990:136-82). I investigate how Mongolian children learn to receive, to share and to give and how by doing so they are introduced to different regimes of ownership, learn their obligations as seniors and develop kin relationships.

Learning to receive

At first, infants and young children obtain things either by adults anticipating their requests, by asking as we saw above or by displaying upset feelings. As children grow older, this form of egoistic behaviour lose its efficacy and adults progressively request that children control their desires and learn that they will be given their share in time. As we saw in Chapter 4, children's apprenticeship in correct behaviour (*sain züil*) and etiquette (*yos*) is in part the product of children's self-initiated observation and imitation and also in part encouraged by adults' and older children's direct teaching. Learning to receive and to give is one of the basic 'body techniques' (Mauss 1936) used in interacting with others. When receiving an object, hands should be joined and presented palms up. When giving an object, it should be held from below with two hands or held with the right hand using the left hand to support the right elbow.

"Take it nicely (Goyo avaarai)"

When Batuhan, still a toddler, showed that he wanted a biscuit, a piece of meat or an object, Tuyaa sat next to him and made the gesture of giving it to him saying 'take' (*mai*), and waited, until he put his hands properly, to give him the treat. She sometimes took his two little hands and gently positioned them correctly. The word *mai* was the first word Batuhan learned to pronounce. He first used it not to say 'take' but to ask for something while putting his hands together. Adults

responded to this gesture by offering him what he was asking and sometimes added a complimentary comment such as “What a nice child (*sain hūūhed*)!” In teaching children how to receive, Mongolians place the emphasis on adopting the correct body technique; ideally the interaction can occur without a word being uttered. Respect is shown by holding one’s body properly and taking things nicely but there is no need to thank the person who gives. Following *yos*, gratitude is in fact only expressed verbally when people receive something without expecting it (Humphrey 1984:46).

It is accepted that young children ask for treats. As they grow older, adults expect children to learn that they will be given a share of whatever is consumed in their presence and stop directly requesting treats from them. A comparison with Papua Kaluli children’s experience as described by Schieffelin (1990:136-71) will help me bring out the specificity of Mongolian sharing practices. Relationships among Kaluli follow egalitarian values whereby a person should not ‘compel one another to act’ but should establish ‘sociable relationships in which they can expect or negotiate daily cooperation and reciprocity’ (1990:137). In this context, giving and refusing is the object of daily negotiations in which verbal interactions play an important role. To receive a treat Kaluli children learn to ask so as to make the person from whom something is asked ‘feel sorry’ and ‘moved to give’ (1990:152). Asking is seen as an acknowledgment that one engages in an exchange relationship whereby a return can later be asked. Taking or being given without having asked first is considered a denial of the opportunity to give (*ibid.*) In Mongolia by contrast, children do not need to learn to elicit pity, nor do they enter in a reciprocal relations with adults giving them sweets or food. Rather sharing consumable goods is an obligation, and being given a share a prerogative, not a favour. Let me further explain the assumptions that underpin the sharing of food and sweets in Mongolia.

At home, meals are not necessarily eaten together but a separate share is always kept for each member of the household. Whether Erdene was absent or present, Tuyaa filled his personal large silver bowl first. This way, Erdene consumed the ‘upper part’ (*deej*) of the tea and meals which is the fattest and also the most

honorific part.⁵⁴ Children were free to pick up snacks from the biscuit bowl throughout the day and were not forced to eat their meal. However, whether children were hungry or not, after having served Erdene (and the bowls of visitors if present), Tuyaa always filled a bowl for each one of us. Though we might have eaten at different times, the daily consumption of food prepared at home was considered an important aspect of our affiliation to home. On weekends, if, after many visits to neighbouring households, Otgono did not eat the meal that Tuyaa had kept for him, irritated she reproached him to be a child from another family (*ailiin hūūhed*). Conversely, Erdene admitted that no other food but that prepared at home satisfied his appetite (*tsadsan*), while at times of disputes, he typically refused to eat family meals.

Be it a meal or be it sweets, it is inconceivable to consume something individually without sharing it with the people present at the time. The obligation to share is unconditional so that the only way to avoid sharing is to hide consumable goods. Upon hearing visitors approaching, a dish of meat might be for instance quickly covered and placed under the bed. Meals are however generally prepared in large quantities (left-overs being used for breakfast or as snacks). If visitors come while a meal is being prepared or consumed, they are always offered a share to eat.⁵⁵

Receiving visitors is conducted according to a set protocol (see Humphrey 1987 & 2012:65-8; Ruhlmann 2011). In its minimal form, *yos* commands that visitors should be given tea and/or offered a plate of ‘white food’, what I call ‘ceremonial plate’, usually composed of biscuits or dried diary curd possibly topped-up with sugar cubes, sweets (*chiher*) or dried cream (*öröm*). Given the potential danger that visitors bring within the home, the formalised sets of action through which visitors are hosted ‘create an appropriate tone’ which allows the household to relate to visitors while keeping them at a ‘positive distance’ (Humphrey 2012:71); on the other hand, treating visitors well represents a good action through which a household perform ‘good deed (*buyany beleg*)’ and gain merits (High 2008:106) and contributes to a broader set of good practices which maintain the household’s fortune (*hishig*) (Empson 2011:94-100). In fact, not meeting expectations of

⁵⁴ See Ruhlmann (2006:151-186) on the symbolic qualification of food and its ritualised consumption. See Ruhlmann & Gardelle (2013) on the symbolic qualification of milk in particular.

⁵⁵ It might happen that the meal is just enough for the members of the family in which case the hostess is likely to sacrifice her own share for the visitors or to make a new dish for them.

generosity is sanctioned by gossip (*hel am*) which potentially endangers the family well-being and wealth (High 2008:107-10). We will later see how the technique used to harness fortune by which part is given or kept to preserve the whole (Empson 2012) resonate with sharing practices whereby children learn that giving away part of their loot is the only tactic that allow them to keep a portion for themselves and ensure that they themselves will benefit from future distributions.



Figure 20: A young girl offering New Year gifts on behalf of her family

Giving a cup of tea and offering the ceremonial plate to visitors is not conceived as an act of generosity but represents an obligation which is highly formalised through *yos*. In the village, compounds are clustered into adjacent quarters and not a single day goes by without neighbours passing by. With regular visitors, formalities are reduced to a minimum. The duty however remains for the host to offer all visitors something to drink and/or eat and for the visitor to consume what they are offered. When visitors were present, Tuyaa served men and then women in seniority order and ended with children.

Once children become capable of walking while holding something in their hands, mothers ask toddlers to help them distribute treats to visitors and to family members. When Tuyaa had presents to distribute to guests or treats to share at home, she often called Batuhan. As soon as he realized that a distribution was taking place, Batuhan happily abandoned whatever he was doing. Tuyaa designated the person to whom he should bring the treat by using people's names and seniority terms in accordance to Batuhan's position, for instance by telling him, 'Bring it to your older sister Undra (*Undra egee avaad ög*)'. Routines of distribution not only familiarise children with visitors and their names but also represents an occasion when children are taught the appropriate usage of kinship terms according to seniority. Moreover it exposes children to the two important rules of etiquette explained earlier: first, visitors ought to be hosted by offering them something to consume - a cup of tea and/or some biscuits, dried dairies or sweets - and second, nothing can be consumed in the presence of others without being shared.

When they are just among themselves, children do not necessarily use the ritualised way to receive and give but receive and give things casually only using one of their hands unless they make use of their knowledge of proper behaviours to enforce their status as older children. As I already mentioned in Chapter 4, children love picking on each other's misbehaviours and, by doing so, assert their authority. Bilgüün, for example, was very keen on insisting that Batuhan adopt good manners. When giving a sweet or a treat to Batuhan, she usually insisted with an exaggeratedly high pitch voice, "My little brother, take it properly (*Minii düü, goyo avaarai*)."

Teaching younger ones proper rules of behaviour allows older children to assert their status by demonstrating their knowledge while emphatically using the idiom of relative seniority through the address terms older brother/sister (*ah, egch*), younger sibling (*düü*). The very process through which children learn to receive is thus inscribed within, and is productive of, hierarchical relations.

The success of sweets

Besides being used in social visits, sweets have become an object of everyday consumption which is eaten according to the same pattern as other consumable goods: they need to be shared. In contrast with other consumable goods however, in everyday contexts and in the absence of visitors, sweets are seen to be a good that is essentially reserved to children. In fact, hardly a single day passed without children obtaining a sweet from adults or from other children.

Children's everyday consumption of sweets is an extremely recent phenomenon and so are the practices of children visiting households to obtain sweets in the village. The contemporary consumption of sweets has to be contextualised in comparison with earlier periods when not only sweets were a rare delicacies but sugar itself was hardly used. Otgono's grandfather, for example, explained to me how, as a child, the only time he ate sweetened (as opposed to plain) home-made biscuits was during the New Year ceremonies when people prepared special ceremonial, sized biscuits (*heviin boov*) to give to children who came to visit them with their parents. Adults all remember that when they were children sweets were rare (*hovor*) and precious (*nandin*) goods, which were imported from Russia and were especially tasty. Otgono's great-aunt could list nine different kinds of sweets of which she remembered the fixed price per kg which became the 'number' by which the sweets were commonly designated, the illustration figuring on the wrapping paper and the taste of each one. She joyfully recalled sweet number four, a tubular sweet (*goltoi chiher*) on which paper figured a golden knucklebone (*altan shagai*) to be her favourite. Adults of Otgono's parents' and grandparents' generation think little of today's sweets, which are available in large quantities and are mostly imported from China. Although eaten in large quantities, Chinese sweets are thought to have a bad taste (*muu amttai*) and are believed to be bad for one's health (*biye'nd muu*).⁵⁶

Nowadays, all grocery shops offer a selection of sweets (*chiher* or *chiher jims*, literally sweet fruit) from hard sweets (*hatuu chiher*) individually wrapped in

⁵⁶ People contrast the quality of imported Russian (*Oros*) goods that are reputedly of good quality with imported Chinese (*Hiatad* or pejoratively *Hoja*) goods. This fits with generally positive attitude towards Russians and Russia still seen by the older generations as a protective 'big brother' (*ah*) against a strong racism (see Sneath 2003) and defensive attitude against Chinese and China (see Delaplace 2010).

paper, to lollipops (*modtoi chiher*, literally sweet with a wooden stick), chocolate bars (*shokolad*), chewing-gums (*bohi*), sweets bought in bags, chocolate and sweet boxes and sometimes soft sweets (*zöölön chiher*) and dried raisins (*üzem*). Around the New Year celebrations in February and for children's day on the first of June, the selection of toys, sweets, biscuits and juice available in local shops increases and occupies most of the space on groceries' shelves. The price of food products and manufactured products rose by 20-30% in the course of 2008. In the second year of my fieldwork, people bought sweets in smaller quantities and increasingly turned to the hard and cheapest kind whose provenance shopkeepers preferred not to comment on (meaning that they were imported from China).



Figure 21: The sweet pleasures of daily sociality

In the village and in the countryside, the main diet is composed of boiled flour biscuits, flour, rice, meat, fat and dairy products. New products such as vegetables, fruits, canned fish, eggs, kimchee or seaweeds are increasingly available in local groceries that are mainly used as gifts or as statement of modernity when hosting guests but most people prefer traditional dishes to which they might add a few

vegetables (mostly potatoes and onions, sometimes cabbage and carrots).⁵⁷ Apart from the plain home-made biscuits (*boov*), which are sometimes slightly sweetened, the everyday diet does not include any sweet items. A context where sugar and sweets were historically rare and sweet products are still absent from the regular diet possibly favours the fondness of people for eating sweets. The success of sweets is also explained by the fact that they can be kept for a long time, easily stored or hidden. Moreover, because they exist in different kinds and are small items that can be given in a smaller or larger quantity, sweets can conveniently be used as a substitute to dried dairy products and added to the ceremonial plate or the gifts offered to guests. Lastly, as we saw in Chapter 3, children love sweets which thus represent an affordable way to make them happy.

Being given and receiving sweets is a way through which people mark their attention and affection. Everyone likes sweets. I had to learn to like them too as it soon became clear that not eating sweets not only seemed strange but also ostracised me from daily sociability at home and on visits. Men consume sweets, though few love them the way most women and all children crave for them.⁵⁸ Asking a friend whether she thought it would be shameful for a man to admit to loving sweets, she said that she did not think so. She added that men were often not as fond of sweets as women are but that, unlike women, they have other consumable goods to exchange such as alcohol, tobacco and cigarettes. While women can admit loving sweets, they are expected to eat them with moderation and if they fail to do so they often adopt a self-deprecating attitude admitting, “I like sweets, I am greedy (*Bi chihrend durtai, bi hovdog*)!” By contrast, there is no moral judgement on children liking sweets although adults, while keen on giving sweets to children, also kept repeating them not to eat too many, as illustrated in the introductory vignette.

⁵⁷ Adding vegetables is a recent phenomenon and people from older generations are often not so keen on them. I once made a cabbage dish and offered some to grandma, she refused to eat any, laughing at the fact it was a ‘goat meal’ (*yamanii hool*).

⁵⁸ While children have preferences for such or such sweet, or dislike a specific one, I did not know a single child who did not like sweets.

Children's sweet visits

At age six, Otgono regularly visited households that were not in the close vicinity of our compound, in particular his great-uncle's and great-grandfather's who were living in a large compound in the northern part of the village a good ten minutes' walk from ours. It was a sunny Sunday afternoon and Otgono had agreed to wait for me to pay a visit to his great-uncle. Leaving together from home, we decided to first climb the gravelly sacred hill. Reaching the top, after having turned three times around the cairn (ovoo) surmounting it and thrown three stones on top of it as instructed by Otgono, we stopped and looked at the village. Otgono tested my knowledge of the village asking me where our house was. I then asked him to point and name as many households as he could. He knew most of the households around his compounds and the ones between his great-uncle and his own compound. Asking him which ones he preferred to visit, he pointed at the big compound of his father's uncle. Asking why he liked going there, he replied that he always obtained sweets (chiher avdag) from his aunt and his great-grandmother. When I asked him why they gave him candies, he replied, "Because I am a child (bi hüühed)." Becoming impatient with my questions, he told me we should go and started to run down the hill.

Adults love receiving the visits of children. In the village and in the countryside, old people who live on their own especially miss the presence of children and offer them sweets to make them happy but also as a way to encourage them to visit them again. Through visiting, children not only gain autonomy (see Chapter 7), but they also develop their own network of personal relationships. Over the summer of 2008, Otgono's great-aunt and a neighbour had joined Otgono's grandfather's camp, while two of his sons had established their camp within walking distance, so as to group herds and to share work (see Chapter 7). The camp was very lively with half a dozen of children below the age of ten and a few in their early teens. West of Dorj's yurt was the yurt of his aunt, Ajaa, and her daughter, Badma, who was then in her sixties.

Living together with her mother of whom she took care, Badma was only occasionally visited by her husband, children and grandchild who lived in

Ulaanbaatar. Ajaa and Badma enjoyed the liveliness that children brought to their home. Each morning children living on the camp were seen one after another to pay a visit to Ajaa's yurt where they knew that Badma would give them a treat. During the day, children passed by, checking if other children were there and often stopped for a short time. It was generally not long before Badma offered them something to consume: a bowl of tea, some food or a sweet. That summer when I asked Bilgüün, Otgono, Ochir, Batuhan, Uyanga and Byamba (two neighbouring girls sharing our camp), who their grandparents were, all of them cited Badma as one of their grandmothers (*emee*). In the same way, as illustrated in the above vignette, in the village, Otgono's bond with his great-grandmother and his uncle's family living in the northern part of the village was directly linked to the fact they rewarded his visits with sweets and thus Otgono took the initiative to visit them every weekend and also sometimes after school.

Given the abundance of sweets circulating daily and the ethic of unconditional sharing of consumable goods, children do not so much see being given sweets as a favour but rather as one of their prerogatives. In fact, the circulation of sweets is one of the social activities where older children keep their prerogatives of 'kings' which they actively exert over adults. Children knew that they could legitimately request sweets from adults if they could find clues that adults or children had eaten some. This motivated children to be extremely attentive to any information they could gather about current or past consumption of treats.⁵⁹ Adults were themselves careful to hide evidence of their own consumption as they knew that children would legitimately ask for some if they discovered that they had eaten sweets without keeping any for them.

Once, Bilgüün came back from herding the baby goats on the southern pastures; on entering her grandparent's yurt, in front of the stove she noticed a special wrapping paper from a sweet she did not recognise. She immediately enquired, "What kind of sweet is this? Who has eaten it?" Hand playfully lied, "I don't know" before heading to her chest and take out some manufactured biscuits that she gave to Bilgüün. Alternatively, when a distribution was occurring in one of the yurts, the

⁵⁹ This plays into the development of children's acute observational skills. I will come back to this point in Chapter 7.

child who had benefited from it often told others that they could get sweets, thus avoiding having to share their own.

As children grow older, adults stop indulging their desires unconditionally and begin to scold them when they misbehave. Receiving sweets from adults is however one of the prerogatives that children keep from their younger age. The personal pleasure in making a child happy goes together with moral satisfaction. As seen in Chapter 3, making children happy is also seen as a way to be virtuous and gain merits (*buyan*). It would however be misleading to interpret adults' gift within a system of exchange whereby gifts of sweets are motivated and counter-balanced by the merit they receive.

Anthropologists have long critiqued the inadequacy of interpreting transfer between people according to the culturally specific model of transactional exchange among equal individuals (Dumont 1966:91-121 & 1983:11-32) or according to the 'premiss of balance' (Parry 1986:454). In rural southern Mongolia, transfers of sweets between adults and children are asymmetrical, alike their relations. As Otgono told me on top of the sacred hill, children receive sweets because they are children. Gifts of sweets have no performative power in creating an obligation of return because they express the prerogatives of children to receive and adults' fondness for children. Moreover, because children are seen as powerless and pure (*aruin*) and in no position to reciprocate, giving them sweets creates merits. In this respect, sweets are strictly alienable and create no obligation for children towards adults.

While adults' gift of sweets to children is a 'type of gift' that enacts the prerogatives of children but creates no obligation, it does not mean that these gifts have no performative effect on personal relations. In fact, for children who unlike adults do not hold a theory of kinship based in inherited shared substance (see Chapter 2), paying visits and receiving sweets produce kinship. Bilgüün for example assumed that Otgono and Batuhan's great-grandmother whom she visited with them and who gave them all sweets and gifts was also her relative until her uncle and father laughed at her for thinking so. We also saw how children came to consider that Badma was one of their grandmothers as a result of keeping visiting her and being

given sweets. Children extend their performative conception of kinship to mutual help; for example, I once asked Otgono, “Is Bat-ah your relative (*Batah chinii ah düü io*)?” “Yes” he replied. I further enquired, “Why?” Otgono paused before answering, “He is my *ah düü* because he cares for my herd (*tiim uchiraas malaa mallaj baina*).” Children’s view that gifts and mutual help define kin relationships is congruent with psychologist Keil’s finding (1987, see also Keil & Batterman 1984) that conceptual development is marked by a shift from understanding concepts through characteristic features to building an abstract definition. This conceptual shift from ‘factual knowledge’ to ‘integrated knowledge’ is further evidenced by Astuti (2001) and Toren (1990:196-216).

In her study of how Fijian children make sense of hierarchy, Toren shows that children’s conceptions of hierarchical statuses change from understanding status to be a result of the position of people in relation to the structuring above/below axis to developing an ‘abstract scheme’ where spatial positions becomes the result rather than a defining parameter of status (1990:219). In the same manner, Mongolian children do not have an ‘abstract scheme’ of who is or who is not a kin. They conceive of kin (*ah düü*) to be the people who ‘act as kin’, that is the people with whom they entertain familiar relationships through gifts, regular visits and mutual help. By motivating children’s visits and supporting the development of familiarity relationships, sweets thus transform the relationships between children and adults who they visit regularly. In children’s view, they create kinship.

Learning to share

At three, Batuhan was not required to share his own treats but knew that he would obtain a share from others upon request. Tuyaa saw it as a good thing that Batuhan shared his treats parsimoniously – by contrast to Otgono who she thought was too generous (*ögöömör*). “Batuhan is not really stingy (*haramch*)”, she once told me, “but he has not yet learned to share (*huvaaj suraagüi*)”. Like Tuyaa, other parents saw it as normal that young children do not spontaneously give and therefore need to learn to share.

The virtuous stinginess of young children

When in some rare occasions, a young child, of his own volition, gives a small thing - one of her sweets, a drawing or a special stone - to an adult, the adult thinks of this small token as having a special moral quality, as being a blessing and in turns blesses the child verbally. When given something by a young child, adults and older children carefully receive the gift with their two hands and bring the given object to their front uttering with a high pitch voice, "Become tall (*Ödii öndör*)!" It is a way to thank the child and to make her proud of giving things. The complete sentence, occasionally uttered by elder men is, "Child of your elder, take my age and become tall (*ödii öndör bolooroi, övöögiihöö nasiig avaarai*)!" The special blessing given to young children makes their gift stand out and acts as a reward for giving.

People further explained to me that because it is rare to receive something from young children, their gifts are especially appreciated (see also Empson 2011:73-4). A well-known expression says, "The gifts (*hishig*) of younger children cannot be found (*Düügiin hishig olddoggüi*)."*Hishig* is generally used as a synonymous of *buyan* (fortune) or together with it as a compound word, *buyan hishig*. When they explained to me the above expression, people told me that *hishig* was a present (*beleg*), a little thing that children give such as a piece of sweet that they share. As explained in Chapter 3, fortune (*hishig*) is an 'abstract quality' which imbues and circulates between humans, objects and spiritual agents (Empson 2011:71). It cannot be precisely localised but efforts can be made to harness and contain it. For example, a herder might keep a few hairs of the cow he is selling so as not to let the prosperity go away with this cattle (*ibid*). Conversely, qualities of prosperity can be extended by contact with a blessed or fortunate object. For instance, pouring some blessed incense to a bag of non-blessed incense makes the entire bag of incense become blessed. Little gifts (*hishig*) from older people and young children are especially valuable because they are imbued with the special moral qualities of children and elders: the first being especially pure (*genen tsailgan*) and innocent (*tsever aruin*) because they are so young, the second being highly respected

(*hündelsen*) given their old age (*öndör nastai*) equated with experience and thus wisdom (*erdemtei*).⁶⁰

“Give sweets to your düü”

When giving sweets or treats to children, adults either distribute sweets in equal share among them (often making the youngest child distribute the treats), or give all of them to one child and order her to ‘share and eat (*huvaaj id*)’. When they distribute a few sweets to each child at once, adults warn children, “Only eat one (*Gantsiig l id*) or you will get a cold (*ugüi bol haniad hürne*)”. I initially thought that adults were using a white lie to convince them not to eat sweets. Adults however assured me that eating sweets truly made the cough of children worse and also had many other bad consequences for health (among others, giving cavities, being bad for one’s stomach, giving skin problems to the babies of pregnant women, etc.).

Beyond the moral obligation to share, given that sweets are actually perceived to be detrimental to health, sharing is also a way to protect children from over-consumption. While children were constantly told that they should not eat too many sweets, adults hardly ever exerted direct control over their consumption. But when children caught a cold or had a runny nose as frequently happened during winter, adults reminded them that they were to blame for having eaten too many sweets. Sweets thus represent a means through which children are taught that they should learn to control their cravings and that keeping themselves well is increasingly considered their own responsibility. It is also a means through which children are introduced to their obligations as *ah* and *egch*.

As we saw, obtaining sweets is a prerogative that all children exert over adults. Among children, sharing sweets is inscribed within asymmetrical status, whereby younger children can typically exert the prerogatives of ‘king’ over their *ah* and *egch*. Once, Bilgüün and her younger brother, Ochir, had received the same share of treats; Ochir had eaten them all at once and thereafter requested his sister to share

⁶⁰ The parallel between the status of children and elders also extends to the prerogative of receiving sweets and gifts and to their ‘natural stinginess’. As elders lose mobility, their field of action within their family is often reduced to praying and to managing the redistribution of the sweets that they receive from visitors.

her sweets with him. Bilgüün refused, saying that he had already eaten his own. Their father, who overheard the conversation, told her gently, “Never mind, give some sweets to your younger brother (*Zügeer, düüdee chiher og*)”, which Bilgüün did without further protest. Besides the fact that Ochir was younger, the fact of being Bilgüün’s younger brother reinforced her duty to share with him irrespective of the fact that he had received the same share as her.

Sharing sweets is used by parents as a medium to teach children the importance of solidarity among siblings. Initially, older children learn that they should concede to their younger siblings even more so than with other younger children. As they grow older, children are taught to see their older siblings as holding a special position in the economy of sharing. For instance, Otgono was the first person with whom adults started to ask Batuhan to share his treats. At the end of his day at the kindergarten, Batuhan received a large sweet. When Erdene picked up Batuhan from the kindergarten and saw him eating his sweets, he often insisted that he should save some of his sweet for his brother, “You should share everything with your brother, understood (*Ahtaigaa bugdiig ni huvaah yostoi, zaa yu*)?” but never suggested he should keep some for his cousin Bilgüün. Induced by adults’ supervision of children’s sharing practices, sweets become a medium through which children enact and express special bonds with adults and children. For instance, even when Bilgüün did not have the prospect of seeing her brother for weeks, she sometimes set aside a share of her treat and tried to keep it in her bag so as to bring it to him when she went back to the countryside.

Beyond the encouragements that young children receive in sharing and the direct pressure on older children to share with younger ones, there is another factor that plays in teaching children to share. In fact, trying to keep sweets is a highly risky, mostly unsuccessful strategy. Only mothers can hope to stock things in their locked chest without people helping themselves from their reserve. Even in this case, children soon learn the location of the keys and might take the opportunity of being left alone to have a little helping (see Chapter 7). If a child manages to keep a few sweets or to constitute a personal reserve, she will have a hard time finding a place to hide it. When Batuhan and Otgono made the effort to refrain from consuming all their treats, they publicly stated that they were placing their bags of



Figure 22: A boy looking for sweets

sweets behind the picture frames or asked their mother to keep their sweets in her chest so as not to eat them all at once. However, when they later retrieved their bags, they often found out that some of their sweets were missing and realised it was virtually impossible to prevent others from helping themselves from their reserve. As a result, children generally choose to distribute and consume all their treats immediately and so did adults. In a context where it is nearly impossible to store treats, where the opportunity to consume sweets on one's own is extremely rare, and where delayed consumption exposes oneself to the risk of having to share again, children inevitably learn to share – just as adults predict and expect.

Sharing sweets: obligation or exchange?

While young children can exert their prerogatives of 'kings' over their *ah* and *egch*, as they grow older, older children increasingly consider that they should also share, to in turn receive. When Batuhan had sweets, Bilgüün asked him with a lamenting voice, "Batuhan, little one of your big sister (*egeegiin düü*), give me a

little piece (*nadad jaahan ög*)!" As time went by, Otgono made it more difficult for his brother to get sweets from him, particularly when no adults (but me) were present. He reminded Batuhan that on a previous occasion he had refused to give him sweets. Nonetheless, as Batuhan showed signs that he might start crying, Otgono always ended up conceding to his request.

Adults tell children to share with all children present and to submit to younger children's extra requests. We have seen that older children comply with such demands in the presence of adults. Children however keep track of what they receive and give to others and, in the absence of adults, regulate the sharing of their treats according to expectations of delayed reciprocity. Many studies report a similar phenomenon whereby children know to adapt their interactions to adults' expectations but keep children accountable of their actions according to their own social goals and moral conceptions (e.g. Ahn 2011; Corsaro 2003; Corsaro & Rizzo 1988; Katriel 1987; Kyratzis 2004).

As mentioned earlier, over the summer of 2008, Otgono and Batuhan stayed with their grandparents. Otgono and Batuhan had received sweets from their father who had visited us briefly, and told Otgono to share them with others (*huvaaj id*). Otgono had gotten a bag of little jellies that children especially liked. Soon after his father left, Otgono opened the bag and gave one to Batuhan first, he gave one to Uyanga and her sister and told Batuhan to bring one to Bilgüün and one to Ochir, who he assumed were in the next yurt. When Myagmar, the neighbour's cousin who was Batuhan's age, came close to Otgono presenting his two hands joined silently, Otgono ignored him, picked one jelly cup for himself and placed the bag in the kitchen cupboard.

Coming back from herding, Süh saw the bag of jellies almost empty in the cupboard and asked Otgono, "Have you shared them (*Chi chiher jimsee huvaasan uu*)?" Otgono replied he had shared them (*Huvaasan*). Noticing that Myagmar was not cheering with the other children, Süh asked Otgono, "Did you give one to Myagmar?" Otgono replied confidently, "No, because the other day, Myagmar refused to share the sweets that he got at Batbold's hair cut ceremony." Süh, overtly amused by his nephew's answer, told Otgono to give the last remaining

sweet to Myagmar, "Never mind, give a sweet to your younger brother (*Züger, düüdee chiher ög*)!" Thanks to the intervention of an adult, Myagmar obtained a sweet without having himself shared his own. This interaction introduced Myagmar to children's 'own peer culture' of sharing (Corsaro & Rizzo 1988) and taught him that among children benefiting from others' favour is conditioned by reciprocity. It demonstrated to him that older children no longer considered that he could claim the benefit of being a young child and that he too, as a peer older child, had to share his loot, if he wanted to be part of later distributions.

In the kindergarten, children liked to bring little consumable items such as a lollipop, sweets, pieces of curd or more rarely a little toy. These treats were not submitted to the general obligation of sharing but children used them to reinforce and to produce relations with a selected number of children. In the classroom, relationships among children are pre-structured by relationships that children establish with other children prior to going to the kindergarten. Batuhan, for example, almost exclusively played with his cousin, Uyanga. As weeks passed, he progressively socialized with an increasing number of classmates but by the end of the year he still did not know the names of all his classmates. While adults use *naiz* to mean friend and *ah düü* to mean relatives, in Batuhan's classroom children used these terms interchangeably to refer to children with whom they had personal relationships.

Popular children tended to be those who had extended their circle of friends by allocating shares of their treats. Nandin, for example, a tall and self-confident four-year-old girl, sustained her popularity and ascendance over her peers by regularly bringing a lollipop or a piece of curd. As each child was sitting on their chair, waiting for the teacher (who often left her classroom unattended), Nandin would get a treat out of her pocket and consumed it ostentatiously before offering a small bite or a brief lick to a selected few. Often other children would come to her and ask for a share. Nandin decided who she would let have a share and who she would not with consistency and thus established a close relation with three children. When children who she regularly favoured brought treats, they often spontaneously offered some to her but if they failed to she claimed her share reminding them of her previous gifts.

Unlike the American middle-class children described by Corsaro (2003) and Ahn (2011), children in the Middle Gobi did not conceive of friendship as established on a moment to moment basis, rather they used the terms of friends (*naiz*) and relatives (*ah düü*) interchangeably to refer to the children with whom they had established enduring relationships through playing outside and within the kindergarten and through repeated exchanges of treats. By bringing their sweets to the kindergarten, children experience a different regime of ownership whereby they can claim sweets to be their own and strategically choose with whom they want to share them to maintain and to create relationships with others. As soon as children leave the kindergarten what they have brought or received individually, such as the big sweet they obtain from their teacher at the end of the day, becomes part of the family regime of sharing, as shown by the dialogue when Erdene told Batuhan that he should share his sweet with his brother. In actual fact, children mostly sustained sharing with classmates whom they knew from their neighbourhood and were already engaged with in sustained relations of delayed reciprocity.

At a first level, sharing among peers reinforces adults' teaching that children should share and introduce young children to the fact that their prerogatives over older children will soon vanish. At a second level, sharing among children teaches them that it is important to keep track of former exchanges so as to be in a position to engage in strategic sharing with other children and to benefit from a share at a later time. This points to an important difference between adults' and children's conceptions of sharing. Very much like among adults, the obligation is on the person 'who has', to share.⁶¹ Adults prescribe that sharing sweets among children be unconditional and not inscribed within the history of former distributions. In this mode of sharing, the emphasis is on honouring one's obligation to share at a given time without envisaging that sharing creates a right to receive. At home, under the supervision of adults, children learn their obligations to share with all children unconditionally, and to submit themselves to the extra requests from younger children. Among themselves however, they keep track of former

⁶¹ See High (2008:100-13) on asymmetrical obligations to give and receive among adults.

distributions, envisage sharing as a reciprocal activity and use delayed exchanges as a way to build enduring personal relationships.

Learning to own by giving

In 2009, the Eve (*bitüün*) of the Mongolian New Year⁶² was exceptional: Dorj's four children and their family had all gathered at their father's winter camp. New Year's Eve is usually spent at home. On the first day, people pay visits to their elders, their closest oldest relatives first, and then exchange visits with others ideally according to seniority order. That year, Dorj's mother was sick and fearing that it would be her last New Year, her grandchildren had made an extra effort to come early so that all her descendants would be gathered around her to start the year. Dorj's youngest daughter, Nyama had made the journey from Ulaanbaatar with her husband and their one year old son, Erdem-Tögs, bringing with them some of the little boy's toys.

The TV had been turned off and adults were chatting convivially before preparing beds. Erdem-Tögs was sitting among them playing with his big plastic car. Batuhan, who was then four years old, came to play next to him with one of his cousin's smaller cars. Noticing Batuhan, Erdem-Tögs's face became strained and he immediately started crying, thus attracting adults' attention. Batuhan seemed a little disappointed but acting as if he was giving the toy upon his own volition, he said, "Take it, my little brother (Mai, minii düü)." All were amused to see Erdem-Tögs claiming his toy back and Dorj complimented him, "What a great little boy who knows how to keep his things!" Perplexed, I asked Dorj why he saw the fact that Erdem-Tögs refused to let his cousin play with his car to be a good thing. He replied quoting a saying, "Those who give heavily their things are left with little fortune [literally cannot fix a heavy fortune] (Baigaa yumaa хүнд өгдөг хүнд буян тогтодoggүй)" and explained to me that children who are too generous (amigүй өглөгч) will never learn to keep/protect (hamgaala-) their things whereas children who know how to keep things can learn to share (huvaa-).

⁶² I will give more information about the Mongolian New Year in the section on 'the genealogy of gifts'.

In this situation, Batuhan's attitude shows that he has learned that he had no prerogatives to access toys if a younger child (*düü*) wanted them. By contrast, Erdem-Tögs considered that he had exclusive rights over his toys even when he was not playing with them. In the former sections, we have seen how children learn that consumable goods should be shared. In this section, I examine the regimes of ownership and sharing over durable goods. I ask what explains the fact that children's initial lack of propensity to share is seen as a desirable quality and examine how children who are first encouraged to being protective of their belongings learn to share. I show that developing the skills of sharing without being generous is essential to navigating different regimes of property and to form relations with kin and non-kin.

Navigating different regimes of ownership, learning kinship

In the kindergarten each child had their own personal set of objects: their chair, their pens and pencils, their notebooks, their roll of toilet paper, their soap, etc. Each of them was marked with a personal symbol (*temdeg*)⁶³ taped on it and placed in their personal drawer which bore the same symbol. Most importantly each child brought his own chair and was entitled to use it exclusively. When Pürvee joined Batuhan's group for a few weeks in the middle of the year, his parents did not buy him any of the required material. Unaware that a regime of personal ownership applied to chairs, he sat on a free green chair. When Aruika arrived and discovered Pürvee on her chair, she protested that it was her and pushed him from it.

Interactions when a child had with or without awareness taken the chair or object of another pupil happened occasionally. If a teacher witnessed such a scene, they always supported the child claiming her object back and looked for a substitute one to give the child who had no personal one. Teachers' support of children's exclusive right of usage over their belongings is revealing of a different regime of relations at home and in the kindergarten.

⁶³ This is also the word used for the symbol with which herders mark their herd (see Humphrey 1974b).

In the kindergarten, the legitimacy to keep one's personal belongings goes together with being free from the obligation to share. In the kindergarten, morning tea, lunch and afternoon snacks were distributed in equal shares and consumed at the same time sitting at tables. In school, the morning snack was equally personal. In the kindergarten, only the toys placed on shelves at the back of the classroom were communal and to be used by all. During free time, children could take them and play with them under the sole request that they keep tranquil (*tomootoi*) and quiet (*chimeegüi*). During play times, teachers usually left the classroom but even when present they did not intervene in children's disputes, so that children learned that they should settle their arguments themselves.

The way Mongolian teachers and parents did not think that it was necessary to intervene in children's relationships and to teach them to share toys and to treat each other as 'friends' contrasts with practices in American kindergartens as described by Corsaro (2003) and Ahn (2011). In Ahn's ethnography (2011), American kindergarten teachers are seen to readily intervene in settling discontent among children. When doing so, they insist that children should interact with their classmates according to an idealised concept of friendship whereby children are expected not only 'to imagine everyone in their class as their friends' but to cooperate, to share and to include everyone as equals (2011:298). The rationale given by teachers to children is that they should avoid hurting other children's feelings (2011:300). As explained above, the experience of Mongolian children is drastically different. Be it at home or in the kindergarten, adults avoid as much as possible intervening in their affairs unless a younger child is involved. Furthermore, when reasons are given as to why they should share or treat younger children with respect to their junior status, no reference is made to feelings. They are simply pointed to the fact that they need to act in conformity with their status of *ah* or *egch*.

Ahn shows that despite teachers' constant intervention and their insistence that children verbalise solutions to discontents in terms which conform to adults' friendship ideology of equal sharing, American middle-class children entertain their own ideas about what friends are and how to negotiate relationships with them. For them, friends are 'people whom they can play with and whose social

goals converge with their own at certain moments' (2011:300) while they use the idiom of sharing as a way to legitimize taking away a toy from another one by asserting, "I am sharing" (2001:302). By contrast, Mongolian classrooms represent a space where children discover how to negotiate relationships with peers, that is, people towards whom they have no obligations and from whom they can exert prerogatives of personal ownership. Children however learn that this mode of relating can only be entertained outside of the home and that once home the *ah düü* mode of relating and shared regime of ownership prevail.

Apart from special valuables and clothing items, all objects at home were used depending on present individual needs. As shown by Højer (2012:41-6), Humphrey (2002:67-76) and Sneath (2006:93-100; 2012:468-9), Mongolian custodial ownership is not defined as an abstract legal relation but rather through the personal relation that regular use establishes between a person and an object. Objects regularly used come to stand in metonymic relation with the person. For instance disrespecting someone's hat (or one's own) by placing it on the floor and leaving in the southern part of the yurt is taken as a direct sign of disrespect to the person. Objects become 'parts' of the person using them, and become imbued with their qualities. This is why certain objects can be used for their beneficial properties such as cots used by many infants (see Chapter 3) and this is also why objects to whom a person was especially attached have to be given away, thrown or buried with the person after her death or her soul (*süns*) could 'take refuge in it' and prevent its peaceful reincarnation (Delaplace 2009b:196; Humphrey 2002:71).

In homes, apart from clothing and schooling items and the head of the family's bowl, only a few items are deemed personal in such a way that their use is restricted to their owner. The head of the family generally has a specific bowl in which his meals are served. Ceremonial items or valuables such as silver saddles, silver belts or jewels are also personal but typically belong to people with higher status who are strong enough to use them. Such valuables, especially those made with gold, are 'heavy' (*hünd*) and possessing them can be dangerous, especially for young people who could easily become subverted by their attractiveness (High 2008:209). At home, Batuhan and Otgono both possessed a silver bowl but they

were kept in the home chest. Tuyaa and Erdene explained that having or playing with valuable objects when young risk to jeopardize a person's future 'fortune' (*hishig*). Some toys (teddy bears, cars and figurines) had been given to Bilgüün, Otgono or Batuhan personally, but they played with them indifferently and when Batuhan wanted to play with one, Otgono and Bilgüün could try to convince him otherwise but ultimately conceded to give it to him as they knew that it was their obligation as *ah* or *egch*.

At three years old Batuhan had a very strong sense of personal ownership and disliked the idea of using other people's things. For example, Batuhan categorically refused to wear clothes which belonged to his brother until they had officially been given to him as his. Although Batuhan's sense that use established ownership over objects was congruent with adults' ideas, he however had to learn that most objects at home could not be claimed as personal. At home, we had one plastic and one wooden stool. One morning, Batuhan decided to claim the plastic stool to be his and pushed his brother from it. Erdene witnessed the scene but contrary to Batuhan's expectations lent support to Otgono telling Batuhan to use the wooden one. Batuhan refused saying that he wanted to use the chair his brother was using and which he called his own (*minihi*). Everyone found this hilarious and Erdene continued teasing Batuhan until he sat on the floor and cried.

The regime of shared ownership among family members⁶⁴ by and large extends to the network of relatives (*ah düü*) under the principle that kin should help each other and the fact that unless something is presently used by a family member, ownership can hardly be claimed. Be it money, a vehicle or a washing machine, if a relative makes a request to borrow one or the other, the pressure is on the 'owner' to find a legitimate excuse not to lend it. High shows how rich herders might resolve to actually hide from their home to escape the solicitations of close and remote relatives (2008:101:13). In the village, the recent institutionalisation of banking accounts has the effect of rendering people's saving and debts highly visible. People who were believed to have savings were placed under endless requests to lend their money. The argument that borrowers put forward seemed implacable: given that this money was not used why not lend it?

⁶⁴ The regime of shared ownership include the family herd of which each child will receive a part when they leave their parents' home to form their own household.

In 2009, Erdene bought a minivan. Following his purchase, Erdene was hardly ever to be seen at home. Neighbours and relatives kept asking him to help them with errands. Not only had Erdene spent most of his time helping various relatives, he also found himself spending his own money to cover oil costs as many of his relatives were poorer than him and did not reimburse him. Two months after he had purchased the minivan, Erdene came to the conclusion that cars simply did not suit him (his two previous attempts at owning a car had also fallen through) and he decided to sell the car. When commenting on the story of Erdene and his car(s), his parents-in-law did not pity him but rather thought that it was his own mistake not to know how to protect himself from his relatives' requests. While sharing is an obligation and giving is a source of merit (High 2008:106), being too generous is seen as a problematic quality as it makes one susceptible to being abused by friends and relatives.

Given that 'owning' places one under the obligation of sharing, household management requires one to find a delicate balance between sharing enough to not be the object of malicious or resentful gossips (*hel am*), generate fortune through good actions, and sustain solidarity within the extended network of people required to access economic resources (see Sneath 2004:174-5). At the same time one should not become known for being too generous so as to be able to resist the perpetual requests of kin and neighbours. This explains why, although adults teach children to share with younger ones and peers, they view it favourably that children initially display a sense of protection over their belongings.

As Batuhan lost his prerogatives as 'king' to dispossess older people from objects he desired, he had to face apparently inconsistent messages. In the kindergarten, his sense of personal ownership was reinforced and supported by adults. At home, by contrast, he had to learn that possession of objects was only momentary and established through current usage. The difference between the regime of personal ownership and exclusive rights of usage in the kindergarten and the predominance of shared rights of usage at home maps onto the difference between conditional sharing among peers in the kindergarten and the unconditional sharing expected

among siblings. In other words, by being exposed to different regimes of ownership and regimes of exchange, children are introduced to apprehending different regimes of relatedness, a lesson largely brought to the fore by the exchanges of visits and presents during the Mongolian New Year.

The genealogy of gifts

The Mongolian New Year (*Tsagaan Tsar*) marks the start of a new astrological cycle according to the Mongolian lunar calendar. The New Year discontinues time by making everyone one year older and suspends time by orchestrating the enactment of the timeless hierarchical order (Højer *forthcoming*). New Year represents a moment of 'ordered renewal', where people's destiny is inscribed within a new cycle and kin relationships are reset in their ideal form (*ibid*). This commands a set of preparations so as to ensure that the New Year starts and unfolds propitiously. Preparations for the New Year begin weeks before the event, with the collective preparations of hundreds of meat dumplings (*buuz*) and the purchase of alcohol and gifts. In the days preceding the first day of the Year, the yurt is cleaned from roof poles to floor carpets. People strive to 'clear' everything from the past year (including settling all their debts) so as to make the year to come, so to say, new.⁶⁵

The New Year celebrations consist in paying ceremonial visits to relatives according to seniority order and following the formalised protocol of etiquette.⁶⁶ On the first day, parents and close senior relatives are visited by their children and junior relatives. In the following days, visits are extended and returned. Visiting kin are greeted with the full range of ceremonial food and beverages, and each person, adults and children alike, is given individual gifts ranging from a few sweets and a token item such a pen or a pair of socks to expensive valuables such as a bottle of vodka, a piece of expensive clothing, a box of chocolates, banknotes, etc. As explained earlier, adults generally avoid giving valuable objects to children

⁶⁵ For an historical perspective on the New Year celebrations see Jagchid & Hyer (1979:116-20).

⁶⁶ For a description of the New Year visits see also Højer (2003:102-12).

and the Mongolian New Year visits represent one of the rare occasions when children receive non-consumable gifts.⁶⁷

On the 8th of February 2008, the first day of the Year of the Mouse, we first visited Erdene's grandfather's household in the village and then together with Erdene's brothers and their family drove to the regional capital where we paid visits to their parents and relatives and returned home late at night. On the second day, a day deemed inauspicious for travelling, we stayed in the village. Erdene and the children toured households (*ail hese-*) separately while Tuyaa stayed home to host children and relatives returning their visits.

Excited by the prospect of paying visits and collecting gifts, Otgono woke up early and just after breakfast announced that he was going to visit households. Tuyaa told him to wait for his brother and Erdene reviewed the list of households that Otgono and Batuhan should visit, starting with their oldest relatives and mentioned that there was no need to visit 'unknown household' (*tanihgüi ail*). Otgono repeated the names of the relatives and neighbours he was going to visit but added that this year he also visit families he did not know so as to get a maximum of sweets and money. Children's visits to people they don't know appear as an 'oddity' in a context where adults precisely only pay and return visits to their kin. As alluded to in Chapter 3, in ritualised contexts such as during the New Year ceremonies, adults are concerned with being virtuous (*buyantai*) and interact with children, young and old, kin and non kin, in their quality of 'vessels of fortune' (see Chapter 3).⁶⁸

Soon after we finished breakfast, children started to come in a steady flow to collect gifts. Once Batuhan got ready, I accompanied Otgono and Batuhan on their visits to known and unknown households. The contrast between how Otgono and Batuhan were hosted by people related to their parents (*ah düü*) and others was

⁶⁷ At the time when the generation of Otgono's grandparents were children, gifts were restricted to small hand-made biscuits (*eviin boov*) and dried dairy products (*tsagaan idee*), and sometimes a special Russian sweet. At the time of Otgono's parents' generation, notebooks were added as a standard gift in addition to sweets and biscuits. After the opening of the market in the early nineties, foreign manufactured goods (mainly Chinese) became available in local stores and extended the range of gifts offered, as well as small banknotes.

⁶⁸ In fact, people also give small mostly consumable gifts to children of people they don't know when they visit them during weddings, funerals or other celebrations (*nair*). This is a way for the adults to 'make fortune' (*buyan hii-*).

striking. When visiting unknown households, children entered together and silently stayed in the entrance waiting to be given something. Sometimes the hostess asked them whose son/daughter they were, but often children received their gifts silently, presenting their two hands, rapidly putting their gifts in their bag or the chest 'pocket' of their traditional coat (*deel*) and leaving immediately.⁶⁹ Once out, children either ran to the next yurt or compared their booty, commented on what they had just received, occasionally mocking a stingy hostess, proceeded to some exchanges and/or ate a sweet on their way to the next household.

By contrast, when we visited people Otgono and Batuhan knew or people related to their parents, hosts asked the boys to come to them and greet them ceremonially (*zolgo-*) or they took the initiative of greeting them by sniffing them (see Chapter 4), and the hostess invited us to sit while she was looking for our gifts. My presence was a factor which prompted the hostess to treat Otgono and Batuhan to invite them to sit and to also offer them a cup of tea and some food. The conversation generally turned on the topic of whom we had visited and what presents we had gotten. As soon as the boys got their presents, they urged me to leave. Often, the hostess encouraged Otgono and Batuhan to pay more visits to get more gifts. At the end of our visits, Erdene's cousin for instance prompted Otgono and Batuhan, "Go to Batah and Tombaiarah, a little south, they are also your relatives (*ah düü*)". Each time we returned home, Tuyaa asked the boys what they had gotten from whom and they proudly showed their treasure: some socks, stickers, sweets, etc. and some small banknotes which they unloaded in their respective gift-boxes, while Tuyaa asked them what they had gotten from whom specifically.

All families assess carefully the value of what is given to each of family member, so that offering appropriate gifts to visitors is a serious matter. Often, Tuyaa pondered for a little while before deciding on the appropriate combination of gifts for each given guest. Once, after having long hesitated she feared not having given

⁶⁹ I did not follow Otgono and Batuhan on their visits to unknown households as it would have been inappropriate for me to do so. However I witnessed children's visits to an unknown household when I was at home and during visits elsewhere.



Figure 23: Old and young children collecting New Year gifts

a valuable enough gift to Jargal, the daughter of one of Erdene's numerous cousins. Sharing her concerns with Erdene, he confirmed that she should indeed have added a 5000MNT note rather than two of 1000MNT to the pens and sweets she had gifted her. When Jargal's younger brother visited us, Tuyaa took this opportunity to repair her mistake and asked him to bring a 5000MNT banknote to her sister and to apologize on her behalf.

Women are in charge of giving presents, men however also take part in the purchase of gifts, pay attention to what is received and given and tease children in ways which underline that presents are not nominally given by the hostess but a present from the family. When describing the actual act of giving, children refer to the woman from whom they received the thing but in other contexts they also refer to gifts as having been given by such or such household. By being asked to memorize what each person they visited gave them, children are encouraged to pay attention and compare the value of what has been given to them. They maybe come to realise that giving them presents is also a way through which adults mediate their relationships with their parents, in other words that the gifts they receive are given to them in their quality of son or daughter. This lesson in kinship and family membership is reinforced as children learn that the large majority of the gifts they receive need to be 'returned' to their mothers to become part of the family reserve of gifts that she will distribute to visitors.

Rather than touring many households at a time like older children, Batuhan preferred heading home to proudly show his mother the gifts he had received. He then placed them in a personal gift-box, which he used to keep his gifts separated from his brother's. Batuhan liked to spend time checking his booty and sometimes preferred reorganising his box rather than following his brother on more visits. On one such occasion when he had chosen to stay home, we received the visit of one of Erdene's cousins and his family. Batuhan was observing his mother giving gifts to our guests. Seeing his mother offer a pair of socks, a pack of biscuits and a banknote to his cousin, Batuhan broke into tears, requiring that his socks be given back to him!

At six years old, Otgono had learned the lesson. When coming back from visiting households, he informed his mother who had given him what. He then negotiated with her so as to keep his favourite toys or clothing items, gave his banknotes to his father for safekeeping (*hamgaala-*) and willingly offered the rest of the gifts he had collected to his mother. Otgono knew that if he did not take the initiative of giving his presents to his mother so as to protect some of his gifts, they would most likely be taken from his box. He would thus lose the gifts but also lose the opportunity to establish himself as contributing to the family expenses. In a shared regime of ownership, very much like with sweets, the act of giving was in fact the only means through which Otgono could claim ownership over his gifts, precisely by voluntarily relinquishing them.

The practice of giving gifts that have just been received from visiting households is absolutely generalised. A range of 'generic presents' (e.g. socks, panties, sweets, cigarettes, etc.) are bought in relatively large quantities to have enough gifts to bring to elders and to give to visitors coming on the first day. The stock of 'generic gifts' constituted ahead of the festivities is in no way sufficient to cover all the gifts that will have to be given to visitors, but each family counts on the 'generic gifts' that respective family members will receive upon visiting to complement their initial investment. Only a few items are bought or made as personalised gifts for close relatives. For instance Tuyaa's mother, Hand had sewn a traditional jacket for Erdene and Batuhan, and had bought a Superman figurine that Otgono had requested. Apart from a few personalised gifts which are kept and the goodies and alcohol that have been consumed, by the end of the New Year visits, families have given back most of the gifts they have received.

Not only are the gifts received immediately put back into circulation, but the visits paid should be returned within the following days. On the third day of the New Year, Tuyaa's uncle and his family had just returned from the countryside having only stayed in the village for a few hours before heading to visit more relatives in the countryside. Tuyaa's uncle was not going to come back to the village afterwards but directly head south to work. As soon as they arrived, they sent their youngest son to tell us that we should pay them a visit, which we did. We barely had time to arrive home, before they returned the visit, hastily consuming the

drinks, dumplings, meat and alcohol Tuyaa served them. Some visits are paid with pleasure and hosts and guests enjoy the exchanges of new anecdotes generated by the New Year visits while consuming food and alcohol in abundant quantities. However because visits are paid one after the other, over a short period of time, there is a strong sense that giving and returning visits is an obligation. An obligation which is honoured even when it implies exchanging visits back to back, or even if one is on bad terms with certain members of one's kin network.

As Malinowski (1932) and Mauss (1938) first highlighted, 'immediate reciprocity is tantamount to the denial of any moral relationship between the parties while delay between gift and counter gift is an indication of the moral character of the relationship' (Bloch 1973:77). Given that visits are exchanged among kin only, it appears as somewhat of a paradox that people seem so concerned that visits and gifts be returned immediately. Building on Højer's suggestion (*forthcoming*) that New Year celebrations stage an 'idealised picture' of hierarchical relationships, the avoidance of delayed reciprocity seems to precisely allow for the New Year visits to constitute a closed system of exchanges set apart from the everyday contentions that emerge from delayed reciprocity and mutual but asymmetrical obligations among kin.

Because reciprocity is immediate, gifts and exchange do not create obligations. Rather visits and gifts exchanged during the New Year serve to demonstrate respect to elders (*ahmadaa hündle-*) and to honour asymmetrical obligations between family units (*ger bül, am bül*). The verb used to mean to respect *-hündle* - literally means to make something heavy. In line with the etymology of *hündle-*, I suggest that the cautiousness with which people measure the value of the gifts they receive and give reflect that presents objectify the 'relative weight in respect and kinship' between people. Importantly, in the exchange of visits and gifts, what matters is not the material object received and given which will most likely be put back into circulation almost immediately, but the actual acts of visiting and hosting, giving and receiving and the value of the objects offered and received. Gifts constituted of objects that are new and 'generic' are not imbued with the personhood of the giver and are perfectly alienable.

In line with former anthropological critique of the analysis of exchange through individualistic assumptions, Sneath (2006) proposes to distinguish between two categories of material transfers in Mongolia: 'exchange' and 'enaction'. 'Exchanges' concern material transmission according to a transactional logic. 'Enactions' concern other material transfers of good or assistance which are best viewed as 'materialisations of various types of social relations' or 'enactions of the aspects of persons and roles' and expressed in 'the language of obligation and expectation' (2006:90).

Following Sneath's analysis, I propose that gifts and visits exchanged during the New Year ceremonies do not create relationships or obligations; they 'enact' relationships which pre-exist them. The argument that gifts and material transfers cannot be understood outside of the relationships in which they take part is not new (e.g. Malinowski 1932; Mauss 1938; Dumont 1966; Parry 1986; Weiner 1992). The care that Mongolian people take in weighing the value of the gift they offer and receive shows a concern that the relation be enacted correctly according to mutual but asymmetrical kinship relations. While gifts will be put back into circulation, who gave what to whom, what I call the 'genealogy of gifts' is what matters and remains.

Like most of his toys, the life span of the Superman Otgono had received from his grandma for New Year was really short. The figurine Otgono had so desired and longed to receive went missing within a week. However a year later, Otgono still remembered and occasionally mentioned the Superman his grandmother had given. As explained earlier, only a few selected objects offered by persons dear to children are excluded from the generalised New Year exchange. Because children keep a precise memory of the genealogy of their gifts, these objects become very much attached to the person who had given them. For instance, Bilgüün hardly had the opportunity to see her maternal grandparents, aunts and uncles because they lived far. Putting on her pink boots, she often mentioned that they had been gifted to her by her beloved grandpa from the South (*ömnö ovoo*), which was the name she used to distinguish him from her other grandfather. In other words, the inalienability of gifts is a quality the object acquires through the constant association of the object to the person by evoking the genealogy of the gift.

Not only did Bilgüün and Batuhan know precisely the genealogy of their toys but they also kept memory of the genealogy of other family members' belongings. Months after the New Year, Bilgüün could trace accurately who had given me a specific pen, a red bag or the scarf I had received then. Batuhan seemed sensitive enough to the power of the genealogy of gifts to decide of the genealogy of his beloved toys according to his own sense of relationship. He for instance refused to believe that as a baby I had gifted him a little teddy-bear that he really liked but claimed assertively that his mother had given it to him. In a context where gifts become imbued with the person who gave them, the generalised redistribution of presents operated during the New Year celebrations can also be viewed as a way to prevent that homes be penetrated by objects whose use would create relations with their donor. In this sense, beyond the need to build up their stock of gifts to redistribute, the careful selection of a few gifts that mothers allow their children to keep, can be seen as a way to control the bonds that children form with people outside of their home. In fact, the gifts that children receive from 'unknown households' are either immediately consumed or redistributed.

Very much like with the daily gifts of sweets, for adults, New Year exchanges do not create but 'enact' relationships according to kin relations and obligations. This does not mean, however, that visits and gifts have no performative power in qualifying relationships. The genealogy of gifts remains after New Year exchanges of visits and gifts have been settled. Moreover, for children who hold a performative theory of kinship (see above), New Year visits are productive of relationships and an occasion when they learn many lessons in kinship. First, visits paid ceremonially with their parents and siblings are exclusively paid to their relatives. These visits thus represent an occasion when children are introduced to people they might not otherwise know. These people are often keen on emphasizing that they stand in an *ah düü* relationships to them and support their claim by giving them valuable gifts. Secondly, during these visits the family stands out as a moral unit of exchange and of relationships. Visits are paid as family and to families. Gifts and visits are received in the name of the household head, and when children are received individually they are asked whose son or daughter they are. Moreover, two ritualised acts are avoided among family members: husband and wife do not greet each other ceremonially and parents do not give presents to their

children (until adults they come and visit their parents with their own family). These two (absent) acts materialise that family members are bonded as a 'unit of exchange' paying visit and hosting, receiving and giving to other family units.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the processes through which young children, who are at first encouraged to be egoistic and behave like 'little kings' (Chapter 3), learn to receive, share and give. In the first section, we saw that children first learn how to receive and distribute things through playful and rewarding interactions. As they grow older, children enjoy paying visits to their relatives who they know will reward their visits with sweets. Children consider that as children they have no obligation to reciprocate but see these visits and gifts as characteristic of kin/friend relationships. This factual understanding of kin relatedness contrasts with adults' kinship theory based in inherited shared substance. While adults conceive of the *ah düü* mode of relating as an extension of the kinship idiom to non-relatives, this is not reflective of the way children learn to relate to others. This demonstrates that an adult-like knowledge of kinship based on knowledge of genealogy is not essential for children to be competent at the *ah düü* mode of relating. More broadly, it shows that interacting with others through the *ah düü* mode accommodates different conceptions of relatedness by the persons interacting.

In the second section, I explored why, in a context where sharing among children is mandatory, adults consider young children's stinginess not only normal but a desirable quality. I suggested that this is because adults think that through little routines of distribution and by interacting with others, children easily learn to share; albeit, a child who is naturally too generous will have difficulties to protect any of their belongings from others. In fact, as children grow older, the daily distributions of sweets supervised by adults teach children that sharing is an unconditional practice. Discovering their duty as *ah* or *egch* to concede to the requests of younger ones, children further learn that the status of senior first

comes with obligations rather than prerogatives. Unsupervised by adults, children however develop their 'own peer culture' of sharing (Corsaro & Rizzo 1988). Among themselves, children regulate their interactions through delayed reciprocity and introduce younger children to the necessity of sharing their own treats too if they want to later receive a share.

The circulation of sweets supervised and unsupervised by adults both converge in teaching children to share although under two different rationales. Supervised by adults, children learn that sharing is unconditional and represents an obligation which is disconnected from past and future distributions. Among themselves, children learn that sharing is productive of relationships and that receiving is conditional upon sharing. This reveals an important contrast between adults' and children's understanding of relationships. While adults consider that sharing and exchange practices express obligations or 'enact relationships' that pre-exist them (Sneath 2006), for children sharing and exchange create relationships.

In the last section, I examined how children are exposed to and learn to navigate different regimes of ownership. We saw that children are exposed to contradictory injunctions. In the kindergarten, children are encouraged to claim exclusive rights of use over their belongings. At home, by contrast, children learn that objects are under a shared regime of ownership and that under this regime personal ownership can only be claimed fleetingly either by using or by giving an object. By navigating these two regimes of ownership daily, children learn that they map onto different modes of relatedness. Among kin where mutuality is expressed through a shared regime of ownership, individuality can only be asserted by honouring one's obligations. Among classmates, individuality is materialised through personal ownership and mutuality needs to be produced through conditional exchanges. This lesson in kinship pervasive to daily interactions is brought to the fore during the New Year ceremonies where children play a key role in the circulation of gifts.

We saw that during these visits, children become attuned to paying attention and to memorizing the value and genealogy of the gifts which circulate among families. Children also discover the expectation that they should contribute to the circulation of gifts by giving most of the gifts they receive to their mother, for her

to give them to other children. By voluntarily giving back their gifts, children can claim ownership over the act of giving and show their understanding of their responsibility as son or daughter. In other words, they learn that as family members the positive affirmation of their individuality is subordinated to the forms of mutuality commanded by the shared regime of ownership and prescribed by their role according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. The New Year ceremonies reveal adults' expectations that older children positively contribute to the family economy. The contribution of older children is also required in daily life as they become progressively counted upon to take part in domestic and pastoral activities, as I will develop in the next chapter.

Chapter 7. Learning to be a ‘useful’ family member

At the end of Chapter 3, we saw that Batuhan, who had been used to being at the centre of attention and enjoyed exerting his prerogatives over others without having demands made on him, was for the first time harshly scolded by his father, who, in his irritation, told him he was ‘the most useless member of his family’. In this Chapter, I focus on the transformation of young children who are first considered cute (*hōrhōn*) and ignorant (*medehgüi yum*) and whose dependence on others is supported by the keen attention they receive, but must later become family members with personal competences (*chadaltai*) on whom others can rely to work (*ajilla-*) and help (*tusla-*) within the household economy.

The daily running of the household economy requires specialised knowledge of individuals (see e.g. Sneath 2006:148) and is based on the interdependent coordination of all family members (see e.g. Portisch 2007:106). As we saw in Chapter 5 children, like adults, keep moving back and forth between the village and the countryside, so that the composition of households and camps keeps varying (see also Humphrey & Sneath 1999:156-64). The constant variation of the household composition paradoxically requires that people be both specialised and polyvalent, and able to adapt to new structures of cooperation each day. I will present a ‘normal morning’ on Bilgüün’s grandfather’s camp during the summer of 2008, to illustrate how the interdependence of family members in daily work activities relies on the combination of the autonomy and specialisation of individuals, with their flexible but hierarchically structured participation.

In the morning, one of the first pastoral tasks to be performed consisted in pushing the camels away from their foals, and driving them towards fresh pasture. After breakfast, one of the adults took the initiative to separate the camels from their foals. It was never long before one or two adults and older children joined in. Cooperation and coordination were spontaneous and the team of persons accomplishing this task varied each day. No one was responsible for this task in particular. But everyone felt some responsibility towards it, so that a person never

found herself doing it all alone. In parallel to this chore, one of the young men had already gone to bring back the horses grazing nearby.

The self-initiated character of people's involvement did not mean that the cooperation of family members was amorphous. Rather, gender, individual competences and seniority structured the routinized allocation and performance of daily tasks. Women typically stayed on the camp, helped by girls, while men and boys were in charge of herding and watering animals. In the course of the day, adults who led herding and pastoral chores expected that children would voluntarily help with individual and collective tasks. For instance, Bilgüün was expected to keep the house clean, fill the dung basket, volunteer to help others milk goats, help maintain camels at a distance from their foal during milking time, etc. Her brother Süh was younger and thus mainly expected to voluntarily help in collective tasks concerned with goats and sheep (*baga mal*) but also started to be sent along with men herding on horseback.

Within this general organisation, specific arrangements needed to be made daily depending on the state of the pasture, seasonal chores, and so on, especially in summers when herds belonging to different families (*hot ail*) were herded together and coordination had to be organised depending on available labour force on any given day. After breakfast, Dorj's sons passed by Dorj's yurt (*ger*) to report information about herds, pastures and neighbours. The conversations were generally brief and agreement was quickly reached as to where the herds would graze and who would be responsible of specific chores. Disagreements emerged only occasionally; in these cases Dorj, being the oldest man, had the final say.

As exemplified by the description of the organisation of morning chores on Dorj's camp, the cooperation of family members is organised through a hierarchical allocation of tasks flexibly adapted to the changing composition of the household. Importantly, for most daily activities, family members coordinate their work without the direct supervision or orders of senior or more expert people. Rather, everyone has a general understanding of the tasks to be performed and knows what is expected of them given their personal skills. Within this flexible but interdependent cooperation of household members, children's contribution

initially concerns 'easier tasks' but this is not to say that their help is subsidiary. In their absence these tasks are performed by senior people – in the domestic and pastoral economy no work is considered degrading although specialised work bring personal gratification – so that their help often represents a valued alleviation of workload for others. The economic contribution of children cannot be separated from the moral and pedagogical aspects of working. In rural Mongolia, as in Tikopia, 'early association with the economic life acts as a very important educational mechanism' (Firth 1936:144).

Beyond the need for children's involvement, parents in the Dundgobi considered that doing work (*ajil, hödölmör*) was an important aspect of how children became moral persons (*hümүүжүүлэ-*). Parents, for instance, regretted that life in the village, where there was no pastoral work to which children could contribute, made children lazy (*zalhuu*) and they were keen on sending children to the countryside during their holidays so that they would become hardworking (*ajilsag*) and helpful (*tusal dag*). Moreover, participating in domestic and pastoral work is one of the main mechanisms through which sexual differences are turned into gender roles (Empson 2003:102-31; Lacaze 2012:126).

In this chapter I examine the processes through which children learn to become both specialised and polyvalent contributors to the household economy, both capable of self-initiative and of integrating within a pre-established structure of participation; and how these competences transform them into both independent and reliable daughters and sons. We will see that it is not only the specific skills that children learn but the way they learn to participate which makes them helpful family members in accordance with the *ah düü* mode of relating. I start by looking at how children learn to learn by themselves rather than relying on being didactically taught. I then investigate how the modes of participation of children in pastoral and domestic activities allow them to develop pastoral and domestic skills and motivate their self-initiated contribution. Lastly, I consider how children, who are by and large left without supervision and free to work or play, come to meet adults' expectations that they can be trusted to become reliable and helpful sons and daughters.

Learning from others by oneself

As explained in Chapter 3, parents judge that by and large, the process through which children become socially and morally competent is autodidactic: children principally ‘learn by themselves’ (*öörödöö surdag*). As we will see, this approach does not only apply to moral skills but also to technical skills. In this section, I examine how the relative reluctance of adults to teach is met by children’s development of specific learning skills which allow them to become competent without soliciting the direct attention or support of older people, thus fitting the *ah düü* asymmetrical economy of attention (see Chapter 4).

Becoming self-sufficient on one’s own

As we saw in Chapter 5, being autonomous, *biyee daasan*, in a literal sense, means to be able to ‘carry one’s own body’ rather than being carried and cared for. Before children start participating in domestic and pastoral chores, adults progressively require them to become self-sufficient in daily routines of care and hygiene. Although washing oneself or getting dressed does not represent a positive contribution to the household economy, it alleviates older children and adults from the responsibility of helping and supervising younger children in these daily routines.

“Go pee! Wash your hands and face (*Biye zas! Gar nüüree ugaa*)!” were words that Batuhan heard most mornings after he had gotten out of bed. When still a toddler, Erdene or Tuyaa brought him a bucket and held him above the sink to assist him with his morning toileting. By the age of two, Batuhan could go to pee outside on his own and by the age of three he was tall enough to wash his hands and face alone after having placed a stool next to the sink and climbed on it. This morning routine did not only concern Batuhan but was also the first thing that everyone did upon waking. In Mongolian homes, personal hygiene is linked to notions of respect and pollution. For instance, the family hostess is in charge of emptying the ashes from the stove before making the first morning tea. It is deemed important that she washes herself prior to doing so, or this would show disrespect towards the hearth deity (*galiin burhan*) and thus potentially bring misfortune to the family.

Conversely, washing oneself and acting with respect is a way of guaranteeing and protecting the family fortune (*hishig*) (see also Empson 2011:94-100).

While children had no direct responsibilities for making tea, like anyone else they had to wash before they could consume their breakfast tea (*öglööni tsai*). Milk tea prepared in the family hearth is in fact a valued beverage and its consumption is the object of a protocol.⁷⁰ As with the first gesture taught to children for receiving and giving objects (Chapter 6), the very first routines through which children learn not to rely on the care of others are intrinsically moral. In performing daily mundane acts such as washing oneself, it is not only the efficiency of the action which matters, but the way the action is carried out, according to the Mongolian “moral aesthetic” of acting correctly (*zöv*) (Empson 2011:94-100). Once children start being capable of doing things on their own, their actions also progressively become interpreted as potent within the household economy of fortune (*buyan hishig*). We saw, for instance, how children started to be asked to ‘repair’ (*zasa-*) their action when they, for instance, tripped over the threshold upon leaving (Chapter 4). In the same way that if older children do not behave correctly, it can be detrimental to the general well-being of the family, their correct and respectful behaviour contributes to the good of all.

In relation to the development of competences that makes young children capable of getting ready on their own in the morning and taking care of themselves throughout the day, it is not just what children learned that made them autonomous but the way they learned it. Let me explain this point with an example. In the kindergarten, every afternoon after lunch, children took a nap. One afternoon I was in Batuhan’s classroom with the middle class group while children were getting ready to sleep. I noticed a little girl who had just started coming to the kindergarten. She was struggling to remove her boots and tights. I thus offered her my help. The teacher however ordered me to let her do it herself to let her learn. Self-sufficiency is thus both a result of developing autonomy in daily routines and a pedagogical approach to how children should learn these routines.

⁷⁰ See Jagchid & Hyer (1979:43-4) for an historical perspective on the consumption of tea by Mongols. See Ruhlmann (2006:92 & 199-200) and Ruhlmann & Gardelle (2013) on the symbolic value of tea. Beyond its honorific properties for visitors, milk tea (*süütei tsai*) has emotional connotations and has come to be an icon of care and relation between mothers and children as elicited by Javglan’s 2008 ballad ‘The tea of one’s mother’ mentioned in Chapter 5.



Figure 24: Children in the kindergarten getting themselves ready to sleep

Learning without asking

Having myself been raised in a cultural context where learning by verbal enquiry is favoured⁷¹ I was struck that Mongolian children seldom resorted to obtaining information by asking questions. My own inclination to solicit verbal explanations and take the initiative to ask more knowledgeable persons most clearly brought out the inappropriateness of such practice.

The first winter when I visited Tuyaa's parents, Dorj and Hand, in the countryside, my curiosity was endless and I was especially fascinated by any activity related to their herds. One cold evening, after the last camels had been milked and the women and children had gone back inside, Dorj had remained outside to inspect the camels and I had stayed with him. The sun had long set behind the flat horizon, and a large full moon could be seen rising from the south-east. The untethered camels stood or lied close to their foals tied by cords fixed to the ground. When Dorj stopped momentarily, I pointed at the tag a camel had in its ear and asked,

⁷¹ See Li (2012:223-328) on the Euro-American model of Socratic teaching which she contrasts with the Confucian tradition.

“What is this?” hoping to get information about the tagging system. Dorj did not bother turning towards me and replied with irritation, “A camel (*Temee*)!” I did not insist and made a mental note not to disturb senior men during their activities. I however learned that younger people were no more likely to support my initiatives of learning through verbal explanations.

At the spring of 2008 we were all in the countryside and the weather had warmed up enough to start shearing the sheep’s winter wool. The sheep had been gathered in the corral, and all available adults were busy shearing. Dorcho, a nephew of Dorj in his early twenties whose camp was only a few miles from ours, had also joined to help. I immobilised a sheep, tied its legs and turned towards Dorcho to ask him, “Teach me how to do it (*Nadad zaaj ögööch*)!” Dorcho gave me a dismissive look and replied ironically while theatrically showing me how to open and close shears, “Take the shears in your right hand, open them wide and orientate them towards the sheep, then...”. It was not long before everyone laughed. In fact, I realised that it only took a few minutes from observing how Dorcho first made a cut where the wool had started to separate from the skin and then kept pulling and cutting the wool, to myself being able to perform this task. Dorcho’s mockeries brought to light my own habit of being taught didactically, rather than learning through self-initiated observations.

The reluctance or derision with which my questions were met reflected a more general scarcity in the use of verbal explanations in supporting children’s learning (see also Empson 2003:211-22; Portisch 2010:68-69).⁷² Favouring that children learn by imitation and participation is consistent with the ethic of calmness and the hierarchical economy of respect described in Chapter 4. Adults did nonetheless sometimes demonstrate techniques or explain things verbally to children but they did so upon their own initiative, reflecting the politics of giving and obtaining attention according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. Children were given explanations when parents were not too busy (*zavtai*) and therefore well-disposed. For instance, one morning after we had re-tethered the foals, Amga *ah* called his five-year-old son Ochir. Squatting in front of a docile foal (*namhan botgo*), he grasped the cord below its head with his right hand and used his left

⁷² For a comparative review of the role and methods used by adults in ‘not teaching’ children see Lancy & Grove 2010.

hand to scratch the top of its nostrils explaining to Ochir how he should talk to the foal. Ochir paid full attention to his father and scratched the camel in the same way he had been shown.

Most often, didactic teaching occurred when children repeatedly failed to perform a task and adults thereafter showed them how best to do it. For example, when Bilgüün's grandfather criticized the way she had arranged the covers on the bed, her grandmother showed her how to do it properly. Another time, Bilgüün was trying to copy her mother's method for making horsehair cords. Seeing Bilgüün's unsuccessful attempt, her mother exclaimed, "Why are you not capable of working (*Chi yaagaad ajiillaj chadahgüi*)?" and then rolled the cords in her hands more slowly to show Bilgüün how to do it. Bilgüün tried again and asked her mother whether she was now doing it correctly. However her mother refused to give her attention, telling her, "You yourself should know (*Ööröö med*)!" The fact that instructions were often associated with exasperation and scolding also contributed to children seldom taking the initiative of soliciting verbal explanations (see Chapter 8).

The Mongolian education of attention

Social environments vary in the way they promote and structure learning opportunities and learning strategies (see e.g. Harkness *et al.* 2010; Rogoff *et al.* 2003; Rogoff *et al.* 2007). A context like that of rural Mongolia where adults are little inclined to teach through verbal explanations makes observation a crucial learning skill. Gaskins & Paradise (2010) highlight that it is a misapprehension to conceive of observation as a lower level or passive learning strategy. *Observational learning* is in fact extremely demanding as it relies on the learner's personal initiative to pay attention, on her capacity to sustain continuous attention without being necessarily guided towards relevant information, and on her aptitude to analyse and memorize information relevant to her social context (Gaskins & Paradise 2010:94-97).

Assessing the effect of didactic teaching on children's observational skills, Gaskins & Paradise note that in "cultures where learning depends in large part on others'

directing children's attention to specific objects and events, short-term, focused attention is more common and more valued but harder to sustain" (2010:100). Contemporary psychological studies give weight to Paradise and Gaskins' observation that *didactic teaching* makes children more dependent on experts' guidance in their learning strategies. For instance, Silva *et al.* (2010) directed a study of children's attentiveness to demonstrations of toy construction, comparing children whose parents were prone to use *didactic teaching* with children whose parents drew less heavily on such a teaching strategy. During the experiment, children witnessed another child being shown how to construct a toy. The results show that children whose parents were less likely to use a *didactic* style of teaching paid more attention and remembered information more than children used to *didactic teaching*. Following Silva's *et al.* (2010) findings, the reluctance of Mongolian adults to engage in *didactic teaching* may contribute to creating a context where children are prone to develop acute skills in observing and paying attention.

Observing is a form of awareness of one's environment which can occur with or without the awareness of the observer. This raises serious methodological limitations to the study of observation in context (Gaskins & Paradise 2010:185). I thus turn the problem on its head and look for evidence of children's attentiveness and infer from them their use of observational strategies. Let me start by describing a situation which occurred on Otgono's grandpa's camp in August 2008.

We had milked the goats early that day, after which I had started walking southwards with the empty dung basket on my back, when Otgono joined me. We chatted while walking slowly, keeping our gaze focused on the ground, Otgono looking for lovely stones (goyo chuluu) and me for dung (argal). Otgono suddenly asked, "Who is this?" "Who?" I replied without understanding what was the object of Otgono's question. Otgono turned back and pointed at a motorbike passing north of the camp westward, which was soon turning into a small dot against the flat horizon. "I don't know," I replied. "This is uncle Süh!"

A little later another motorbike passed by eastward. I only noticed the noise when Otgono asked me again, "Who is this?", "Süh?" I replied uncertain. "No, this is grandpa," he said sounding disappointed and leaving me baffled. "How do you know?" Otgono looked at me with a mixture of surprise and frustration and resumed searching for stones. Being more attentive over the following days, I realised that though I could barely count on my sight to distinguish motorbike drivers, I could learn to recognise the distinctive sounds made by the motorcycles used by the different men of our camp. On our next dung expedition, Otgono asked me again to identify who was passing on a motorcycle. "Tsengel ah!" I guessed. "Well done (Sain bain)!" Otgono complimented me, rewarding me with a large smile.

This situation illustrates that Otgono's attention was not limited to information that was immediately relevant to his activities. At the time when the motorbike passed, Otgono was busy searching for stones. While his immediate focus was on spotting a colourful or interestingly shaped pebble, he however kept a broader attention to what was happening around him, in this case, by noticing changes in the 'soundscape'.⁷³ This stance whereby Otgono maintained a 'peripheral awareness' of his current environment and continually kept attentive to potential information has been highlighted by Gaskins & Paradise as being a 'unique kind of attention' which they name 'open attention' (2010:98).

Gaskins & Paradise define 'open attention' as a default stance whereby children learn to keep their attention on the 'here and now' without a pre-conceived idea of what they should attend to (2010:100). Using Ingold's notion of *education of attention* (2001), I suggest that for observation to be an efficient strategy, attention cannot be 'open' to everything. Rather, through participation in daily social activities, children's attention is progressively and continuously tuned towards relevant information. Legrain (2011:319-416) precisely shows that the distinction between what Mongolian people count as 'sound' and what they dismiss as 'noise' in a given context is the object of a specific education of attention. In fact, notwithstanding adults' reluctance in supervising children's learning processes, *observational learning* was actively encouraged and *guided* by adults as they

⁷³ I borrow the term from Legrain (2011:343).

didactically directed children's attention through questions, very much like Otgono did with me.

One evening in July 2008, Ochir and I had been asked to bring back the herd of goat and sheep (baga mal) on the camp. Before we had time to step down from our horses, Amga ah who was squatting in front his yurt looking through a pair of binoculars immediately asked us, "Have you seen Jambal-Dorj ah's herd (Jambal-Dorj ahiin mal harav uu)?" Ochir immediately replied that it was southwest pointing in the direction where one could in fact discern white spots close to the line of new electrical pylons.

Focusing on keeping the herd walking in the right direction, I had not paid attention to my surroundings and would have been unable to answer Amga ah's question. In this case, like in many other instances, Ochir's father knew where the herd was and only asked us as a way of testing our knowledge. As demonstrated by his immediate answer, aged five, Ochir had already developed a good sense of what information was relevant to observe and memorize. Once children demonstrate a reliable sense of attention, adults only ask children questions when they actually need the piece of information which demonstrates the *didactic* characters of these questions.

Beyond being tested on their knowledge of contextually relevant information, children are regularly asked to circulate information or objects to neighbouring households. Once back they might be asked extra information - was anyone visiting? were they given any special treat? - echoing the questions they are asked when returning from New Year visits (Chapter 6). These social exercises train children to pay attention to information that is not necessarily relevant to their activities or of interest to them but can be useful to others. The counterpart of observational skills is the propensity to stay quiet and attentive, and *listening in* rather than asking questions, which is deemed the appropriate way of behaving as a junior person in the presence of senior persons in daily and ceremonial situations of hospitality (see Chapter 4).

Used to being constantly asked about people comings and goings, children anticipate questions. At the end of a day at kindergarten, as I was walking towards Batuhan's classroom I passed by Uyanga, a cousin of Otgono who was living in our neighbourhood, when she spontaneously told me, "Batuhan has gone, Erdene came to pick him up!" This example illustrates that children have an acute awareness that paying attention to the micro-events of their environment is a valuable resource for others. As convincingly demonstrated by High (2008:45-8), obtaining attention is not a prerogative but a difficult challenge for junior people who senior people can choose to simply ignore (see Chapter 4). In this context, having information to share gives a child the opportunity to instigate interactions and momentarily obtain other people's attention.

Observational skills are essential for gathering relevant information about herds, be able to participate in social interactions and are more generally part of a broader economy of attention which allows to make one's actions harmonious and propitious with one's environment. Most people in Mongolia understand propitious conditions for success (*büte-*) to be inscribed within the Mongolian astrological cycle (*odon ornii zurhai*) which condition success in their endeavours. People rely on astrological calendars (*tsag toonii bichig*) and Buddhist experts (*lam*) to get information about the astrological propitiousness of their endeavours. They also rely on their own observation of patterns of misfortune and success. For example, besides what the Mongolian astrological calendar predicted for people of the rooster year (*tahia jiltei*), Erdene avoided as much as possible taking important action on Tuesdays. When I asked him how he knew Tuesday was a bad day for him, he explained that he had noticed that endeavours he attempted on Tuesdays kept failing (*bütehгүй*). Although this might seem an easy observation, it in fact required Erdene to notice and to memorize various occurrences on different days and test different explanatory patterns.

People's attention to regularities extends to the art of noticing and decrypting omens (see also Humphrey 1976). Before the New Year, we were at Otgono's great-uncle's to help make his ceremonial biscuits. He had first plunged a snake-shaped biscuit into the boiling camel fat and was watching the cauldron attentively until the snake rose to the surface. He let the snake cook a little longer and placed

it on the lip of the cauldron. As he cooked the biscuits I stayed next to him and we started a conversation. Ölzii *ah* explained that the way and direction in which the snake came out indicated where the good pasture would be located in the coming spring. As we continued talking, he further explained that the skill of predicting (*meregle-*) could be applied to any kind of object if only one paid attention (*anhaara-*). Otgono's grandpa was good with cards (*hözör*) and jacks (*shagai*) for instance, but others used coins (*zoos*) or learned to predict by noticing on-going correlations. He had for instance learned to read how the directions of cracks and the shape of ceremonial biscuits predicted family fortune (*hiimori*) for the year to come.

The art of Mongolian bricolage

We have seen that rather than providing verbal explanations, adults ask children questions and in so doing encourage their powers of observation. Children's inquisitive mind-set and proactive attitude to learning were also revealed by their tendency not to ask for help when faced with a new object or chore and their inclination to find intrinsic interest in the very process of understanding the mechanics of new objects. I had brought Otgono a Connect 4 travel board game from France. After I gave it to him, Otgono took the pieces of the game out of the box and spent a good fifteen minutes, fully focused, trying to assemble the pieces in different ways, checking the picture on the box and then testing how he could make the support stand still. Though he was aware that I was watching him, he did not ask me a single question. After trying out a few configurations, the structure stood still and Otgono started to play at inserting coins into it.

Ingenious 'bricolage' is an important skill in daily life in Mongolia. So much so that the act of repairing things with whatever is available is itself called "making something Mongolian (*mongolchilo-*)".⁷⁴ Rare were the motorbike or car rides, which did not require a halt to fix the motor. More generally, from fixing one's coat zip to repairing a faulty electric kettle, mending foals' halters or the felt walls of the yurt, everyday life called for incessant bricolage. The capacity to repair things, was pre-empted by adults' and children's sustained curiosity towards understanding

⁷⁴ I thank Dr. Bumochir Dulam for bringing this point to my attention.

the mechanisms of any new object, be it a child's toy, a mobile phone or a camping knife. Otgono and Batuhan in fact often showed more interest in examining the mechanisms of toys by dismantling them than in playing with them as the designer intended. Soon after Otgono and Batuhan received a new toy, they submitted it to a meticulous dismantling and not always successful attempt at reassembling the object.

The Mongolian art of 'bricolage', this reflexive engagement through practice,⁷⁵ is not only applied to dismantling things but also to developing various technical and social skills. The lack of direct supervision over them gives children space to experiment with various techniques and develop their own. Virtually any chore – from the way one holds one's dung basket on one's back, collects pieces of dung with one's fork and manages to throw them in the basket, to the way one places one's fingers to squeeze a goat's udder when milking, or pinches dough to make dumplings – accommodates personal variations in technique within the range of what is considered 'aesthetically correct' or 'good quality' (see also Empson 2011:94-100; High 2008:46; Portisch 2007:121-4). Children and adults are not directed in adopting a special technique but they are assessed on whether 'they can' or 'cannot' complete the task. There is in fact no universal technique; rather people need to find the technique that suits them best (*toohiro*-).

People for instance may prefer to close dumplings (*chimhe*-) by making them flower-shaped (*tsetseg chimhe*-) or spiral-shaped (*saran helbertei chimhe*-). Different techniques involved various amount of work and dexterity (flower-shaped dumplings are considered the easiest and thus seen as 'lazy dumplings' (*zalhuu buuz*) and rather avoided for ceremonial occasions. Irrespective of the technicality of the shape chosen, what matters first and foremost is that the pattern be nicely made (*goyo*). Children are exposed to these different models and left to figure out 'their technique' through personal practice and reflexive engagement.⁷⁶ At times, adults might intervene, by showing them their own technique or giving them a tip but intervention is minimal and rarely authoritarian, unless advice is given out of exasperation (see next chapter).

⁷⁵ Although my use of the term 'bricolage' is reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' (1962:30), as it will become evident later in this section, I do not endorse his opposition between 'abstract' and 'concrete' thinking.

⁷⁶ As shown by Portisch (2010), this is also true of other crafts such as learning to make felt carpets (*syrmaq*) which she shows is an intensively reflective practice.

It is accepted that levels of performance vary as long as each person applies herself diligently. Otgono's grandmother for instance preferred to milk goats by using only her right hand to pull an udder while holding it with her left hand. Though she used this technique with an incredible dexterity, she was never as fast as her daughter-in-law Bayar *egch* who milked by rapidly sliding her right and left hand along the goat teats which she held between her thumb and index fingers. Tsetseg *egch*, (the neighbour's wife with whom Dorj's shared his camp that summer) was the fastest of us all, grasped the udders with her whole hands and closing them progressively from top to bottom, exerting such pressure that the milk in her bucket made foam. Despite the lack of trust for Tsetseg who was suspected of stealing and criticized for her immodest attitude with men, everyone on the camp acknowledged and admired her hard work and personal talent (*aviyas*) at various tasks. As argued by High (2008:50-53) being recognized as especially skilled at a particular task or craft is a way for individuals to affirm their singularity beyond their assigned status within the family hierarchy.

The art of learning reflexively through one's own observations, trial and errors, is not only applied to technical activities but also seen as the most appropriate way to learn literacy-based knowledge. When I first lived in the village in 2006, I taught English to children and adults. I was initially surprised that they never asked me any questions despite my encouragement to do so. After becoming friendly with one of city hall administrators who had a university education, I asked her whether in school and university students were encouraged to ask questions. She replied, "When I was a student even when I could not understand, I never asked my teacher. When one does not understand something it is best to keep the problem in mind and look for a solution yourself. Asking questions will not help you learning, it is only by trying to understand yourself, figuring out the rule for yourself that you learn and remember." This reflexive way of learning through others echoes traditional techniques of education by teaching children proverbs and riddles to promote their intelligence (*uhaan*) (Aubin 1997). At the time of my fieldwork, adults regretted that children no longer learn riddles (see Chapter 8). However other traditional games such as chess (*chatar*) or played with jacks, stone or fingers were regularly played by children. These games which encouraged that

children design mental strategies, manipulate numbers and/or think fast and make guesses about another person's thoughts, all trained children to engage reflexively to learn and win.

This reflexive and individual approach to learning is also illustrated by the 'exemplar-way focused way of thinking about morality' typical of Mongols (Humphrey 1976:26). Exemplars include those given by proverbs and stories (*ülger*) (see also Aubin 1997) but also the propensity to look for models in historical figures or in religious teachers (Humphrey 1976:35-7). Very much like in developing a technique or decrypting omens, "exemplars are not the same for everyone but chosen by each subject" and requires that "the subject do some 'work', that is ponder the meaning of the exemplar for him- or herself" (Humphrey 1996b:34-5). This is revealing of the more general Mongolian approach to learning where observation and reflexivity are combined in making novices deferent towards more expert people but capable of learning from them without soliciting their attention. Very much like with learning through exemplar, learning by emulation and imitation 'without being taught' combines a high degree of individual autonomy and personal involvement in the process of learning with a high degree of conformity and reliability in the work produced.

The Mongolian 'chore curriculum'

In the former section, I examined how children's pedagogical environment promotes that they develop specific skills and modes of learning. It showed that learning oneself through self-initiated observations and reflexive engagement with practice constitute prevalent skills in what, following Rogoff *et al.* (2007) can be called the Mongolian *tradition of learning*. In this section, I turn to examine the process of participation through which children become competent at domestic and pastoral chores, and how this changes their status within their household group. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the progressive involvement of children in pastoral activities is integral to the education of Mongolian children in rural areas (see also Aubin 1975:509; Lacaze 2012:126). Far from being specific to the Mongolian pastoral context, the participation of children in productive activities is widely documented in most non-modern bourgeois

societies (e.g. Firth 1936:144-5; Gaskins 1999:50-3; Lancy 1996:41-71; Nag *et al.* 1978; Spittler & Bourdillon 2012) and constitute what Lancy calls a 'chore curriculum' to underline that children's participation in productive activities is educative and organised in progressive stages adapted to children's personal development (1996:148-149).

In his later work (2008: 235-242 & 2012), Lancy further highlights pedagogical characteristics of the 'chore curriculum'. Firstly, children are expected to be willing participants (2008:24). Secondly, learning to run errands principally occurs by emulating role models rather than through teaching (2008: 35). Thirdly, the onus to develop competences is on the learner not on the model (2008:39). In other words, the 'chore curriculum' represents a typical instance of the 'intent community participation' *tradition of learning* (Rogoff *et al.* 2007); and as outlined in the former section, these three aspects are congruent with how Mongolian parents believe that children should learn to develop domestic and pastoral competences 'by themselves'.

In this section, I combine Lancy's concept of 'chore curriculum' with Lave & Wenger's theory of *situated learning* (1991). I use Lave & Wenger's framework to go beyond an analysis of how children develop skills at each particular chore. Instead, I see the family group as the *community of practice* within which children learn to take a position as *participant* and examine children's trajectory within their household from incompetent little 'kings' to 'useful' *participants*. I follow Lave & Wenger's analytical framework of the learning trajectory as an 'evolving form of membership' (1991:53), however I contend that a *situated approach* to learning needs however not dissolve learning in participation. This is why, rather than using Lave & Wenger's terminology of 'newcomers' and 'old timers' (1991), I prefer to designate different participants according to their command of the tasks as *novices* or *experts*. Far from presenting children with a linear trajectory of participation we will see that the Mongolian 'chore curriculum' exposes children to contradictory injunctions, some of which challenge them to participate.

Learning is playing

Prior to becoming competent at helping, children learn to navigate their social and pastoral environments. This happens through a mixture of encouragements and spontaneous explorations. For instance, before children can walk, adults are keen to bring toddlers in the proximity of herds, and familiarize them with animals. Before Batuhan could even stand, Erdene took the opportunity of our occasional visits to the countryside to make him sit on the back of a docile horse, which was source of pleasure for them both. Once children have become confident walkers, they decide where to go within their village neighbourhood or camp vicinity. Otgono and Batuhan like other children spent a lot of their time outside, playing among themselves, watching animals, and joining adults for non-dangerous activities.

In spring, children could freely enter the corral where the kids and lambs (*ishignüüd*) were kept and liked to attempt to hold one in their arms. At five years old, Otgono and Ochir had long mastered the technique of catching and holding baby goats but for Batuhan, who at three was still only barely triple the goats' size, this proved a challenging endeavour. He showed a lot of perseverance, running, falling, still quite impressed by the not so predictable movements of the animals, until momentarily successful he called the attention of his older cousins or myself to proudly show us how he could hold a kid or lamb in his arms. Beyond this playful process of familiarization occurring independently of adults' involvement, children were allowed and often encouraged to be in the vicinity of adults when they were working. An example of this occurred in April 2009 as we were spending the school spring holidays with Otgono and Batuhan's grandpa, in the countryside.

Batuhan decided to follow his grandma, Hand, in the corral of the baby goats, and I followed them. While Hand and myself were going through the door, Batuhan climbed over the wooden fence. As he jumped in the corral, the baby goat and sheep instinctively ran to the other side. With his usual determination, Batuhan ran towards them. He caught one by the back legs and was forcefully trying to pull it so as to carry it in his arms. "Be gentle (Zöölön)!" said his grandmother jokingly threatening his nose with her fist.

Batuhan let go of the baby goat. When Batuhan's grandfather, Dorj, passed by the corral, Batuhan had just caught a baby goat and was holding it immobile. Seeing Dorj watching Batuhan, Hand commented emphatically, "Our Batuhan has become a very helpful and hardworking person (Manai Batuhan ih tusaldag, ajilsag hün boljee)!"

Before their participation is productive, young children's initiative to get involved in work activities is rewarded by adults. Their playful participation paves the way to their productive integration in work activities. In the situation described above, Batuhan did not contribute in any way to the task at hand, if anything his presence could have been seen as disturbing the activities by requiring adults to keep an eye on him.⁷⁷ Adults however welcomed and encouraged his presence by the keen attention they gave him, not least because young children's presence made their own work pleasurable, but they also *drew his attention* to the fact that helping was a source of personal recognition by others.



Figure 25: A boy immobilizing a goat to be milked

⁷⁷ See Little (2011:153-6) on how Asabano adults in Papua New Guinea prefer to keep children away from work activities until they are competent.

The absence of close monitoring of children's activities allows them to engage with work as play and play as work. Often, when performing tasks with a group of children or on their own, children engaged in chores with a playful stance, moving in and out of pretence and non-pretence modalities. For instance, when bringing a small herd to nearby pastures, one of the boys was often seen to put the stick he used to direct the herd between his legs and run behind the goats as if riding a horse. These moments of individual pretend play alternated with focused engagement with the herd and collective make-believe, such as playing at hosting guests in a miniature yurt made of a large circle of stones.⁷⁸ By and large, studies of pretend play (as reviewed by Lancy 2008:162-65) describe make-believe games as moments when children rehearse and practice skills that they then transfer to real life. Doing so presumes an a priori separation of playing from participating. While children in southern Mongolia did use pretend games to have fun outside of work activities, they also integrated make-believe and other forms of play into working. There were many other ways through which children turned productive chores into playful activities, for instance through competitive involvement, or by finding parallel interest in the environment be it in searching for special stones, trying to catch lizards or to kill fast running insects. In the early stage of children's involvement with domestic and pastoral chores, children see no distinction between learning and participating, nor do they distinguish between playing and working. At first, their mere presence is a source of compliments, but soon the pressure on them to actively participate increases.

Playing is working

Children first enjoy a large degree of self-determination in choosing whether to participate, but are progressively expected to take part in work activities. Most

⁷⁸ Otgono's great-aunt, Badma, took the initiative to drive me a few kilometres south of our camp to show me the vestige of a miniature yurt. Crawling next to her we endeavoured to realign the dispersed white stones into a perfect circle. She explained that as a child, she used to spend hours playing at the game of the yurt '*ail ger togloom*' looking for rightly shaped stones to constitute her miniature yurt, furniture and herd. Stones used to symbolise animals and objects had conventional shapes. White round stones represent sheep and goats. Flat triangular stones represent horses which can be made to run by holding them between one's index and thumb. Stones with 'two bumps', extremely hard to find, are used for camels. As a child, Badma spent days looking for perfectly shaped camel-stones or a perfectly round stove-stone. These stones became part of her toy kit that she and her sister transported as they changed camps. As described below, Bilgüün and Ochir played with a larger miniature yurt in a different manner. At the time of my fieldwork, no children played in the way described by their great-aunt or knew of the different forms of stone to represent animals.

pastoral chores are performed in groups so that young children can remain at the *periphery* of the activity and learn from observing and cooperating with more experienced people. In the countryside, one of the first chores that children are made responsible for is directing herds of goats and sheep towards nearby pastures. On Otgono's and Batuhan's grandfather's camp where there was a large herd of camels, another chore allocated to children was to keep the camels apart from their foals before they were milked. In summer 2008, a total of seven to eleven children between the ages of three and eleven lived on Dorj's camp and his sons' nearby camp. In the afternoon, when the first camels could be seen at a distance responding to the call of their hungry foals, adults ordered all children to go outside. Their task consisted in filtering the coming camels so that women could milk them first before letting them freely feed their foals.



Figure 26: Children keeping camels away from their foals

Batuhan and Myagmar, who at three years old were the youngest children of the group, were encouraged to go with the older children though not forced to do so. While Batuhan was keen on going, Myagmar showed little interest in herding activities. Most often, by the time Batuhan and Myagmar had found their hats to

protect them from the fierce midday sun, all the older children had already gathered. Children coordinated seemingly spontaneously to prevent the approaching camels from entering the open area where baby camels were attached by cords lined up and staked to the ground. When a woman had finished milking a camel, she signalled to the children to let another one approach. Exchanging a quick glance, children immediately released 'the right' camel. This required them to have previously recognized the symbol (*temdeg*)⁷⁹ identifying what herd the camel belonged to (that summer they were three different herds) and match this information to the person calling for a camel, because each woman milked exclusively camels from her own herd.

At the beginning of the summer, Batuhan and Myagmar were quite scared when facing these gigantic animals coming towards them. Being stimulated by the underlying competitive atmosphere Batuhan progressively gained confidence. He first dared throw stones at a close enough distance from the camels to potentially reach them, quickly running away just after sending his projectile and checking afterwards whether the camel had stopped. After a few weeks, Batuhan tried running towards a camel shaking a stick to scare it away, most often successfully or retreating rapidly behind an older child when a camel advanced regardless of his threat. Myagmar, on the other hand, often 'forgot' about the camels, and instead got captivated by catching insects, searching for stones or by a solitary pretend game.

In the case of holding back camels, like for other chores performed by children only or by children and adults together, activities were only minimally coordinated through direct orders and verbal exchanges and the realisation of tasks relied on each individual's initiative. Bilgüün and Uyanga were among the most experienced children, and sometimes gave a quick order to watch a camel or asked a child to keep an eye on a given camel while they pushed back another one coming too close. Like younger children, they played as they worked, however their attention to the general task remained closer and they were more likely to step in when immediate intervention was required.

⁷⁹ See Humphrey (1974b) for a presentation of the system of symbols used to identify herds.

Not all children were equally mindful of participating productively. Batoya did not have much experience but aged eleven, he was the oldest. He liked to use (and abuse) his status as *ah* to give orders to the younger children, and also to challenge them in ways that tended to disrupt coordinated efforts rather than increase their efficacy. Ochir had the utmost fascination for Batoya and was always keen to engage in indirect competition with him: throwing stones further away, running towards a camel who someone was already watching, and so on. Irrespective of the different ways in which children engaged with the tasks and though the composition of the group of children varied every day, they nonetheless managed to hold the camels at a distance without adults' intervention.

By the end of the summer, Batuhan and Myagmar's participation was considered less and less optional. Adults still let them 'oversleep' while older children were expected to wake up early to start the day helping with the first chores. During the day however adults expected that they either respond to the collective call to help or that they help upon their own initiative. Myagmar nonetheless remained relatively uninterested in collective activities. When his father came back from a day of herding, he enquired about his participation and reproached him increasingly harshly for not joining in the work with the other children. Given the presence of a large group of older children that summer, Myagmar's help was not required for the tasks to be performed. Myagmar's father's concern was thus that his son should learn to work and voluntarily take part in chores. The next summer, Dorj's camp (*hot ail*) did not include as many children. Batuhan had now become a confident 'camel watcher'. His participation was no longer considered subsidiary but adults and older children counted on his help.

Being challenged to participate

We have seen that children are increasingly expected to be present and to participate in pastoral and domestic chores and that their participation is a way to be acknowledged as a useful member of their family. At times however, adults choose to challenge children's initiative to participate in an activity. I present such a situation which happened at home one evening in February 2008.

Otgono was running after his brother with a belt while Batuhan was neighing and running, imitating the rhythm of a horse galloping. Erdene, their father, received a message on his phone. He stood up and ordered, "Clean the house (Geree tseverleerei)! Everything must be tidy when I come back with mummy (Eejiig chini avaad irehed geree tseverlesen baigaarai)!" Batuhan enthusiastically took the hand brush and was about to sweep the carpet when his father stopped him, "You don't know how to do it (Chi chadahgüi)," and thereafter left to pick up their mother. When their parents came back, Otgono and Batuhan were still playing and Erdene reproached Otgono for not having cleaned anything.

The way Batuhan was discouraged to sweep is not characteristic of interactions with young children only. Rather, the interjection "*Chi chadahgüi*!" ("you can't do it" or "you are not capable of doing it") represents an interactional routine which is used towards older children and adults by more experienced and older people. Another instance of this interactional routine happened during the summer of 2008 on Otgono and Batuhan's grandfather's camp.

The baby camels had been in the pastures all morning and it was time to catch them and tether them by their cords. This task was usually performed by adults and experienced teenagers. Nine-year-old Uyanga, however, took the initiative to join us and approached an immobile foal. Her father seeing her doing so exclaimed, "You cannot do it (Chi chadahgüi)!" As she hesitantly reached for the halter, the camel got away from her. Uyanga however did not feel discouraged and tried again. A few minutes later, she called me to help her pull the foal she had caught. Her father looked at her and smiled without saying anything.

The next day Uyanga helped us tie up the foals without any adult dismissing her capacity to help. Looking at her Hand commented, "There is nothing Uyanga cannot do (Chadahgüi yum baihgüi)!" In the evening Hand congratulated her for her hard work and gave her a few sweets without giving any to others.

In the two situations described above, a child spontaneously got involved in helping with a chore in which she/he had not previously demonstrated aptitude. In both cases, older more competent persons were available to perform the task at hand and Batuhan like Uyanga saw their voluntary initiative rebuffed by their father. Children are thus presented with what seems to be a pedagogical paradox. On the one hand, they are expected to help upon their own initiative; on the other hand, their initiative might be rebuffed if they have not yet demonstrated their competence. This interactional routine thus puts novices under pressure to have learned prior to having tried.

In her ethnography of Halh pastoral herders of the Övörhangai region, High (2008:48-53) describes a comparable situation where a junior child who is rolling circles of dough for the first time, is harshly rebuffed by her older sister. High interprets this refusal to teach younger ones and their exclusion from participation as a way for more senior people to 'fervently assert their own status position in face of potential competition' (2008:48). For High, the refusal of experts to teach and integrate novices in their activities is one of the ways through which senior people produce and maintain hierarchical relations.

A significant difference between the context of High's study and the situation on Dorj's camp is the relative abundance or scarcity of the workforce in relation to the workload. In the pastoral family described by High, the workforce was plentiful to the extent that work not only represented a status symbol but was also valued as a source of activity and distraction from 'resting time' (*zav*). On Dorj's camp on the contrary, the workload was heavy, and adults barely had any time to rest during the day so that the participation of more people was a relief. The fact that help was in fact needed makes the discouragement of children's initiative to help with new tasks all the more surprising. In the case of Uyanga, it is possible that her father was concerned for her safety and felt that her presence was actually disrupting or an additional workload for him, or arguably that excluding his daughter was a way to assert and maintain his authority. Batuhan's case however suggests that there is more to this routine interaction than the assertion of power. In fact, Erdene did not secure his personal status by preventing Batuhan from doing a task that he himself did not perform. Otgono on the other hand was usually more than happy to

see Batuhan take over his domestic duties. Why then did Erdene rebuff Batuhan when he tried to help?

The dismissal of novices' capacity either pre-empts their participation or is used as an assessment of their performance. Depending on the situation and the tone used, the affirmation that one is incapable ranges from cheerful mockery to harsh dismissal. In any case, as High underlines, the process of learning is marked by the stigma of being incapable (2008:49). Despite the dismissal she encountered, we saw that Uyanga's personal motivation was so strong as to keep trying to catch a baby camel. The motivation of children to learn and to participate conforms to Lave & Wenger's theory which outlines humans are *social learners* and their *motivation* to participate is integral to their motivation for learning. In their model however, motivation is by and large assumed to be 'a given' and treated as a generic aspect of participation. I suggest that children's motivation for learning and participating also needs be 'situated' so as to understand the social challenges of learning and the meaning of participating.

In the two situations I presented, the rebuffing of the novice taking the initiative to perform a new task had opposite effects. Batuhan took the order literally and abandoned the project of sweeping. Aged nine, Uyanga had been exposed repeatedly to the dismissal of her attempts to take the responsibility of performing a task at which she had not proved competent. For her, her father's discouragement worked as a challenge to publicly prove her capacity and in this sense motivated rather than discouraged her participation. I argue that as they grow older and are increasingly shown that personal recognition by others depends on working with others, this routine by which adults challenge children to demonstrate their capacities is motivational, first as a way to stimulate children to pay attention and practice on their own prior to participating and secondly as making participation a marker of status. Let me evidence these two points in turn.

In many of their games, children enjoyed comparing their competences and creativity at enacting various activities: be it jumping with a rope, throwing an object as far as possible, jumping around a pole, choreographing a dance, etc. I

myself took part in some of these little competitions during which children were especially keen on testing my abilities.

As we were outside after having milked the goats, Ochir rapidly moved the fingers of his right hand so as to create a specific shape and challenged me to do the same: "Can you do it Auntie Aude (Od egee chadah uu)?" Bilgüün, Otgono, Urga and Myagmar were also present and quickly reproduced the pattern with their fingers. Only I, to their great amusement, remained incapable of linking my thumb with my small finger. Ochir assessed my performance mercilessly: "Auntie Aude cannot do it!" Following my 'defeat' at twisting my fingers, I stood up and performed a cartwheel and defied Ochir, "Can you do it (Chadah uu)?" The four of them immediately tried to imitate the movement, falling and laughing while I teased them for being incapable. A few days later, Ochir whom I had seen practising on his own behind the storage room called me and showed me that he was now capable of performing a cartwheel.

In this situation, like in situations when an adult assessed negatively the performance of a novice, Ochir gave me no explanation or guidance to help me learn. Rather, I was left to better observe and practice on my own till I would next be challenged to demonstrate my skills. On the other hand, Ochir asked me for no explanation on how to perform a cartwheel but took it upon himself to practice on his own until he could do it. The public challenges that adults set to children and that children set to each other to prove that they are capable creates an on-going motivation to develop new skills so as to be accepted as participant in collective activities.

Like adults, children do not hesitate to exclude novices who fail to learn by themselves. I had given Otgono and Bilgüün a snap card game and had taught them how to play. They loved playing with it and brought the game to the countryside. Bilgüün who kept charge of the game had agreed that Urga and Ochir, who had never played before, could join a game. Giving them their share of cards, they started to play one after the other. When Ochir randomly snapped a card, Bilgüün took the cards back telling him he was wrong. After a few attempts, Bilgüün's

verdict was final: “You two are not capable of playing! Enough! (*Ta hoyor togloj chadahgüi! Boli!*)” And thereafter he excluded them from the game. Putting the responsibility on the novices to demonstrate their competence, this interactional routine promotes children’s sense that it is their personal duty to learn. This is coherent with adults’ assumption that children best learn by their own devices and that they should develop a sense of responsibility towards the task they undertake. It also demands of the novices that they themselves assess when they are ready to participate and puts pressure on them to perform the task well.

Let me turn to the second point: the way the challenge to participating transforms work into a status marker. The initial obstacle that her father instigated against her participation, made Uyanga’s performance and later integration a personal success: she had publicly proven that ‘she was capable’ despite expectations to the contrary. Moreover, once having proved herself to be capable, her competences were acknowledged by the family group. Not only did adults speak highly of Uyanga among each other; but she was also directly complimented and rewarded. Showing her capacity to help tie camels allowed Uyanga to distinguish herself as a skilled and hardworking person within her household. By participating in an activity from which younger children were excluded, it also allowed Uyanga to assert her status as older.

The interactional routine which dismisses novices’ capacity to participate works as a threshold between those who are capable and those who are not capable, between those integrated as a *participant* on which others rely and those who are at the *periphery* of activities. It marks the change of children within their family from being a young incapable child to being an older competent and resourceful person (*chadvartai hün*). The general trajectory of children’s participation from self-initiated to mandatory applies to each chore independently. For instance, a child might be required to wash bowls but his participation in milking activities still seen as voluntary. The degree of involvement requested of each participant also depends on the available labour force, so that people’s position as *peripheral* or *full participants* varies. For instance, one evening when all senior women had gone home to welcome guests, Bilgüün and myself who were usually *peripheral* to

milking goats found ourselves the only and thus central 'participants' and had to manage the responsibility of milking all the goats.

In this section, we have seen that children's involvement in pastoral and domestic tasks is viewed in three different ways: their participation is either welcomed, requested or rebuffed. Adults' approach to learning domestic and pastoral skills is underpinned by the idea that children should learn themselves through observation and voluntary participation and thus adults rarely supervise the acquisition of domestic and pastoral skills in a didactic manner. Looking at the trajectory of learning at each given chore, children's participation goes from voluntary to mandatory. However, being encouraged, rebuffed and requested to participate are not strictly chronologically sequenced stages in learning. Children are at times welcome and encouraged, at others dismissed, and in other circumstances requested to work and left to collectively organise a chore. While these injunctions might seem contradictory, they all converge in instilling children with a sense of responsibility to become competent participants in the household economy. Being acknowledged as competent has in fact direct moral implications: once one has proven capable, participation is no longer considered voluntary but expected, as I turn to explain in the next section.

Learning to be a reliable daughter or son

In the previous section, I have presented children as highly motivated participants, who overcome challenges to learning and dismissive remarks by adults to show that they are competent. Needless to say children are not always so enthusiastic to participate. In this last section, I examine what happens when children do not meet adults' expectations to be useful. It will show that the moral transformation of children through learning to work is not only one of proving personal competences and developing a gendered identity but also of understanding one's responsibilities as family member and becoming a reliable daughter (*ohin*) or son (*hüü*).

When participating is no longer learning

In the village, Otgono and Bilgüün went to school in the mornings but had most of their afternoons and weekends free. When not in school, they spent a lot of their time with neighbouring children, playing outside or paying visits to collect sweets or more rarely watching TV (although we had an impressive TV set it was not working during the first year of my fieldwork). Every morning Otgono's mother, Tuyaa, reminded them that after school, they had to come back home, have lunch, clean the house and do their homework. Most days, Bilgüün and Otgono however preferred to go out and play, coming back towards the end of the afternoon to do their homework soon before they expected Tuyaa to come back. At weekends, the same scenario unfolded.

After breakfast, Tuyaa announced that today no one was allowed to go out and play. Batuhan, Otgono and Bilgüün were to stay home, work and do their homework. It was not long however before Otgono went out with the excuse of going to the toilet. And as we all expected, Otgono did not return home for several hours. Otgono knew perfectly well what awaited him upon his return. Tuyaa lost her temper and scolded him for spending his time playing instead of working (*ajilla-*) and doing his homework (*geriin daalgavar hii-*). Otgono kept silent until his mother had finished scolding him and thereafter did his homework or helped with the chores.⁸⁰ Once the moment for scolding had passed, Tuyaa resumed her normal tone of voice.

Otgono's keenness to escape contrasted with his enthusiastic attitude in participating and helping his mother when at home. For instance, Otgono sometimes took the initiative to stir tea with the large ladle, closely supervised by Tuyaa. On laundry days he happily hand-washed small items. Aged six, when the crotch of his trousers got torn, without asking, he took a needle and thread from Tuyaa's sewing box and mended them. When Tuyaa saw him, she let him finish and then complimented him, showing his dad how he had himself repaired his trousers. At the end of August 2008, when he came back to the village after having spent most of his summer in the countryside, he offered to prepare dough for

⁸⁰ As described by Morton for Tongan children (1996:189-95), silently enduring scolding is also a way through which children learn self-control.

dinner, stating with pride, "I am capable to prepare dough (*bi guril hiiij chadna*)."

Besides receiving direct compliments after he prepared dough, Otgono kept overhearing his mother telling visitors how her son had learned to prepare dough and was so keen on helping her. The way Otgono's personal competence was turned into a source of public pride confirms that as we saw in the previous section, developing personal skills is a way to receive individual recognition but also a way to demonstrate social competence as a family member who can actively contribute to the household economy.

Despite adults' expectations that boys identify most closely with their father, Otgono seemed really keen to imitate his mother. In the village, he had in fact far less opportunity to help his father than he had to help with domestic tasks. However while Otgono was happy to help with new tasks for the achievement of which he was publicly rewarded, his help was far less enthusiastic when it came to daily chores such as washing dishes or sweeping the floor. Every evening, Bilgüün and Otgono in fact argued and tried out different strategies (sudden headaches, apparent deafness to orders, need to go to the toilet, etc.) to delay helping and/or make their sibling responsible for these chores.

The contrast between Otgono's spontaneous interest in participating in some tasks and his reluctance to perform others is not due to Otgono having initially no intrinsic interest in certain tasks. Rather, his motivation to perform tasks followed a similar trajectory. First, Otgono was extremely motivated in learning something new and in taking part in activities he saw older persons perform. For instance, aged three Otgono had been extremely keen on helping wash dishes or sweep the floor. Aged five, his enthusiasm for such tasks had however long gone. As we saw earlier, when Erdene asked the boys to clean the house, Batuhan eagerly grasped the hand-brush while Otgono waited for his father to leave to invite his brother to resume playing. Once children become competent at a task, not only the intrinsically motivating challenge of learning vanishes but also children are rewarded less and less for doing them. Instead, this chore becomes a daily duty that they are expected to perform and scolded when they do not.

As discussed earlier, Lave & Wenger's theory of learning (1991) suggests that people are intrinsically motivated to learn and participate. We saw how most children in fact appeared so motivated to learn that they even overcame abrupt dismissals from more expert people. However, motivation is not a steady factor but needs to be understood in relation to children's learning and social trajectory within their family. Children initially see virtually no difference between working and playing as they are by and large free to participate or not and learning makes performing chores fun. Once older and more competent, participation is however no longer like playing but becomes work. As a result, once children mastered a skill and once they had passed the threshold of being acknowledged as competent, participation alone did not seem rewarding enough to motivate their voluntary and reliable involvement. As Otgono grew older, his enthusiasm for paying visits to neighbours and more generally not to spend time at home increased. Indubitably, he liked playing with friends and collecting treats from neighbouring households. Moreover not being home had also become a way to escape his increasing responsibilities in helping with daily chores.

'Educational hiccups'

Bilgüün's younger brother Ochir finished his morning tea quickly, stood up and was about to leave. Bilgüün protested, "Wash your bowl (Ayagaa ugaa)!" "You too have to clean the house, why am I always the only one who does the cleaning?" As usual, Ochir ignored his sister's orders and left without rinsing his breakfast bowl. I decided to stay with Bilgüün, writing notes in the western side of the yurt.

Knowing that everyone was busy outside, Bilgüün endeavoured to open her mother's chest. Visitors had brought some new sweets the day before. She opened the sweet bag and brought out an open packet of soft sweets. She regularly looked through the open door which looked directly onto the baby camels' tethers. When she saw that all the camels had been gathered and were now pushed away by her grandpa, she quickly put the bag back in and closed the chest.

When her mother got in, Bilgüün was sweeping the carpet with fast and short movements. Bayar immediately noticed that she had just started sweeping, all the more that breakfast bowls had been left unwashed next to the stove. Bayar flew into a rage. “Why can you not work (Chi yagaad ajil hiiᠵ chadahgüi baina)? What have you been doing? The bowls are still there, dirty, and you are not even capable of sweeping properly (Hog shüürdej chadahgüi)!” Bayar egch said, taking the bowl and washing it energetically. Bilgüün kept sweeping the floor, avoiding eye contact with her mother who was scolding her increasingly virulently. “It is the same with your homework: you don’t work enough, you know nothing (yu ch medehgüi) and you don’t help either (tuslahgüi). There is nothing you do well, you cannot be a student and you cannot be a herder either, you cannot even sweep the floor!”

Bayar took the hand-broom from Bilgüün’s hands. “Look!” she said furiously. Bayar egch used slower movements but applied more pressure than Bilgüün so that she both extracted more dirt from the carpet and did not make it ‘fly’ as much. She continued, still beside herself, “We have no need for a lazy daughter (zalhuu ohin), go if you don’t want to work and don’t care to study. All you do is play! You’ve passed the age of playing. You need to work and do your homework. No more playing Bilgüün, when you are done helping, take your books and read (nomoo unsh).”

This scolding scene did not represent a one-off outburst. Rather, over that summer, Bilgüün and her parents entertained very different ideas of what she should spend her time doing and she was frequently scolded. The use of such a technique of discipline is surprising as it violates Mongolian moral and pedagogical precepts. It contradicts both the value of calmness, the principle of exemplarity and is potentially dangerous both for the person getting angry and the child being scolded (see Chapter 4); moreover other disciplinary techniques could be used which would seem more congruent with the Mongolian ethic of calmness (e.g. punishing without scolding, supervising children more closely, time outs, etc.).

Given that they contradict both educative and moral precepts, it might be the case that these scenes be best considered momentary ‘breakdowns’ of the moral system

or personal moments of relief. If we follow this line of argument, parents' anger should be considered as fleeting loss of temper. They, so to say, 'got mad', lost control, behaved contrary to 'the normal way'. The problem with such an explanation is firstly that it assumes that people act fully intentionally so that it is surprising that their actions do not match their ethical precepts. Secondly it assumes that individual emotional outbursts are either beyond the realm of social analysis, a form of individual deviance or that they function as valves within a hegemonic regime of emotional control. Thirdly, it takes no consideration of children's role in triggering their parents' outrage and overlooks the possible pedagogical merits of a morally unpredictable but actually recurrent mode of interaction. Instead of adopting an emic frame of analysis and looking at emotional display as a negative and dangerous way of behaving, I suggest that scolding is best conceived as an 'educational hiccup'⁸¹, both uncontrollable and recurrent, both disruptive and integral to Mongolian child-rearing practices.

In her study of children's education and horse-breaking among people of the Altaic region, Ferret highlights two characteristics of Altaic education: first the 'absence of authoritarianism', and secondly the use of 'discontinuous action'⁸² (2010:161-165), both of which are congruent with my observations. Children experience discontinuity in two ways. First, the initial privileged status of children is followed by a period when children are harshly summoned to help (Ferret 2010:162-3). Secondly, children's education is marked by the alternation between the considerable autonomy of children and direct, prompt interventions by adults.⁸³

As children gain physical and emotional autonomy, they are granted a large measure of freedom in their whereabouts and activities. Moments of energetic scolding need to be understood against the background of the lack of direct supervision by adults over their daily activities. As Otgono grew older, Tuyaa was increasingly unhappy that he spent so much of his time playing outside instead of helping or doing his homework. Nonetheless she rarely directly intervened to make him come back earlier, although she could easily have done so, for instance

⁸¹ I borrow the term from Legrain who organised an Inner Asian workshop on the theme 'Hiccups of social life' (Cambridge, 2013).

⁸² Personal translation.

⁸³ Ferret outlines this aspect in relation to how horses are tamed (2010:159-61) but does not develop it in relation to children's education.

by sending Bilgüün or Batuhan to find him. While Tuyaa did not step in to prevent Otgono from disobeying her, she was genuinely irritated by the fact he lacked discipline (*sahilgagüi*) and scolded him when he came back home. In work-related circumstances, Tuyaa acknowledged being an angry person (*uurtai hūn*) and blamed herself for it. In the instances when she scolded Otgono however, she rather described the situation as a response to Otgono's behaviour which 'caused her to scold him', using the factitive form of the verb to scold, *zagnuula*-.

As we saw in the introduction with regard to households living off pastoral activities, the completion of work relies on the interdependence and also on the self-initiative, diligence and sense of responsibility of each person according to their position within the family. The constant variation of the compositions of households applies equally to the village. And, very much like in the countryside, children spend a lot of their time unsupervised by adults. More generally, the principle of individual reliability according to one's position as a family member is held as a moral obligation. In fact, not helping amounts to forcing someone senior to oneself to fulfil one's personal responsibilities and thus also shows disrespect. In other words, among household members, individual autonomy underpins cooperation and is embedded within the *ah düü* mode of relating. Although it came as no surprise that Otgono had disappeared, Tuyaa's disappointment upon his late return was genuine, because Otgono's disobedience showed both a lack of sense of responsibility as a family member, a lack of respect for her and reflected badly on her own quality as a mother. Let me further explain this point.

Children's education is considered a parental matter. With the occasional exception of grandparents or close kin with whom children temporally live, people consider that it is totally inappropriate to scold another person's child (*hüüni hüühed*).⁸⁴ Because no other person but their parents are allowed to discipline children and that children are believed to chiefly learn from the exemplar of their parents, a child who misbehaves is seen as a direct reflection of his parents' educative and moral qualities. This circularly reinforces the predicament not to scold other people's children as it indirectly insults the parents of the child for not being a good model and/or not being able to raise their child properly. Tuyaa once

⁸⁴ For an opposite example see for example Kpelle children's experiences who can be disciplined by any older person (Lancy 1996:86).

mentioned that she would hate being a school teacher as scolding other people's children was such a bad thing to do.

The moral affiliation between parents and their children continues throughout life. Zolma outraged by her twenty years old younger brother who had spent his afternoon drinking reminded him that when drinking, it was not just his name but his father's name that people pronounced. Conversely, behaving well and actively contributing to the household economy reflects the moral quality of a child's parents. In other words, children's work ethic and helpfulness are not just useful individual qualities to help within one's family; they are moral competences through which children honour their parent's names as daughters and sons.

Tuyaa's angry verbal reprimands towards Otgono, or Bayar's furious admonishment of Bilgüün marked a period of transition when Otgono and Bilgüün still behaved like young children who could act with no consideration for family matter, while their mothers now considered that they should be concerned with the image they gave of their family and feel responsible to help them and to do their homework (see Chapter 8). Otgono and Batuhan were however left with the opportunity to 'freely disobey' (partly because their mothers often needed to be outside to work) but they were also made to face the consequences of their action if they do, namely their mother's anger. In his analysis of anger among the Pintupi, Myers (1988) argues that anger is a reaction to a denial of relatedness in a context of high individual autonomy and interdependence. Parents' anger in Mongolia also makes sense against the background of the high interdependence of family members. By contrast with the Pintupis among whom the legitimacy of anger is a product of equal relationships (1988:596-8), in the Mongolian context, 'educational hiccups' constitute a disciplining mechanism whose effect is to subdue children's autonomy to their duty to help and become reliable members of their family. Harsh scolding interactions which contradict Mongolian educative and moral precepts thus irrupt at a point of tension between on the one hand, the value placed on individual autonomy and the self-initiated nature of personal contribution, and on the other hand, the value of respect and hierarchically structured interdependence among family members.

When parent's outrage escalated, it rarely involved physical punishment, but often led to a threat to reject the disobedient child from the family, as illustrated in the interaction between Bilgüün and her mother. 'Educational hiccups' in the form of virulent scolding and threat of exclusion show children that the status of cherished member of their family that they thus far took for granted is being transformed into a moral contract: if they do not want to stay home and help, they may as well leave their family. We saw in Chapter 3 that when babies are born they are integrated within their family as cherished sons and daughters. Growing older, children discover that this status comes with obligations. The unconditional relation of love that young children entertained with their parents as kings is turned into a mutual moral relation which requires that children behave as good sons or daughters (see also Empson 2003:102-31).

The gender of work

In the introduction, we saw that the distribution of work among household members is gendered. We have seen that initially boys and girls all develop basic skills in typically female and typically male tasks. Boys learn to clean, to cook, to milk goats, etc. Girls walk the herd to pasture and go to the well; most girls, though not all of them and often later than boys, learn to horse ride, etc. This initial phase gives children an overview of how tasks are conducted by men and women and helps them develop basic skills in domestic and herding skills alike. This later allows them to flexibly collaborate in domestic and pastoral tasks whatever the composition of the household is at any given moment. However, because girls are under more pressure to help at home and boys spend more and more time away helping their father or uncles or playing with other boys, girls and boys increasingly develop specialised gendered skills.

When Bilgüün was in the countryside with her parents, she and her brother were both asked by their mother and sometimes father to 'clean the house' (*Geree tseverleerei*). As illustrated by the vignette, Ochir however rarely felt compelled to obey the order. At best he cleaned his bowl and promised to dry the rest of the dishes the next day. Most often he got away without helping. When their mother came back from outdoor activities and found the house untidy, she tended to direct

her reproaches at Bilgüün exclusively. Bilgüün's mother's reproaches were not always based on the actual need for the house to be clean. In fact, she sometimes asked Bilgüün to sweep their home just after she had herself swept the floor. By ordering Bilgüün to clean even when the floor was not dirty, Bayar pointed out to her daughter that there was no end to domestic work and that a woman should never be seen idle (*zalhuu*).

The tolerance of Ochir's parents towards his unreliable participation was partly explained by the fact that he was two years younger than Bilgüün, but also because domestic tasks are typically female. A year later Ochir was increasingly expected to be helpful too. By then Bilgüün had become a reliable help at home and Ochir was not asked to substitute for her. She had also become a lot more accepting of the fact that she was made responsible for domestic tasks to a much larger extent than her brother. Though she still tried to convince him to help, she now rarely became angry when he did not, increasingly accepting and taking pride in performing the chores she was allotted as the older daughter of her family. In parallel, Ochir could still get away with not washing his bowl but he started to be scolded more frequently if he was caught not helping pro-actively with herding tasks.

At home in the village, differences between the contribution that Tuyaa required from Bilgüün and from Otgono increased with time. Initially both of them were required to clean the home in her absence and to help wash up dishes after meals. However Otgono and Batuhan tended to be more often asked to fill the dung basket than their cousin, a task which although typically female, implied going outside. Conversely, after the birth of Saraa, Bilgüün was more often made responsible for caring for her than Otgono was. However, none of the tasks they performed were exclusively gendered. As mentioned in the introduction, life in the village presents children with less opportunity to contribute to work as only domestic chores can be shared. As a result, mothers often tend to request that boys also help them with what are traditionally considered typically female tasks.



Figure 27: Brother and sister doing laundry



Figure 28: Young boy top-up the dung reserve

This is a relatively new phenomenon that some older people find shocking. As we were paying a visit to Otgono's grandparents, Tuyaa asked Otgono to sweep the floor. Seeing Otgono taking the hand-broom, Otgono's great-grandmother scolded Tuyaa, "Why is Otgono sweeping the floor? Boys don't sweep (*Hövgүүд hog shүүrdej bolohгүй*)!" She added, moaning to herself, "He is going to run out of fortune (*Az hiimori ni doroitno*)!" The gender division of tasks indeed goes hand in hand with conceptions about appropriate behaviours and the preservation of one's own and family fortune. For example, at the time of my fieldwork, it was accepted that men could sweep the floor, however they still avoided emptying the ashes from the stove as doing so was seen as unpropitious.

Despite trying to raise Otgono and Batuhan to help her at home, when pregnant with her third child Tuyaa admitted that she hoped to have a daughter so as to have more support at home. In fact, everyone took it as a matter of fact that girls help their mother more than boys do. Even when a girl had a brother a few years older than her, girls were always more responsible for helping at home. As we saw, Otgono took part in domestic tasks with Bilgүүн and took pride in being able to make dough. He nonetheless also had a clear idea about what constituted male and female work, as the following interaction which occurred when he was six will demonstrate. I was home with Otgono and Bilgүүн when I received a text from Erdene announcing that Tuyaa had given birth to a baby girl. I shared the news, congratulated Otgono and asked him whether he was happy to have a sister. He answered, "Yes, because once she is big enough, she will do my laundry." Otgono's answer echoes his increasing keenness on asserting himself as a boy and his increasingly gendered view of chores. It also demonstrates that he shared adults' view that family members are born mutually interdependent and have the obligation to help each other.

Overall, men and women adopt a flexible approach to 'the gender of work' and flexibly replace each other as long as the substitution is temporary. Erdene for instance saw no problem in being responsible for domestic chores in the month following the birth of Saraa. Given that work is one of the main mechanisms of the production of gender identity, being made durably responsible of a female task for a man or a male task for a woman is however seen as a threat to one's status. In the village context where men and women's interdependence is no longer structured

around pastoral activities, the forms of mutual interdependence among family members needs to be redefined and does not go without of tension. Tuyaa's long office hours put Erdene under the duty to help her, and he occasionally took the initiative to cook dinner on weekdays. He however steadily refused to take responsibility for domestic tasks on a regular basis. In the same way, Baltan, a fourteen-year-old boy who, during the school year lived together with his two sisters (respectively eleven and six years old) had a similar understanding of gender roles. Although Baltan's sister was three years his junior, she was responsible for cooking and cleaning for the three of them as well as supervising their younger sister. It is not that Baltan did not know how to cook or to clean but simply that in the presence of his sister, he did not consider it to be his role.

In September 2009, Ochir started school. Towards the end of the month, their great-grandmother moved to the village and they both stayed with her. Since her brother had moved to the village, Bilgüün adopted a strikingly different attitude. While in the countryside, Bilgüün had no ascendancy over her brother, in the village, she proactively took the role of protective older sister, to which her brother conceded especially in relation to his school work. Moreover, in a context where there was no other woman but her great-grandmother at home, she seemed to take it upon herself to feel responsible for an increasing numbers of domestic chores and felt proud of having learned to lit up the stove. She also regularly came to our yurt and helped taking care of her baby cousin. It is not to say that she always prioritized housework or homework over playing outside, but her great-grandmother could count on her to perform daily domestic chores without being asked to. The scolding interventions to which she had become accustomed were replaced by the frequent compliments she received or overheard for being a hard-working person (*ajiltai hün*) and helpful daughter (*tusaldag ohin*).

Conclusion

I started this chapter by presenting the challenges of learning to be useful within the pastoral domestic economy where the constant variation of the household composition requires that individuals be both specialised and multi-skilled, take the initiative to work but know how to collaborate and to distribute daily chores. This chapter has demonstrated four main social mechanisms through which children learn to become both competent and useful, to develop the capacity to participate in collective activities and to acquire specialised gendered skills and by so doing transform children into reliable daughter or son.

First, we have seen that adults' relative reluctance to direct children in learning promotes their autodidactic learning by developing an acute attention to socially relevant information, and makes them prone to reflexively engage in learning rather than expect to be supported by a more expert person. Secondly, using Lave & Wenger's theory of situated learning and Lancy's concept of the chore curriculum, we saw that the modalities of children's participation in domestic and pastoral activities encouraged children to feel responsible for learning and helping. I showed that by rewarding young children's voluntary participation, by putting them under increasing pressure to participate upon their own initiative, and by also challenging them to prove they are competent to be integrated within work activities, participation is turned into a status threshold. By developing personal competences and by participating, children who can no longer claim the status of king become acknowledged positively as capable and useful members of their household.

Thirdly, I showed that the use of scolding by parents, which seems to contradict the ethical and pedagogical precepts of the *ah düü* mode of relating, in fact, preserved children's individual autonomy while making them aware of their responsibilities. Lastly, we saw that the process of specialisation is progressive. Children first gain a general understanding of chores by being encouraged to participate in both male and female chores and also develop the capacity to take the initiative to perform new tasks. As they grow older boys and girls increasingly take part in different domains of activities, and learn to identify with different

responsibilities within their family and to honour their responsibilities as daughters or sons.

This chapter shows it is not just the personal competences that children develop but the very process of learning and participating which turn children into useful members of their family, according to a hierarchically organised mode of interdependence structured by the *ah düü* mode of relating. The process by which children transform from dependent little kings to competent members of their household fosters their autonomy in two ways. First, self-sufficiency is required of them in accomplishing individual tasks. Secondly, they are encouraged to develop autodidactic abilities by being made responsible for working without being directly supervised. Moreover, the compliments they receive for developing personal skills fosters their sense of individuality. Through the use of rewarding and disciplining modes of interaction, children are however shown that individual skills and autonomy are only valuable as tools which allow individuals to take positions and to willingly fulfil their obligations as son or daughter. In other words, as they grow older, children's sense of individuality develops encompassed within their sense of mutuality. Being hardworking and reliable is a moral quality through which they honour their affiliation to their parents and which allow them to be integrated and acknowledged in any family in which they temporarily live thanks to the structured but adaptable ordering of relations and economic cooperation through the *ah düü* modes of relating.

Chapter 8. Learning to be a ‘good pupil’ (*sain suragch*)

For children raised in the countryside, like Bilgüün and Ochir, going to school meant leaving their family and moving to the village. They experienced this change as both hard and exciting. Although Bilgüün found being away from home difficult, by the end of the summer she was happy to go back to school and be reunited with her friends. Unlike her older cousin Ochune who had a personal interest in school subjects, Bilgüün did not especially like to learn what she was taught in school. When doing her homework, she often fell asleep over her notebooks or got distracted by activities in the home, preferring to watch TV or play with Batuhan. However, she took her duties as a pupil seriously and in the morning got out of bed promptly after Tuyaa to make sure not to be late for school.

We saw at the beginning of Chapter 5, how, once Bilgüün entered school, it was expected that she should be capable of withstanding the experience of separation from her home without being distressed. Moreover, as she was repeatedly told by her parents when they paid a quick visit to the village or before she left her home, after school, she should not play with her friends or spend time outside, but go home, do her homework (*geriin daalgavar*), clean the home and help her aunt with other domestic chores. In other words, beyond marking a process of separation from her family, going to school also brought expectations that Bilgüün behave like an autonomous and helpful household member who could be counted upon to fit in her uncle’s home without bringing additional work for her aunt but rather positively contribute to the running of the household.

At home, homework was a source of recurrent tensions between adults and children and sometimes resulted in scolding interaction of the same kind as the ones linked to the completion of domestic and pastoral chores. In fact, as we saw in the previous chapter when Bilgüün was scolded by her mother, doing her homework was as one of her responsibilities together with their duty of helping. It is however possible that these homework crises are not triggered by adults’ new expectations that children behave as helpful daughters and sons but also result

from specific tensions due to the activity of learning literacy skills and of children's personal transformation as a consequence of being schooled.

In this chapter, I examine whether developing literacy skills and forming relationships outside of their family network when going to school introduce children to a mode of interacting alternative to and potentially conflicting with the *ah düü* mode of relating. In order to do so, I start by contextualising the current school system and the 2008 reform in the history of the institutionalisation of universal schooling in Mongolia and present parents' views on recent school reforms which promote child-centred pedagogy. I then look at the social meaning of being a pupil and examine the significance of homework crises in light of the process of moral transformation of children into competent and autonomous members of their family.

The Mongolian school curriculum

In the school entrance hall, hung a little too high for first graders to be able to see it, a large painting depicted the different architectural phases of the school starting in the forties, when the school was composed of two yurts, up until the current period starting in 1989 when the present large J-shaped building was built with its adjacent cultural centre and boarding school (see figure 26). More than the specific history of the local school, the painting reflected the national story of the institutionalisation of free universal schooling in the young Mongolian People's Republic.

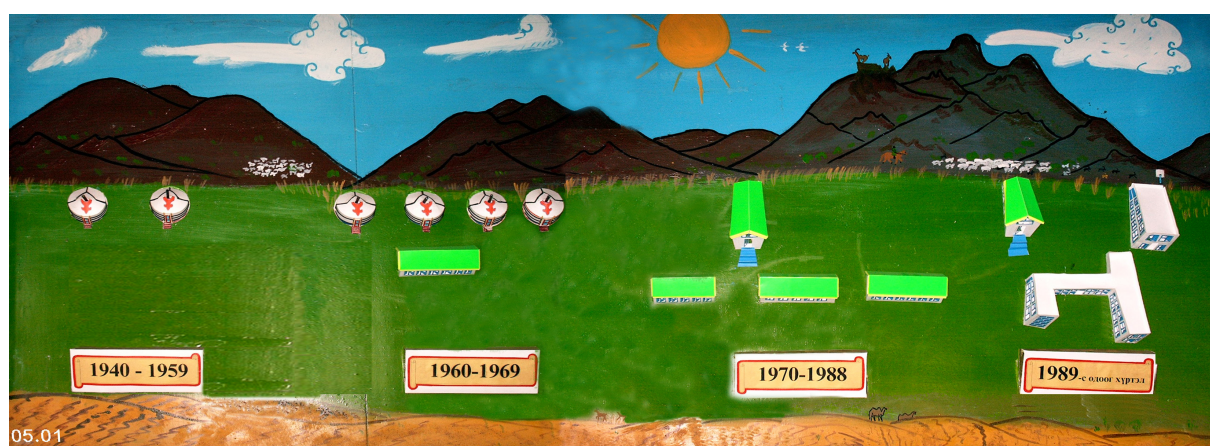


Figure 29: School painting

Schools for all in the Mongolian People's Republic

Though I do not have the space to present a thorough history of institutionalised education in Mongolia, it is important to locate the development of universal literacy in contrast with prior Mongolian education institutions, then exclusively accessible to males (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:25-34). I invite the reader to consult Atwood (2004d:159-160), Jagchid & Hyer (1979: 224-30), Pritchatt (1991:2006-7) and Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe (2006:25-34) for a presentation of institutionalised education from the mid-sixteenth century to early twentieth century.

In brief, from the mid-sixteenth century to the early twentieth century, the banner schools of the Qing colonial administration and Lamaist monasteries were the two institutions which provided formal education to some of the Mongolian male population irrespective of their social stratum. In banner school, boys graduated at the age of thirteen after having learned to write Uighur-Mongolian script as well as Manchu. Scribal education was followed by three months of yearly administrative service which made it unpopular (Atwood 2004d:160). From the seventeenth century onward most families with more than one son sent one to be educated in a monastery; a practice considered seen as auspicious for the family (Aubin 1975:513-514). By the nineteenth century monasteries had become the largest institution of formal education. Children aged between eight and seventeen developed literacy skills through reading and memorizing Tibetan texts, and only at a later stage Mongolian. Though 45% of the male Halh population went through the monasteries, few of them were actually literate (Atwood 2004d:159-60).

In 1924, the first constitution of the Mongolian People's Republic granted the right of free education for all. Schooling only became compulsory in 1955-56 after adequate institutions had been put into place to train teachers and boarding schools had been built to welcome students (see Bulletin of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia 1972; Krueger 1961:183-7, Legrand 1975:177-82; Pritchatt 1974a, 1974b & 1991:207-8; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:34-42). On the school painting, boarding schools are represented by the green roofed building in front of the classroom yurts within the 1960-69 brackets.

With the aim to institute the socialist ideal of the ‘people’s education’ (*ardiin bolovсроl*), the Mongolian school curriculum was designed after the Soviet model and the Cyrillic alphabet adopted to replace the Uigur Mongolian script (Legrand 1975:181; Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe 2006:42). The curriculum favoured scientific and technological subjects in accordance with the assumption that ‘education should be primarily practical and of value to the community and, secondarily, to the individual’ (Pritchatt 1974a:35). The Soviet-inspired pedagogy put the emphasis on rote learning and repetition and commanded an unconditional respect towards teachers (Pritchatt 1974a:35-40 & Pritchatt 1991:212; see also Muckle 1988). Initially, compulsory schooling started at eight years old and lasted for four years. This primary curriculum could then be completed by two cycles of three years each; completing this ten-year cycle opened the possibility of university education. In 1963 compulsory schooling was extended to seven years and further extended to eight years in 1965.⁸⁵

According to official statistics, by 1959 the enrolment rate for children between the ages of eight and twelve was no less than 97.7%. By the sixties, the entire Mongolian population was considered literate, a feat which gave the Mongolian People’s Republic international recognition. At the 1970 UNESCO convention, Mongolia was in fact recognised to be the first Asian country to eliminate illiteracy (Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe 2006:70).⁸⁶ This internationally recognized success-story of the development of literacy in Mongolia contrasts with the broad failure of the institutionalisation of schooling conducted in ‘post-colonial third-world’ countries during the same period to develop literacy in rural populations. It is all the more impressive that it overcame the logistical challenges of schooling a pastoralist population (Krätli 2001:57-8).

Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe (2006) argue that contrary to the ‘educational imports’ of the post-socialist era, the success of universal schooling in Mongolia is due to the original adaptation of the Soviet model of schooling to the Mongolian socio-economic context. They suggest that the success of schooling in Mongolia is to be

⁸⁵ See Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe (2006:43) for a timeline of the reforms under the socialist regime. See Pritchatt (1974a) for a diagram representing the general school curriculum after the 1973 reform and a description of the syllabus.

⁸⁶ These figures were later revised and universal literacy was officially re-achieved in the late eighties (Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe 2006:193).

understood in the broader context of the collectivization and modernization of animal husbandry in the fifties which released children from pastoral work (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:44-5). Beyond being free of charge, the education system was tailored to the Mongolian pastoral economy by adopting a relatively late enrolment age, providing extensive and free boarding school facilities and by matching school holidays with seasonal labour peaks in animal husbandry (*ibid*).

However, this ingenious school design would probably not have been so successful had it not been met by the high value that Mongolians to this day place on intellectual intelligence (*uhaan*), knowledge (*medee*) and education (*bolovsrol*). Not only are the skills of speaking well or the quality of having knowledge (*erdemtei, nomtoi*) admired by Mongolians but being educated is considered a virtue (*buyan*) and a source of respect. Parents' desire that their children be educated together with the sense of diligence and discipline that were inculcated in children at home also played an important role in the success of modern schooling (Aubin 1975:516).

As shown by New Literacy Studies (see Bartlett *et al.* 2011; Brian 1984 & 1993), the value of schooling and the use that people make of literacy skills cannot be predicted a priori but need to be considered in context. Bloch (1993:87-109), for instance, shows that very much like in Mongolia, Zafimaniry people hold knowledge in high esteem and thus support children's attendance at school (irrespective of the fact the knowledge they learn there might be incomprehensible or irrelevant). By conferring knowledge to children, schooling however disrupts the hierarchical distribution of knowledge which is traditionally a prerogative of elders.

In Mongolia, knowledge is also considered an attribute of elders (Humphrey 1996a:30), an attribute which confers respect. This is most visible in the status of teachers which irrespective of seniority and gender are formally respected. Very much as senior people cannot be called by their names, teachers are also addressed and referred to by adding the suffix 'teacher' (*bagsh*) to their names, even when an older person refers to them. While institutionalised education and school enrolment have been supported by the value that Mongolians place on

knowledge, respect conferred to school educated people transects respect structured by the *ah düü* mode of relating. In contemporary Southern Mongolia, unlike in the Zafimaniry village described by Bloch, given that most adults are literate, children's knowledge does not represent a challenge to their authority, rather as we will see in the next section, school education is considered a necessary quality that children are required to develop.

School reforms in the 'age of the market'

The school painting portrays the last period, starting in 1989, as on-going. While the buildings are in fact still in place, the fall of the communist regime in 1990 did not leave the ideological orientation of the Mongolian school system unchanged. After the fall of the socialist regime, Mongolia underwent a transition to the 'age of the market' (*zah zeel uye*) marked by the implementations of structural reform packages (Sneath 2002:191-196; see also Munkh-Erdene 2012). In 1997, the Asian Development Bank 'designed, funded, and executed' a reform of the Mongolian education sector (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:86). The introduction of dormitory fees from 1996 to 2000, the rationalization of staff and reorganisation of schools reinforced the high school drop-out rate which ensued from the decollectivisation of the economy (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:177-182). These generic adjustment measures took no consideration of the socio-economic and climatic specificities of Mongolia. And, during what Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe call the long decade of neglect (1991-2003), international institutions refused to fund the established primary and elementary school system (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:199).⁸⁷ This resulted in the deterioration of educative services and infrastructure, notably of boarding schools which once had made the Mongolian school system an exemplar of best practice (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:165-183).

In recent years, the massive economic growth generated by the mining sector has resulted in the government initiating some educational reforms based on the recommendations of the Asian Development Bank and World Bank within the framework of the Millennium Developmental Goals (Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelma

⁸⁷ See Klees *et al.* (2012) for a critical analysis of the World Bank education policy since the eighties.

2008:413). In 2005, the school curriculum was extended from ten to eleven years by lowering the age of school entrance to seven, forcing Bilgüün to leave her family to enter school in 2008 instead of a year later. In 2008, it was extended to twelve years and compulsory school enrolment lowered to the age of six, together with the implementation of a new curriculum aiming to promote 'independent learning' in primary and elementary classrooms (Weidman & Yoder 2010:64). This reform is little concerned with pastoralist constraints or with local conceptions of pedagogy but promote the achievement of 'international standards', an 'hypothesized global model' (Anderson-Levitt 2003:7) or 'imaginary' device (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:186) used to advocate reforms extending the period of schooling and promoting student-centred pedagogy. The contemporary reforms of Mongolian schooling are presented by international agencies with the aura of scientific-based conceptions of children's development. These reforms which postulate the existence of a 'universal child' are in fact the expression of 'Western-based assumptions concerning the child's self, such as value like individualism, autonomy and choice, (...) linked to the emergence of transnational global capitalism' (Hoffman & Zhao 2008:1-2; see also Canella 1997 on the Euro-American assumptions underpinning 'early education'). As argued by Anderson-Levitt (2003), whether and how schooling contributes to the spreading of a 'global culture' is however a local empirical question.

On the first of June 2008, Otgono sat and like all his classmates passed the school entrance exam. He turned six years old in August and entered school a month later. Over the course of the summer, the two first-grade class teachers were trained in the new programme and new pedagogical methods. Instead of the pupils' desks being placed parallel to each other facing the blackboard and the teacher's desk like it usually was in other classrooms, in Otgono's classroom shiny new low desks with their chair bound to the table were clustered in groups of four, facing each other, thus allowing for activities to be done collectively. Otgono and his classmates were given new books and exercise books with colourful illustrations and stickers, which their parents had to buy from the school. At the back of the classroom, wooden toys and books all harbouring World Vision stickers were displayed on a brand new large wooden shelf.

In Otgono's classroom, teacher Chimeg (*Chimeg bagsh*), conducted lessons in an interactive manner. Like at home, many activities were based on imitation. When explaining a lesson or a story, Otgono's teacher invited children's participation and almost systematically complimented them for any contribution. Her pupils did not fear her and enthusiastically called out to ask her to check their exercise. When correct, she drew a smiley face on their notebook, when not she encouraged them to try again, creating a space for learning within the assessed performance. In between activities, pupils stood up and together with the teacher sang a short song often involving some body movement. Their favourite song finished with the enthusiastic affirmation, 'It is true I am a good pupil (*Bi sain suragch mön*)!'

The teacher of the other first grade class, teacher Urana (*Urnaa bagsh*) had attended the same training as teacher Chimeg. Her teaching style however drastically differed from her colleague's. She had chosen to keep the tables facing the blackboard. Her approach favoured learning through collective repetition and memorization. Across grades too, there were important differences in teachers' pedagogical style. Older teachers tended to be more inclined to use knowledge-based approaches while younger teachers tended to be more inclined to introduce some student-centred techniques in their teaching. While policy makers and educators insist that educational reform in Mongolia conforms to the achievement of 'international standards', this discourse does not directly reflect existing practices (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:185). As shown by the collection of ethnographic studies edited by Anderson-Levitt (2003), the so-called global model of education has a different meaning and is applied differently in local contexts. Moreover, the comparison of the teaching practices in two first grade classrooms shows that the way reforms impact practices also vary in a same local context depending on teachers' personal conceptions of teaching. Let me turn to parents' views of the reform.



Figure 30: 'Modern' classroom set-up



Figure 31: 'Traditional' classroom set-up

The first criticism towards the school reform was economic. Parents often complained that education had become too expensive now that on top of the school uniform and the usual contributions to classroom maintenance, they also had to buy the numerous course materials on which the new programme relied. Moreover most parents considered that at six years old, except for the exceptionally intelligent, children were too young to benefit from schooling. The mother of one of Bilgüün's classmates explained:

I think it is really bad to send children to school so early. Children understand but soon forget so it produces children who seem to have understood but who actually have not. What I was taught when I was eight, what my teacher first taught me, I still remember it, it is fixed in my memory (togtotstoi). Now a child who sits in school at six, what she is taught, she will know in the moment, but when she is ten she will have forgotten. For children who haven't totally developed their intelligence (uhaan ni togtoogüi), I can see that this is really wrong (nileen buruutgaj baina). Of course those IQ children, those who are with excellent IQ (IQ-saitai), these children for sure can go to school very early.

This mother was not alone in worrying that going to school too early could have a bad effect on children. Hand, Otgono's grandmother noticed that going to school so young had made Otgono a little 'dim' (*teneg*) and shy (*ichimhii*). Hand contrasted Otgono's behaviour with her cousin of the same age, Ochir, whom she praised for her confidence (*öörtöö itgeltei*). Ochir's parents had decided to postpone sending their son to school by a year. The youngest child of his family, and only child on his parents' and grandparents' camp during the school year, Ochir was growing up surrounded by adults, and was used to being at the centre of everyone's attention. He loved reciting the poem about camels that his aunt had taught him and boasting about the mathematical calculations that he already succeeded in solving,⁸⁸ while Otgono refused to perform any of the poetry he had learned in school. This

⁸⁸ I did not witness how Ochir was taught sums. His parents, grandparents or uncles and aunts taught him literacy skills such as reciting poetry or learning proverbs, by making him repeat after them and then asking him to recite them in public.

reinforced Hand's conviction that it was a good thing that Ochir's parents refused to send their son to school so early but waited for another year.

In fact, another reason which made people sceptical about the benefit of sending children to school at six years old relates to the constraints that schooling imposes on pastoralist families. Most parents and teachers described the school reform to be a reform for children from the city (*hotiin hüühed*) for whom going to school did not imply being separated from their family. About half of the children attending school came from the countryside. A minority boarded in school, and most of them, like Bilgüün, stayed with some relatives. For countryside children going to school at six meant that they would spend one year less learning about pastoral activities, and enjoying the intimacy of living at home with their parents and younger siblings. Early schooling was thus thought to disadvantage children from the countryside who at six would suffer from being separated from their parents, and missing home constantly they would find it difficult to concentrate (see Chapter 5).

Child-centred pedagogy or the promotion of 'lazy learning'

As explained in earlier chapters, prior to the nineties, the school curriculum was conceived to implement and promote the socialist project. With this aim various kinds of 'socially useful work' such as collective agricultural and maintenance chores were included in the socialist school curriculum (Pritchatt 1974a:35, see also Muckle 1988:36). It is still the case that once a year, on cleaning day, pupils and teachers together with the rest of the villagers spend the day clearing the village of the dirt and dust that the wind blows and accumulates in various spots. Children are also made responsible for maintaining their classrooms. Although the school curriculum changed after the end of the socialist regime, for instance Mongolian history has been rewritten to include the imperial past, civic education manuals include the teaching of Mongolian traditions such as the Lunar New Year, English has replaced Russian as taught foreign language,⁸⁹ the value of education and relations within the classroom remain embedded within an ethic of communal responsibility and hard work, mutual help among pupils and deference and respect towards teachers (*bagsh*).

⁸⁹ See Gardelle (2003) for an analysis of the changes in the history curriculum

Teachers address the class collectively with the vocative form of the term children: *Hüühdüüdee*. When addressing a specific pupil, teachers either use their name or, when asking for a personal service or making a compliment, the possessive individual form 'my daughter' (*minii ohin*) or 'my son' (*minii hüü*). This use of filial terms, which marks a stronger degree of seniority than the use of the sibling term *minii düü*, is reciprocated by pupils who deferentially have to call their teacher, *bagshaa*, ('Teacher') and always add the suffix, *bagsh*, when referring to them.

Unlike in the kindergarten (see Chapter 6), irrespective of age differences, children of the same class group interact as peers (*chatsuu*). Children know each other's grade and use it as a marker to establish whom to address as junior and senior though they might not use senior address terms for children who are only one or two years above them. Among children of the same grades children interact as peers, in a similar manner as with their friends or relatives of the same age at home. Very much like at home, relations in the kindergarten and in school are structured by a hierarchical ethic of relationships between pupil and staff and among pupils of different grades (see also Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:113-21). The main difference is that these relations extend outside of children's family networks (*ah düü*).

Already during the socialist period, education experts identified the lack of 'independent learning' and students' 'passivity' to be important shortcomings of the Mongolian schooling system (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:48). Today international experts use the same rhetoric and international programmes all work to promote student-centred pedagogy. Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, who worked as experts for the SOROS Foundation report the challenges that exporting student-centred learning into hierarchical classrooms present (2006:109-145). The way of teaching used by Otgono's teacher is an instance of child-centred pedagogy. In this model, 'independent' and 'active learning' consist in promoting children's questions and turning exercises into playful activities in which children's contributions are used to structure the advancement of the course. An outcome of this way of teaching is that children are monitored a lot more closely and didactically. As a result children rely on their teacher for each step of their task and develop the habit of constant reinforcement and need for support. In Otgono's

classroom, pupils increasingly developed the habit of raising their hand to ask their teacher to check whether they were doing well as soon as they had completed one task. In the other first grade class, no such habit was developed by pupils who knew that their notebook would be checked at set times when the teacher called them.

Student-centred approaches to teaching contradict what Mongolian parents see as active and independent learning. Besides their opposition to sending their children to school so early, the way everything was 'made easy' for children was strongly criticized by parents. Not only are current reforms judged to favour children whose families are in the district centre over children from the countryside, but they are also thought to fail children who are less naturally talented at learning literacy skills. I quote a conversation I recorded with Bilgüün's father:

"When I was a child, teachers were extremely demanding (shardlaga ih tavidag). Now only children who are themselves capable (ööröö chadvartai) study and learn because teachers no longer ask children to pay attention (anhaaral). Today's children always think about making things simple (hialbarchlah), things need to be easy as if children had lost interest in doing things (yum hiih sonirholgüi). Everything needs to be ready-made (buh yum ni belen). (...) How to say?"

Bilgüün's mother added, *"Look, now Bilgüün is going to have lessons on a computer."*

"This is exactly it." concluded Amga.

Most parents disliked the new pedagogical approach experienced by Otgono and his classmates which they view as promoting a lack of diligence and effort in children. When they were children, they said, they worked hard in school and once home had no time to play given how intensive pastoral activities were, but they found work rewarding. Nowadays children only like to play, they commented. As mentioned earlier, parents criticized the fact that they now had to buy school books, all the more that because they included exercises, colouring and stickers, the books could not be passed to future children. They also disapproved of the approach to learning as a game as a result of which children did not develop the

capacity to concentrate (*tövlöröh chadvar*) or the sense that learning required effort (*hüchin charmailt shaardsan*). The new pedagogy was seen as reinforcing a broader tendency for children of the new generation to become lazy (*zalhuu*) and no longer know how to learn, as exemplified by their difficulty in memorizing riddles, proverbs or poetry, while the generation of their parents and grandparents could still easily remember dozens of them (see also Aubin 1975:508-9 & 1997:100).

Tuyaa regretted that Otgono and Batuhan did not learn many riddles, poetry or songs either in the kindergarten or in school. Tuyaa in fact was convinced that the best way to practice reading was by knowing a text by heart and then map this oral memory onto a written version of the text. This technique is based on a child's personal effort to memorize a text through a process of repetition but then relies on personal practice which does not need to be supervised, which shares similarities with the process of learning herding and domestic skills as explained above. As we saw in the previous chapter, not being guided through each step by a more expert person but engaging reflexively to understand is seen as the proper way of learning, which arguably requires a far more active and independent engagement by the learner. While content-focused, imitation-based learning techniques are often described as passive and preventing children's personal involvement (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006:48-9), parents of the Dundgobi region actually saw child-centred pedagogy as a dependent way of learning that inculcated children with lazy habits and a lack of personal responsibility towards their homework.

Being a 'school child' (*surguuliin hüühed*)

In the former section, we have seen that recent reforms make schooling less accessible to mobile pastoralists while also increasingly conflicting with the Mongolian approach to learning as a form of autodidactic reflexive bricolage (see Chapter 7). In this section, I examine what is the meaning of going to school for children in contemporary Mongolia and whether their experience and status as 'school children' (*surguuliin hüühed*) is dissonant with the values and modes of

interaction at which they have become competent at home as the tensions around homework completion seems to suggest.

The appealing status of school children

Anthropological studies have documented a large variability in the social meaning of being an 'educated person' (Levinson *et al.* 1996) and the cultural uses of literacy and numeracy (e.g. Aikman 1999; Barton & Ivanic 2000; Prinsloo & Breier 1996; Stafford 2009; Street 1984 & 1993). In some contexts, schooling seems totally at odds with the status and role of children and neither literacy nor schooling are socially significant but rather lead to a process of 'de-skillment', like for Amazonian Huaorani children (Rival 1996). In other contexts with a longer tradition of institutionalised education in literacy, succeeding in school is considered the main obligation and identity marker of children. For instance, for French and American children, 'mental age' and 'maturity' measured against the normalised progress of the school curriculum are key identity markers (Anderson-Levitt 1996).

We saw that schooling has been part of life for the large majority of Mongolian children for the last sixty years. I also suggested that in rural Mongolia, going to school is part of a broader change of status of children in their home whereby they are expected to become autonomous and feel responsible towards work. I have however said little about what going to school actually means to children. To explore how young children themselves come to identify being a school child (*surguuliin hүүhed*) as an important attribute of their social identity, I start by presenting an interaction which happened at home on the 30th of August 2009, the eve of the start of a school year. Tuyaa had purposely come back from work early. Bayar's *egch* had come to the village to accompany Ochir on his first day at school. Bilgүүn was going to enter grade three, Otgono grade two, Ochir grade one and Batuhan the last year of kindergarten.

Tuyaa plugged the iron next to the TV set and laid a cloth on the floor on which she started ironing the boys' school uniforms which she had washed the day before. Batuhan observed her, asking whether this was his uniform or his

brother's. "My son is big now (minii hüü tom bolood), this is yours". Bayar egch came back from picking up Ochir and Bilgüün's school uniforms which were drying outside. She sat on the eastern couch and encouraged Batuhan to try on his suit. Tuyaa helped Batuhan button up the white shirt carefully. Batuhan put on the navy trousers and jacket cautiously to avoid creasing it. He kept a very serious face while Tuyaa arranged his jacket to fall correctly over his shoulders.

Bayar egch called Batuhan to show her what he looked like. He turned round a little stiffly as if trying to prevent his uniform, which was a little too large for him, from falling. His aunt exclaimed, "It suits you perfectly (Yag taarch baina)." Batuhan relaxed and when he saw his reflection in the mirror next to the couch, a large smile crossed his face. "Will I go to school?" Batuhan asked. "No, you are going to be in the kindergarten highest class (tsetserlegiin tom angi). You need to study well this year (ene jil chi sain surah yostoi) because next year like your older brother Otgono you'll go to school (chi daraa jil Otgono ah shig surguul yavna)," Tuyaa replied. "Why do you want to go to school (Chi yagaad surguulid ormoor baina ve)?" I asked him. "To read books and get a diploma (Nomoo unshaad diplom avah uchraas)," Batuhan replied.

After Batuhan had carefully removed his uniform, Tuyaa sprayed her own perfume on it before folding it; a perfume I had brought her from France and that she only wore for very special occasions herself.

For Batuhan, uniforms represented a strong identity marker which he immediately associated with going to school. Though Batuhan inherited his brother's uniform, he only wore it on the first day of kindergarten and on important occasions, such as the end of year examination. For school children, wearing a uniform was mandatory every day but on sports' day. Boys wore navy blue trousers and a jacket while girls wore a pleated skirt and jacket. Girls' hair had to be tied and adorned with large pink, white or red ribbon whose colour was uniform in each class group. Erdene saw it as a point of honour that his sons went to school with clean and properly ironed clothes. On mornings when Tuyaa did not have time, he stepped in to iron Otgono's clothes, not without reproaching Tuyaa for not taking care of their

children properly. During a meeting with parents, Otgono's teacher reminded them of the importance of sending children to school well dressed, not only as a sign of respect but as a way to give children a sense of the importance of school and help them concentrate in class.

Though Batuhan had never liked going to the kindergarten and used any opportunity not to go, he too wanted to be a 'school child' (*sürgüüliin hүүhed*). Beyond the literacy competence that older children exhibited, Batuhan could observe that going to school gave his brother and cousin many prerogatives which probably made the perspective of going to school especially attractive. Not only did school children wear formal uniforms, they went to school on their own or with their friends, they could stop in the village centre shop to buy sweets and they had personal objects such as books, notebooks and special pencils, that they were authorized not to lend to others (even at home). Moreover, doing their homework was one of the only activities during which Bilgүүn and Otgono were granted authority over Batuhan by adults. If they mentioned that he was bothering them, Tuyaa and Erdene supported their request and ordered Batuhan to keep quiet, and not to bother people who were reading books (*nom unshi-*) and doing homework (*geriin daalgavar hii-*).

Once children start going to the kindergarten and even more so once they go to school, visitors and relatives regularly ask them what they have learned and whether they are 'good pupils' (*sain suragch*). Even before they start going to school, children are thus made aware that going to the kindergarten and to school constitutes an increasingly important identity attribute in their interaction with adults. This pervasive valorisation of being a 'good pupil' is reinforced by a public ceremony called the ABC celebration (*үсеглелин байар*) where all pupils receive a certificate for having learned to read, write and count, the diploma to which Batuhan was most likely referring to in the aforementioned interaction.

At the end of the first year of school, the ABC ceremony makes public that children have acquired the skills of writing and reading. Children prepared this celebration with both excitement and anxiety. A week ahead of time a meeting was organised to inform parents about the preparations. It was decided that each child should

receive the same bag with a bottle of juice, an apple, some sweets and a present worth 5000MNT. "Nothing else so it does not create jealousy among children" insisted the teacher, who as also shown by her insistence on children having to wear school uniforms felt concern that differences of wealth did not permeate relations in school. Each child was assigned a letter of the alphabet, a rhyme to memorize about this letter and parents were requested to make a paper hat on which to glue the letter.

For the days preceding the celebration, all visitors had asked Otgono what his letter was and he gained an increasing sense of pride and acknowledgment by preparing for the celebration. On the eve of the ABC ceremony, Otgono tried on his hat and Erdene instructed him that he should recite his poem loudly without hesitation. Erdene rarely directly intervened in school-related matters and it reinforced Otgono's sense of the importance of the celebration. When Erdene told him he would be unable to attend the celebration, Otgono could not hide his disappointment. To compensate, Erdene promised to buy him a volley ball, a gift worth 10.000MNT, on top of the pack of sweets that Tuyaa had already bought for him.

For Otgono's ABC ceremony, all the children had at least one of their parents attending the ceremony, all dressed in their ceremonial clothes for the occasion. Around fifty women, half a dozen men and younger siblings who had come from the countryside were gathered in the school hall on the second floor. First graders with their special hats all came on to the stage and collectively sang the national anthem. Otgono's teacher gave a short speech congratulating them and then they came, two by two, to recite a letter rhyme into the microphone.

The director then made a long formal address, praising children for being the first Mongolian pupils learning to read and write at the age of six. He then nominated pupils who received a prize for being best at reading, writing, counting, singing and dancing. The class teacher then called children one by one in alphabetical order and gave each one of them a certificate. Parents then offered a present to the teachers and then to each child. The celebration ended with a group photo. Batuhan had not attended the ceremony but the attention Otgono received and the

certificate he brought back home had remained in his memory strongly associated with what it meant to go to school.

The alphabet celebration which turns knowing how to read and write into a recognized social status is an institution inherited from the socialist school curriculum. This celebration represents an important event in children's life, important enough that children's parents and grandparents themselves had kept a vivid memory of this day. Many adults had a picture of their own alphabet celebration, and still remembered the poem they had recited. The format of today's celebration resembles that of the socialist time, thus serving to reproduce a shared experience of the social meaning of going to school across generations. This collective celebration also reinforces the sense of children's membership of their class group and of the school. The group picture taken at the end is the first picture of their class group with whom they will keep going to school until grade 8 or 10.



Figure 32: ABC ceremony, first graders waiting to be called to recite their letter rhyme

Being the member of a class group

For many children who live in the village, their experience of schooling is preceded by kindergarten. Kindergarten attendance is however not compulsory and most countryside children do not attend. Kindergarten class composition is not strictly age-based and keeps changing over the year as children tend not to attend classes regularly. For these reasons as well as the lesser reinforcement of 'kindergarten identity' at home, being a pupil in a kindergarten classgroup did not come with the feeling of membership and identification that being a pupil in a school classgroup triggered.

As mentioned earlier, school class groups are age-based and their composition did not change. Besides, for the first five years, primary school children were taught by the same teacher. Within the class group, all children address each other as peers (*chatsuu*) even if some might be a year younger or older. Being member of the same class group (*neg angi*) creates a bonding shared identity in relation to other class groups, as children identify themselves and others through their class name and use grade as indicator of seniority. There is no gender segregation in classrooms or in the school playground. While children interact across genders and come to know well all the pupils of their class groups, close friendships are generally only established with children of the same gender.

The school classgroup represents children's first personal network of relations outside of one's family network. As in the kindergarten (see Chapter 6), if not directly in their class group, all children have siblings, cousins or neighbours whom they know prior to entering school. Children initially build on their existing family network to navigate the school environment but also have the opportunity to extend beyond this network. However, beyond personal bonds of kinship or friendship, pupils of a child's class group come to form a group of persons to whom a pupil feels related as being from the same class group (*neg angi*). For people who become herders, it often remains the only non-family based network of relations, they have. Even for people who work in the village institutions and thus have another opportunity to develop personal relations outside their kin network, the group of classmates remains especially significant and people look forward to attending the reunion of their class group organized every ten years.

When visiting friends or relatives if I showed some interest in the large picture frames that are exposed in the northern part of most yurts (see Delaplace 2009a:299-304; Empson 2007) or simply if we spent some informal time together, young and senior women alike often took this opportunity to bring their personal picture album out of the chest and together we browsed through them. Among these pictures, my friends often liked to take a close look at their graduation pictures featuring their entire class group and teacher gathered in front of the school. These pictures rarely ever featured in the photographic montages exposed publicly, illustrating the distinction between kin relationships (*ah düü*) entertain as family member and personal relationships developed outside of the family network as member of a class group.⁹⁰

The experience of being classmates binds people in a way that very much like among kin creates obligations irrespective of personal sympathy and is also used as a way to extend one's economic network. Once they received the visit of one of their classmates, Tuyaa and Erdene treated him lavishly, offering our most expensive food items and opening a bottle of vodka in his honour (see also Humphrey 2012 on the politics of hospitality). They later admitted that they did not actually like him very much but for once, he was their classmates and also Erdene had hoped to be associated to a meat export business endeavour of their classmate. In the case of real affinity, friendship developed throughout one's school years take the quality of close kin relations. Tom-Bayar, a classmate and friend of Erdene who had moved to the city, for instance, paid us a ceremonial New Year visit with his family after having visited his own kin.

The classgroup and school more generally also represents the most likely place where people find their future spouse. Both Tuyaa and Erdene, and Nyama (Tuyaa's younger sister) and her husband Ögii who were pupils in the same class group before they started dating and ultimately found a family. Süh, Tuyaa's brother who had to drop out of school at age ten, not only regretted not having had the opportunity to be educated but was also deprived of close friendships outside of his cousin group. This might also have played a part in Süh getting married in his late twenties, later than most of the men of his generation.

⁹⁰ For an analysis of the use of the house chest to metonymically contain relations in relation to the use of photographic montages to make relations visible see Empson (2007:120-34).

Relationships among children of the same class group are marked by provocative joking interactions which continue in adulthood. Visits paid by former classmates are marked by a relaxed atmosphere and a good dose of joyful provocative interactions peculiar to the meeting of peer. The way food and beverages are shared however follows etiquette. In this respect, the comparison with relations on mining sites is informative. There, the consumption of alcohol is 'informal and chaotic' and follows no prescribed order which High demonstrates is precisely a way to avoid the production of hierarchical relations (High 2012:266-9). By contrast, relations with classmates do not represent an alternative mode of relations to the *ah düü* mode but a form of sociality within it albeit free from the distance established by seniority.

Homework tensions

In the two previous sections, we have seen that beyond the actual development of personal skills, going to school is a socially significant experience and that being a 'school child' is an important and valorised change in children's status. While going to school presents children with the opportunity to develop a personal network of relationships, relationships within the classroom and among peers are enacted in accordance with hierarchical values and forms of respect. I now turn to look at the impact of learning literacy skills and examine why homework is often a source of tension. I consider two hypotheses. Homework tensions might represent another form of 'educational hiccups' by which children learn their responsibilities as members of their family. Alternatively, homework tensions might stem from a conflict between learning personal skills and helping at home, between the values underpinning the schooling system and the values underpinning the *ah düü* mode of relating. Let me start by presenting the kind of tensions which regularly surrounded homework completion. The following situation happened at home in the village in March 2008.

It was a cold but sunny Saturday. Although Tuyaa had ordered Otgono and Bilgüün to stay home, they had soon gone missing after Tuyaa left to finish a report at the bank office. Towards the end of the morning, Tögöö, Tuyaa's

aunt, passed by and we were chatting together when Bilgüün came back. Tögöö asked her whether she had done her homework. Bilgüün did not reply but picked up her school bag, sat on the floor next to the table and pulled her notebooks out. While Bilgüün was doing her arithmetic exercises, I resumed chatting with Tögöö. After a few minutes, Tögöö looked over Bilgüün's shoulders and exclaimed, "How badly written! It is wrong! Why don't you know anything? You cannot count (Chi yamar muuhai bichsen yum be! Bas buruu! Yu ch medehgüi, danda buruu bichdeg! Toolj chadahgüi)!" She took Bilgüün's pen and wrote down the calculations. Pointing at the notebook, she stated, "That's how you should do it! Do you understand?" Bilgüün nodded and started the next sum, her forehead virtually leaning on her notebook.

Otgono, Tögöö's son and another of Bilgüün's cousins came in. Tögöö ordered Otgono to tidy up his toys. Tögöö's on-going interaction with Bilgüün turned to a more joking tone. She pretended to spit in her hand and gave a fake slap on Bilgüün's bottom. She then took her mobile phone from the upper part of her deel (traditional robe) and pretended that she was talking to Bilgüün's dad to whom she asked the permission to slap Bilgüün. Bilgüün smiled. After the teasing tone released the increasing tensions between Tögöö and Bilgüün, Bilgüün's motivation picked up. She asked Tögöö to give her extra calculations. She finished the exercise and presented it to Tögöö for her to check. Tögöö pushed away the notebook and looking Bilgüün in the eyes said, "It is fine, check it yourself, you are doing it for yourself."

A few hours later, Tuyaa came back from work and asked Bilgüün whether she had done her homework. Bilgüün proudly brought her arithmetic notebook to her aunt. Looking at the homework list Tuyaa asked whether she had also read the text and answered the questions. Bilgüün had forgotten. Tuyaa, who was tired from a long day at the bank office, instantaneously got exasperated: "Do it now!" Bilgüün read the text and remained paralyzed in front of her blank page. After preparing a dough for our dinner meal, Tuyaa turned towards Bilgüün and asked to see her answers; seeing the blank page she exploded, "Can you not write (Chi bichij chadahgüi yu)? You don't know anything (Yu ch medehgui)! All you do is play! "

Two neighbour girls came in. Doljin, who was three years older than Bilgüün, sat next to her and told her what to write. Tuyaa had calmed down and she told Bilgüün, “You got me angry (uurluulsan) because you don’t study. But when you don’t understand something, you should ask me! OK?” The TV played the introductory song of the weekly English programme. After checking that Tuyaa did not react when she turned towards the TV, Bilgüün stopped doing her homework.

We have seen at the end of the introductory vignette when Bilgüün was admonished, her mother underlined that as an older child, Bilgüün should dedicate her time to helping and studying. The tensions surrounding homework reflected in the above situation are part of larger expectations placed on children to become autonomous (*biyee daasan*) and hard-working (*ajilsag*) pupils (*suragch*). As for domestic and pastoral work, children are expected to comply to a work ethic whereby being ‘hard-working’ does not consist in obeying explicit orders but rather in anticipating them, taking the initiative to work and feeling responsible for their achievement. In this respect, homework can be seen as simply another of children’s duties once they have lost their status of king and tensions around homework can thus be seen as marking a moment of transition when children need to learn their personal responsibilities as older children.

As Tögöo told Bilgüün when doing her homework, parents emphasized that children should learn to work for themselves. Children’s work in school was assessed and received marks grading from A to E. Most parents did not keep a close eye on children’s results. Bilgüün usually obtained Bs and did not systematically mention her marks, especially when they were bad. On occasions when Tuyaa realised Bilgüün had had a D or an E, she reminded her that no one could work for her and that she had to decide herself what kind of pupil she wanted to be, lazy (*zalhuu*) and stupid (*mangar*) or work hard (*ajilsag*) and become knowledgeable (*nomtoi, erdemtei*). The way Tuyaa got angry at Bilgüün shows that as a result of her niece living with us throughout the school year, Tuyaa had inherited some of the prerogatives and responsibilities of her parents. In many instances however, Tuyaa referred to Bilgüün’s duty to study as an obligation

towards her parents and, as we saw Tögöo doing, threatened to call them to inform them when she misbehaved rather than scold her herself.



Figure 33: Children doing their homework without being supervised

At first sight, the insistence of parents and caretakers on children having to learn for themselves seems to corroborate that literacy skills and homework have no value for the family. However adults do not see pastoral and domestic work and homework to be incompatible. When in the countryside, children spend more time helping but they should dedicate time to studying every day. When in the village, children spend time in school and in doing their homework but should not neglect their domestic responsibilities. The idea of learning for oneself is in fact congruent with the emphasis that adults place on children having to learn to be autonomous learners be it when they work in school or when they complete domestic chores. Not only do adults approach learning literacy skills with the same assumptions as learning technical skills but they also expect children to feel responsible for their homework in the same way as with helping at home: through self-initiated and autonomous initiatives. In this regard, being a 'good pupil' does not represent an alternative model to being a 'reliable daughter and son' but is rather another aspect of children's duties.

Besides being triggered by parents' expectations that, very much like for pastoral and domestic work, children demonstrate autonomy and reliability, I suggest that there are also pedagogical factors which crystalize tensions around learning literacy skills. While 'New Literacy Studies' have demonstrated that value and use of literacy is intrinsically social (Bartlett *et al.* 2011:156-161), it is also important to underline that school education is infused and transformed by pedagogical assumptions that parents, teachers and pupils bring to the task of teaching and learning. By and large, as illustrated in the above vignette, adults apply the same pedagogical model to learning domestic, pastoral and literacy skills. When Tögöö supervised her niece's homework and realised that she had not solved her arithmetic exercises correctly, she showed her how to do it by letting her observe her writing the different steps in solving the problem. She however did not provide verbal explanations or guide her to help her solve the problem herself nor did Tögöö try to understand why she had gotten the exercise wrong. Tögöö showed Bilgüün the correct results. One of the tenets of adults' pedagogical assumptions is that children should learn through observing rather than through receiving verbal explanations. However, unlike skills pertaining to herding or domestic activities, inferring what mental technique is used either to read a word or to solve an operation from observing the practices of more expert people is not obvious.

One of the challenges specific to learning literacy skills by contrast to domestic or herding skills is that it is difficult for the learner to herself assess whether her answer or performance is correct. To practise and progress, the novice therefore needs the evaluation of an expert. In rural Southern Mongolia, where children are expected to learn by observing and imitating, adults mostly participate in children's learning processes as a role model or as a judge. When Tögöö noticed that Bilgüün was making mistakes she became extremely dismissive and verbalised Bilgüün's mistakes as an absence of capacity: "You cannot count (*chi toolj chadahgüi*)! Can you not write (*Chi bichij chadahgüi yu*)? Very much like in the classroom, when adults supervise children's homework, they expect them to find an answer within a limited amount of time. When Bilgüün failed to answer her homework questions in due time, Tuyaa immediately got angry and dismissed her niece's capacity very much like we saw children being dismissed when failing to

perform domestic or pastoral tasks properly. In both contexts, adults consider that children should be capable of learning what they are asked by concentrating, and that bad performance is most often than not due to their lack of work.

My argument that adults are unlikely to provide verbal explanation may at first glance appear to be invalidated by the fact that both Tögöo and Tuyaa checked whether Bilgüün understood. Moreover, once Tuyaa calmed down, she encouraged Bilgüün to ask her questions and to explain what she did not understand. This might be evidence of the way pedagogical practices in school also change pedagogical approach to learning at home. Also they are instances when adults teach children patiently. For instance, upon his short visits to the village, Bilgüün's uncle, Süh, calmly sat with her, explained to her the exercise, let her look for an answer herself and re-explained the exercise if she had gotten it wrong. He was however an exception and most adults lost patience if the child failed to understand or to find the correct answer immediately. As a result, no matter how often Tuyaa repeated to Bilgüün that she should ask her when she did not understand, Bilgüün never did.

As for herding and domestic skills, adults do not feel responsible for monitoring children's actual processes of learning literacy skills but assess their performance following an implacable alternative: 'being capable / having learned' (*chadna / sursan*) or 'not being capable' (*chadahgüi*). The pedagogical assumptions and practices that parents use at home are exported to classrooms, both in the kindergarten and in school. For domestic and pastoral work, being assessed as being incapable can work as an incentive for learning, because children can learn through imitation. For literacy skills however, 'copying' does not necessarily result in learning and is largely prohibited. In fact contrary to domestic and pastoral skills where the learning output is practical and the child can self-assess and correct their performance, imitating a good performance by copying another pupil's answer or by echoing words when reading collectively might not be enough to learn to produce the answer on one's own.

In domestic and herding contexts, the regular assessment of one's capacity as being or not being capable, given that it is not associated with a strict timeline for

skill development, works as an incentive to learn (see Chapter 7). When learning domestic and herding skills, children enjoy space and time where adults are not present and they can therefore learn by trying, making mistakes, adjusting their performance or simply playing and observing the efficacy of various techniques. The pressure that adults put on children to learn new skills by challenging their participation is not inscribed within a time-limit but allows for children to learn at their own pace. In school by contrast, age is taken as a reliable indicator of learning capacities and the curriculum is structured with weekly objectives and cumulative skills. Children therefore have to conform to the ideal-type learner postulated by the state programme and follow the pace imposed by the school curriculum while they barely have any opportunity to practise without being judged.

By and large, parents and teachers consider exercises and homework as being a public performance at which children need to demonstrate their competence rather than being a learning opportunity. An outcome of this focus on performance rather than on learning processes is that, at times, when the outcome of the activity will be made public, mothers and teachers prefer doing the task at hand themselves than let the child do it. For instance, once Otgono came back home with the task of making a paper animal that was going to be part of the end of year school exhibition, Tuyaa managed the entire task. In the same way, for Mothers' Day, Otgono's kindergarten teacher 'fixed' children's flower collages that did not conform to the model. She in fact ended up cutting and gluing most of the petals on the cards that children were going to bring home.

Unlike with the chore curriculum whereby specialisation occurs and creates gender roles, in learning literacy skills the curriculum is universal. Until recently, the importance of being a good pupil was however significantly higher for girls than for boys. In the nineties, at a time when school drop-out became a significant phenomenon, female enrolment remained significantly higher than males' and education almost became a female attribute (Steiner-Khamisi & Stolpe 2006:177-182). This national peculiarity which disconcerts international aid programmes (Steiner-Khamisi & Gerelmaa 2008) finds its roots in virilocal practices and the need of sons' labour force. Today in a context of mining boom and climate change, people expressed growing doubts about the future of herding (Sternberg

2012:213-4). Parents were thus increasingly inclined to encourage their sons as well as their daughters to seek opportunities outside of the pastoral economy, which materialises in an increasing pressure on boys to also do well in school and an increasing pressure on parents to be able to send their children to secondary school and university. Most parents contract bank loans and borrow money from relatives to be able to send their children to university. Not only does higher education remove children from the pastoral economy but it also prolongs the period of dependence of children on their parents and relatives. However, as shown by Portish (2012), career choices are often not made individually but rather embedded within a familial economic strategy. The increasing desirability that children complete higher education and possibly obtain a university degree changes the time-frame of mutual cooperation among family members. However, rather than promoting more individualistic moral values, in a context of increasing cost of higher and university education, school education in fact depends on and reinforces kin interdependence.

Conclusion

In this last chapter, I have examined whether going to school represents an experience where children discover modes of relating alternative to social hierarchy. We saw that under the socialist regime, the Mongolian school system was designed so as to be compatible with mobile pastoralism. Between the fifties and the seventies, a large majority of the population, children and adults, became literate, so that literacy skills did not represent a threat to the authority of older people. Rather, given the high regard in which Mongolian people hold education and knowledge, literacy skills were integrated as one of the skills together with pastoral and domestic skills that individuals should develop to become 'competent persons'.

We have seen that going to school marks an important change in children's social identity and represents an experience to which most of them aspire. Irrespective of whether children actually enjoy the experience of learning literacy skills, for all of them, going to school constitutes the opportunity of developing a network of personal relationships outside of their family network and to develop a group

identity as a member of their class group. Friendship developed as classmates endures through life and comes with a similar sense of mutuality as relationships with kin although supplemented with the license that interacting with peers authorizes within the *ah düü* mode of relating.

For children raised in the countryside, going to school means leaving their family to stay with their relatives (or for a few in boarding school), where they are expected to fit in and to feel responsible for helping and for doing their homework without having to be supervised. Going to school thus represents a threshold in the apprenticeship of the *ah düü* mode of relating, a moment when children are separated from their parents and are expected to behave according to social expectations of autonomy. We saw in Chapter 7 that this change of parents' expectations also occurs in relation to children's participation in domestic and pastoral chores. The moral and temporal synchrony between the Mongolian chore curriculum and school curriculum however seems to be eroded by the most recent reforms of the education system. Although homework tensions are part of a larger process of transition whereby children learn that autonomy comes with their personal responsibility to complete their homework and with their family obligations to help, these tensions are likely reinforced by the fact that since 2008 children are required to enter school at age six. Moreover, the adoption of child-centred pedagogy openly contradicts the value placed on autodidactic learning and encourages a form of dependency of pupils on their teachers which conflicts with the *ah düü* mode of relating.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

I started this dissertation with a description of how the introduction of a newborn baby turned Batuhan and Oyuna into an older brother (*ah*) and an older sister (*egch*). We saw that Batuhan and Oyuna had very different reactions to this event. While Oyuna welcomed the news, Batuhan refused to be identified as an older brother. This led me on an exploration of how this apparently instantaneous transformation of children into older siblings in fact represented an important change in children's status and required them to learn new ways of interacting with others. My dissertation thus explored how children do not just become older, but rather, learn to form relations as senior and junior persons. I advanced that looking at how Mongolian children learn to form relations according to the *ah düü* mode of relating would, first, contribute to filling a gap in the regional literature on the experiences of children. More broadly I promised that looking at how children learn to interact according to the *ah düü* mode of relating would be informative of Mongolian personhood, Mongolian social hierarchy and the social mechanisms through which Mongolian persons and social hierarchy are co-produced. It is now time to consider what we have learned.

The making of strong and gendered Mongolian persons

Like everywhere else, Mongolian infants are born in a state of dependency on others. Mongolian adults see it as their responsibility to protect infants whose sensitivity to the influence of others is linked to their physical fragility and sensitivity to fear (Chapter 3). Their soul (*süns sild*), coveted by demons (*chötgör*), can easily leave their body, a risk which is reinforced by their capacity to see supernatural entities and materialises in their propensity to be easily frightened. During their first years of life, the main mode of interaction of adults with young children is to raise them (*ösgö-*), that is, to attend to them and to protect them so that they grow strong (*changa*). Progressively, infants undergo a progressive process of physical strengthening which makes them less vulnerable to the cold and to pollution by humans and malevolent entities. In other words, the

physiological process through which children become stronger also makes them less socially permeable. Concomitant with this physiological process, young children gain emotional autonomy and develop awareness of others (*uhaantai*). As children develop language and gain physical autonomy, adults consider that they can start interacting with them as moral agents who can learn (*hümüüjüüle*-). No longer 'kings', children discover that their moral prerogatives are constrained by their position within the social hierarchy. The challenge they encounter then, is to transform their initial state of dependency into a state of individual autonomy and social reliability by establishing relations as *ah/egch* or *düü*.

In learning to enact relationships according to the *ah düü* mode of relating, children develop distinct moral competences, namely: the skills of emotional control, of knowing to share without being generous and of autodidactic learning. These moral skills are mastered by all persons irrespective of whether they interact as junior or senior, male or female. Besides the development of these generic competences, acquiring pastoral and domestic skills by participating in the household economy - where complementarity and specialisation prevails - transforms children into persons with distinct gendered skills and roles.

Looking at the trajectory through which children develop as persons reveals that Mongolian envisage the life cycle as an ongoing process of physical and psychological strengthening which results from acquiring emotional control; until in old age, the body softens and people find themselves in a state of dependency and fragility similar to that of infants (*nyalh shig*). It is worth highlighting that this general apprenticeship in emotional control does not result in the production of a 'closed self'. However more solidly fixed in adults, the soul (*süns süld*) remains potentially detachable and experiences of fear dangerous. Moreover different people are by birth, astrologically more sensitive to the influence of others and thus remain more permeable to the impact of gossip (*hel am*). Also, at different moments of the life cycle and astrological cycles, people experience various degrees of physical fragility and social permeability.

This dissertation has considered the making of Mongolian person according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. In her essay 'Reassembling individual subjects',

Humphrey (2008:359) however suggests that there exists a plurality of ways of being a person available to Mongolians:

In Mongolian culture, (...), ideas of the self present a daunting thicket of overlaid possibilities. There are at least seven or eight, and perhaps several more, different ways that an Urad person, at different times, counts him or herself as an individual, ranging from the 'biological' inheritor of physical qualities, to Buddhist notions of a unique 'soul' persisting through uncountable lifetimes, to a genealogical kin-person, to a combination of life-forces vulnerable to attack by spirits and ghosts, or to unique specification by astrological co-ordinates.

Humphrey's description is coherent with the philosophical critique of 'the subject', which deconstructed the idea that individuals could be reified into one identity or type. Humphrey notes that this valid critique however misses on the empirical experience of persons as singular subject (2008:358). Aiming to reconcile the vast collection of ideas of the self available to people with their capacity to act as subject, she argues that the constellation of options in being a person is brought together in 'events' or 'decision events' which reassemble multiple selves into an individual subject. In doing so, Humphrey goes beyond prior approaches which too often conceptualised the person as a unitary category thus overlooking internal contradictions and multiplicity; and reconciles the deconstructionist critique with people's experiences as subject.

It is worth noticing that implicit in Humphrey's description of 'ideas of self' is the assumption that the Mongolian person is an adult person. Being the 'biological' inheritor of physical qualities' or 'a genealogical kin-person' require a kind of knowledge and theory of relatedness typical of adults. As cross-cultural studies have evidenced, children do not initially distinguish between qualities inherited biologically and qualities acquired in the course of life (see e.g. Astuti *et al.* 2005; Solomon *et al.* 1996) and as we saw in Chapter 6 Mongolian children do not define kinship through genealogy. As such, my remark only adds to Humphrey's point that Mongolian 'ideas of self' are numerous. Is it the case then that the *ah düü* mode

of relating, far from being encompassing, represents only one of the many 'categories of self' available to Mongolian people?

Humphrey's essay starts from an epistemological problem set by the deconstructivist critique and aims to bring the deconstructivist critique of the subject onto ethnographic ground. In this dissertation, by contrast, I approached the study of Mongolian personhood through an empirical problem, asking how people develop and manipulate various skills in order to be competent in continuously changing situations and as they also undergo continuous changes in their status throughout the life cycle. It has shown that being a competent person is a never-ending process of learning and that if, as Humphrey proposes, multiple aspects of the person and ideas of the self are brought together in 'decision events', these events are nothing less than the daily and continuous inter-subjective processes of relating to oneself and others as *ah/egch* or *düü*.

The moral tension productive of Mongolian social hierarchy

Exploring children's experiences when they lose their status as 'kings' (Chapter 3) and learn to form relations as an older brother/sister (*ah/egj*) or younger sibling (*düü*) helped uncover three fields of social competence which underpin the *ah düü* mode of relating. First, learning etiquette and early separation from their family trains children in acting with calmness (*taivan*) and developing emotional control (Chapter 4 & 5). Secondly, learning to share exposes children to their obligations and prerogatives according to seniority and kin relatedness (Chapter 6). Thirdly, autodidactic learning makes children capable to cooperate and be relied upon as a daughter (*ohin*) or son (*hüü*) (Chapters 7) and good pupil (*sain suragsh*) (Chapter 8).

The study of how children develop emotional control, sharing without being generous and autodidactic learning revealed the versatile nature of these moral competences. On the one hand, they are used to actively produce a system of asymmetrical relations based on paying respect, behaving according to one's obligations as *ah/egj* and proactively contributing to the family economy as son (*hüü*) or daughter (*ohin*). On the other hand, these same competences allow

individuals to carve a space which safeguards them from the dangers arising from attention and communication. Emotional control allows a person not to attract attention to herself and to establish relations at the safe distance of respect and to keep secret the intimate attachment to one's family. Sharing without being generous makes it possible to honour one's obligations while keeping track of the circulation and genealogy of gifts to claim one's share or assess one's relation to others. Autodidactic learning skills prevent the reliance on others to develop competences, while being competent in domestic, pastoral and literacy skills makes it possible to establish oneself as an autonomous and mobile family member.

By showing that the process of learning to interact through the *ah düü* mode of relating is simultaneously a process through which children learn to create a distance from others, the study reveals that Mongolian social hierarchy produces and is the product of an intrinsic moral tension between the desirability and inescapability of mutuality on the one hand, and the need to be mobile and the threats to oneself that arise from communications and close relations, on the other. In this context, the *ah düü* mode of relating constitutes a 'moral technology' which is used to try and generate respectful hence safe relationships with strangers and family members alike.

If the tension between relating to others while protecting oneself from the dangers of communication is the motor of the production of Mongolian social hierarchy in the form of the *ah düü* mode of relating, in turn interacting as *ah/egch* and *düü* shapes people's sense of mutuality and individuality in a way which produces the moral tension above described. After having presented my findings with regards to the moral competences and tension which underpin the production Mongolian social hierarchy, let me turn to consider how learning these skills produce 'Mongolian persons'.

The co-production of individuality and mutuality

Beyond the historical documentation of what it is like to be a Mongolian person for children growing up in rural Mongolia in the years 2008 and 2009, this study

sheds light on the mechanisms of the production of Mongolian social hierarchy, and by doing so, makes it possible to understand the processes which shape the forms of mutuality and individuality characteristic of 'Mongolian persons'. Far from proving the existence of an universal mechanism which would ensure the production of 'homo hierarchicus' (cf. Dumont 1983), it attests that growing up in a hierarchical society such as Mongolia shapes one's sense of mutuality and individuality in forms that are strikingly different from other hierarchical societies. Let me support this point by comparing Fijian children's and Mongolian children's experiences of 'making sense of hierarchy' (Toren 1990).

Two related differences between these ethnographic cases are that unlike Mongolian children, Fijian children learn to associate being older with gaining authority over younger children and to associate showing respect with the feeling of shame or shyness. In Toren's words (1990:218):

So we have to take account of children's daily experience of relative seniority, which effectively means that they may be commanded and disciplined by any older person. Childishness [via] gone being so readily rebuked, children are probably aware too of the adult desire for them to 'grow up', to be of 'mature mind'. But perhaps most important is shame or shyness, which (like obedience) is fostered in children in nearly all their relations with older people.

By contrast, Mongolian children experience being a young child as a status characterised by privileges and are not hurried to 'grow up' until they are required to behave as *ah* or *egch* towards younger children. Until then, they are left free to develop emotionally and morally by a self-initiated process of *identification* with older persons. Even once they no longer enjoy the privilege status of kings, Mongolian children are barely 'commanded and disciplined', rather they are made aware of the increasing expectations of their parents that they show awareness of etiquette and offer help voluntarily. Furthermore, the first lesson that children learn once they take the position of *ah* or *egch* is that being senior places new expectations and responsibilities on them while it confers on them no prerogatives over younger ones whom they should treat as protected younger siblings (*düü*). Children's initial experience of being an older brother or sister is thus one of being

sandwiched between *düü* over whom they have no prerogatives and *ah* and *egch* towards whom they discover their obligations.

During this period when children find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy, they learn that forming relations according to the *ah düü* mode of relating, first comes with obligations and involves increasing expectations of good behaviour and helpfulness; only later will they earn the advantages of respect and authority. I suggest that the structural 'sandwich' position which children experience at the time when they develop personal autonomy is conducive of embedding their sense of individuality within their obligations as son or daughter, brother or sister. The emphasis on the duty that seniority places on self is congruent with the moral devaluation of the direct implementation of authority or of directive modes of teaching on others. Ideally, senior people's authority is not the result of its active enforcement on junior people but is elicited from behaving in an exemplary manner. If within the Mongolian hierarchical mode of relating, mutuality constrains individual autonomy, social hierarchy is not experienced as a direct regime of authority by which senior people control junior people.

Unlike Fijian children, Mongolian children are not taught to associate or to express respect towards senior people through the feeling of shame or shyness. Instead Mongolian children are required to be able to control their body and emotions so as to enact etiquette and treat people with respect. While for Fijian people showing respect is an expression of asymmetrical mutuality which is meant to alter the emotional state of the person owing respect, for Mongolian people showing respect is a way to manage mutuality by imbuing protagonists with calmness to manage the potential dangers of communication by keeping one's emotions under control. These contrasts in how respect is shown correspond to fundamental differences in the meaning and in the mechanisms of production of hierarchy.

In Fiji, as Toren demonstrates (1990), the tension at the heart of Fijian sociality is to contain equality (*veiquari*) within hierarchy. Starting from equality, the Fijian hierarchical mode of relating orders relations by ranking people on the above/below axis. Summarizing Toren's analysis in my own terms, the *above/below* mode of relating is a technology of transformation and containment of equality within hierarchy. In Mongolia by contrast, I argue that the moral

tension that the *ah düü* mode of relating produces and accommodate is the containment of autonomy within hierarchy. This difference has important implications for the way mutuality is established among individuals as I will illustrate with a final example by comparing differences in the process of transformation operated by marriage.

In Fiji, marriage needs to transform the initial equality between cross-cousins into a hierarchical relation where a wife accedes to being below and subordinate to the authority of someone who she previously interacted with as equal (1990:53). In Mongolia, marriage operates a transformation through a process of separation (which does not amount to detachment), not a process of subordination. The bride and the groom might have been peers but as we saw (Chapter 8) relationships among peers is enacted according to the *ah düü* mode of relating. As the bride and the groom 'detach themselves' from their parental families, the spouses become defined by their individual complementarity within their family and by their complementarity as a family unit in relation to other family units of their kin network. While the Fijian production of hierarchy as a transformation of equality implies that mutuality be produced as a form of subordination, the Mongolian production of hierarchy as an encompassment of individual autonomy implies that mutuality be produced as a form of complementarity. As a well-known Mongolian proverb which Bilgüün and Otgono learned in school says: 'A person has older brothers, like a coat has a collar (*Hün ahtai, deel zahtai*)'.

I drew a brief comparison of the production of persons in Mongolia with another so-called 'hierarchical society' to show the specificity of the Mongolian sense of individuality and mutuality. It reveals that individual autonomy which has typically been described to be a value underpinning individualist and/or egalitarian regimes of relations is in fact also essential to the Mongolian hierarchical mode of relating. A possible avenue for future explorations would be to compare the learning experiences of Mongolian children with these of children growing up in so-called 'egalitarian societies' where the autonomy of individuals is a relational prerogative rather than an acquired competence and where people's sense of mutuality is made contingent on their sense of individuality (see e.g.

Briggs 1970; Deyhle & LeCompte 1994; Gaskins 1999; Hewlett 1992; Schieffelin 1990; Walker 2013; Woodburn 1982).

As shown by contemporary studies of the person, mutuality and individuality, interdependence and autonomy are universal aspects of human experience and are always conjointly constituted. In line with contemporary studies (see Chapter 1), this dissertation looked at autonomy and interdependence, individuality and mutuality as complementary aspects of personhood. In contrast with these studies, this research did not focus on adults and/or their representations of personhood, but took children's experiences as the subject of enquiry. Doing so has guarded me against reducing the experience of being a person to 'self-representations' and reifying ritualised practices and meta-representations into radically different conceptions of the self which remain common limitations in contemporary studies of the person (Quinn 2006; Bloch 2012b).

To avoid these pitfalls, Quinn and Bloch suggest adopting a more extensive definition of the person in order to include 'the totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially, and culturally' (Quinn 2006:362) and to analyse 'the person' – which Bloch renames 'the blob' to by-pass terminological debates – situated within the ontogenic, historical, and philogenic processes of which it is the result (Bloch 2012b). Although my study does not meet Quinn's and Bloch's ambitious interdisciplinary agenda, by making children and learning the focus of my enquiry I could approach the study of Mongolian personhood as the product of historical and developmental processes. This work thus shows that the reification of people's experiences into 'categories of self' or reduction of personhood to self-representations can be avoided by conceptualising the 'cultural construction of the person' as a process of learning which requires to incorporate children's experiences within the study of the person.

The future of Mongolian social hierarchy

As a way to conclude this dissertation, I would like to ask if, given what we have learned about how children become competent persons in rural Mongolia, we can expect the *ah düü* mode of relating to remain the primary encompassing mode of

relating in the near future. The *ah düü* mode of relating has thus far proved to be a generative mode of relating capable of integrating historical and socio-economic changes. This was for instance illustrated in Chapter 8 with the example of school teachers (*bagch*) whose knowledge seemed to contradict the correlation between age and wisdom which supports the authority of elders but was in fact integrated within the system of asymmetrical respect as an extra honorific status. Pedersen & Højer (2008) also show that even in Ulaanbaatar the concept of senior authority and the principle of family obligations remain prevalent in the face of new property relations.

At the time of my fieldwork, values of respect and principles of seniority were still dynamic principles which determined the experience of learning to be a person. As we saw in Chapter 8, life in the village and schooling work against traditional conceptions of gender roles. Moreover, given environmental and economic uncertainty, parents are less and less prone to encourage their children to embrace herding as a career. Moreover, the latest reform of primary and elementary education challenges the mode of family interdependence based on self-initiative and autodidactic learning by importing a new model of learning based on 'didactic dependence' and 'child-centred' models of teaching. In a context of economic diversification and climate change, parents increasingly encourage their children to move out of the pastoral economy by supporting them in getting a university degree. As shown by Portish for Kazakh Mongols (2012), choices of education or career paths of Kazakh Mongols are made with respect to kin obligations and family priorities over individual desires. In a similar way, for Southern Mongolian families, supporting their children's study in the regional capital and/or in Ulaanbaatar to gain individual qualifications often represents a strategy of diversification of family resources. Moreover, the financial costs engaged in obtaining a university degree reinforce the bonds of interdependence and complementarity among family members as parents and older siblings are called on to support the studies of their daughter or sister.

There is no doubt that popular foreign TV series, students' experience in the city and new sectors of activities such as mining (High 2008 & 2012) present people with alternative models to the *ah düü* mode of relating. My study however suggests

that in rural areas, children's early experiences in learning to form relations with others which emphasize their obligations as senior siblings, reinforce their feelings of attachment to their home and family, promote the value of diligence and bring their awareness to the dangers of drawing attention to themselves, all contribute to make the *ah düü* mode of relating an efficient moral technology to embed individual autonomy within complementary forms of mutuality.

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