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‘Pure milk’: dairy production and the discourse of purity in Mongolia

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In this article I explore some of the ways in which consumer discourse related to factory-produced tarag (drinkable yogurt) reflects concerns about food safety and cultural identity in Mongolia. Providing examples of how Mongolian industrial dairy producers position products made from imported milk powder as ‘local’, ‘pure’, and ‘natural’, I contrast consumers’ views of ‘artificial’ or ‘poisonous’ milk from Inner Mongolia (China), uncertainty over the nature of Mongolian milk products, and the increasing terminological confusion brought about by dairy process standardization. This paper draws on an analysis of comments posted to Mongolian-language online news sites, in response to rumours that ‘Goyo Tarag’ – a popular yogurt beverage manufactured by Orgil Foods – might in fact be Chinese in origin.

Keywords: Mongolia; milk; dairy production; nationalism

In February 2014, a pair of blurry images taken at the railway station in Ulaanbaatar began to make the rounds of Facebook in Mongolia. These images, taken by a bystander using his mobile phone, purported to show two men next to a train box car, unloading crates of Goyo Tarag – a yogurt drink produced by Orgil Foods, subsidiary of the major Mongolian drinks manufacturer Vitafit.¹ What seemed out of place was that the train had, apparently, just arrived from the southern border: if this was a Mongolian beverage, why was it being unloaded from a train bringing goods imported from China? Given that Mongolia is a nation of nomadic pastoralists with 45 million livestock, it seemed a national affront, and a major food security concern, that milk products should be imported – and from China, of all places!

Within 2 days, the photographs had been ‘liked’, commented upon, shared, and re-shared by hundreds of Mongolians. Very soon they had been republished by several newspapers and online news sites, where they provoked commentary from an increasingly wide audience. Reactions to the photographs ranged from surprise and shock to anger and distress. While some commenters questioned the authenticity of the photographs, many acknowledged a troubling, yet perfectly credible, explanation: the manufacturers of this beverage had been misleading the public, by having their commodity produced inexpensively in China and falsely labelled to indicate local origin.

This discussion was driven by more than a simple rumour of crooked business practices. The suggestion that Goyo Tarag was actually Chinese seemed to indicate that Mongolians were not only victims of Chinese cunning, but were indeed complicit – through the self-interested corruption and bribery of dairy producers and government inspectors – in ‘poisoning’ one another with a Chinese milk product. What is more, the rumour implied that Mongolians were unable to protect one of the few ‘national’ products

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– tarag (yogurt),² identified with the national pastoral heritage and ‘pure nature’ – from foreign industrial products, which are widely seen as ‘artificial’. The manufacturers of Goyo Tarag eventually organized a press conference and factory tour to dispel the rumours, demonstrating that their product was in fact made in Mongolia. Despite this intervention, however, debate over whether the product was truly ‘Mongolian’ continued, revealing an ongoing uncertainty regarding national survival under globalized market capitalism.

Mongolian fears of Chinese food products is commonplace, and is merely one of the many expressions of Sinophobia ingrained in contemporary Mongolian society. Bulag has noted that Mongolians only ‘grudgingly’ accepted Chinese flour and vegetables during the food shortages of the 1990s – for example, considering them ‘poisonous in terms of the long-term health of the Mongols’.³ Nationalist bloggers and online activists have repeatedly posted alarmist warnings about the possibility of ‘poisonous milk’ being imported from China. Recently published articles have pointed to the ongoing risk of melamine-tainted Chinese milk,⁴ as well as to suspicions that a batch of contaminated milk powder from New Zealand had made its way into Mongolia through a Chinese wholesaler, and used by Mongolian industrial milk processors APU, Süü, and VitaFit.⁵ Reader-submitted comments on online news articles discussing the Goyo Tarag rumours have similarly drawn on the premise that Chinese milk products are ‘dirty’ or ‘poison’. A clear example of this attitude is found in the following comment submitted in response to a news story run in the online version of the newspaper *Ünen*, suggesting that Goyo Tarag might be repackaged yogurt imported from China:

Yeew such filthy crooks. I heard that this tarag was supposed to be good for you and kept buying it for our kids. We adults couldn’t drink this stuff but gave it to our kids, and now look what happens. So now we’ve poisoned our kids with this dirty *khujaa* poison, while we kept free of the poison ourselves, from thinking of our children. I even saw lots of pregnant women buying this product. I would like to know how many families’ kids are being poisoned by your dirty money.⁶

The above comment reveals an unqualified assumption that, if the product comes from China, it must be poisonous to Mongolians – all the more so to children and pregnant women. The commenter describes Goyo Tarag as a ‘dirty *khujaa* poison’ (*‘muu hujaagin hor’*), using the racist epithet *khujaa* to denote its Chinese origin. At the same time, the comment is an indictment of market capitalism, in which private greed undermines nationalism: the Mongolian importers are presumed to be complicit ‘filthy crooks’ who poison children with their ‘dirty money’.

In this article I explore some of the ways in which consumer discourse related to factory-produced tarag (drinkable yogurt) reflects concerns about purity in a biological, ecological, and cultural sense. Drawing on the observation that dairy products are deeply embedded in Mongolian culture as symbols of purity, I suggest that milk may be perceived as the manifestation of a ‘pure’ maternal spirit. Yet industrial dairy production calls into question the true nature of ‘pure milk’, undermining its reproductive associations through the commodification of milk. Providing examples of how Mongolian industrial dairy producers position products made from imported milk powder as ‘local’, ‘pure’, and ‘natural’, I contrast views of ‘artificial’ milk from Inner Mongolia (China), uncertainty over the nature of Mongolian milk products, and the increasing terminological confusion brought about by dairy process standardization. I conclude the article with an overview of recent public commentary on Goyo Tarag, with a focus on its ethnic-nationalist dimensions.

Dairy production in Mongolia

The importance of milk production as a symbol of Mongolian culture and ethnicity, and the subsequent *malaise* caused by domestic production being supplanted by foreign ingredients and technologies, is linked to the central role of dairying within Inner Asian pastoralists' subsistence strategy. The exploitation of sheep, goats, and cattle for milk and other secondary products appears to have specifically enabled the emergence of specialized subsistence systems – including pastoralism – in the Old World.⁷ Although it remains unclear when and where dairying first emerged in East Asia,⁸ recent lipid analyses from archaeological samples in areas neighbouring Mongolia provide evidence for sheep/goat and bovine milk consumption at least 2300 years ago,⁹ and for horse milk consumption around 5000 years ago.¹⁰ Historical sources indicate that dairy products such as airag (fermented mare's milk, known in other regions as *koumiss*) and milk tea were a significant part of Mongolians' diet by the thirteenth century, and continued to be the primary food source well into the modern period, particularly during summer months.¹¹

Milk consumption by Mongolians today remains relatively high at 150 kg/year per capita (compared with 201 kg in Canada and 30 kg in neighbouring China¹²), though actual supply is 2.5 times higher in the countryside (190.8 kg/year) than in the city (75.6 kg/year).¹³ Mongolian pastoralists today continue to produce a wide variety of dairy foods from bovine, camel, equine, and goat milk, or (less frequently) sheep milk.¹⁴ Urban Mongolians consume milk primarily in the form of milk tea (*süütei tsai*), but also continue to use milk in ritual offerings (*tsatsal örgökh*) and blessings (*myalaalga*);¹⁵ the cultural/ritual value of milk is also illustrated by the abundant advertising messages directed to urban consumers (described further below).

Mongolia invested heavily in modern dairy processing up to the end of the 1980s, becoming a net exporter of milk at that time. The collapse of the socialist system in 1990 led to the dismantling of nearly all dairy farms and processing plants, however; with the further loss of livestock during successive *zud* (severe winters) in 2000 and 2001,¹⁶ factory processing of milk and dairy products essentially ceased, with the consequence that most of the urban milk supply came to be imported.¹⁷ With the opening of new production facilities over the past decade, there are now close to 100 dairies in Mongolia, including 15 large plants having the capacity to process more than 5 tonnes of milk per day. Since 2009 domestic processing has marginally surpassed imported milk in overall volume, though altogether processed milk (including imports) accounts for just 15% of the total supply.¹⁸

Close to 100% of liquid milk imports came from Russia until the mid-2000s, in the form of tetra-pak ultra-heat-treated (UHT) milk from Irkutsk. Milk from Inner Mongolia was first imported in 2002, rising to a peak of 1800 tonnes, nearly 40% of imports in 2007–2008, before imports were suspended due to melamine adulteration. With the resumption of dairy imports from China in 2012, 700 tonnes of Inner Mongolian milk were officially imported, but this accounted for 95% of liquid milk imports (Figure 1).

While liquid milk imports have dropped substantially since 2008, much of the current supply takes the form of milk reconstituted from imported powdered milk. Altogether dried milk has been imported from 42 different countries since 1995, with the top source being New Zealand, which currently accounts for two-thirds of all dried milk imports: 6200 tonnes of dried milk were imported from all sources in 2012, enough to reconstitute over 60 million litres of liquid milk.

As many Mongolians point out, the reliance on imported milk powder is unfortunately ironic given the number of cattle in the country, which should be ample to satisfy

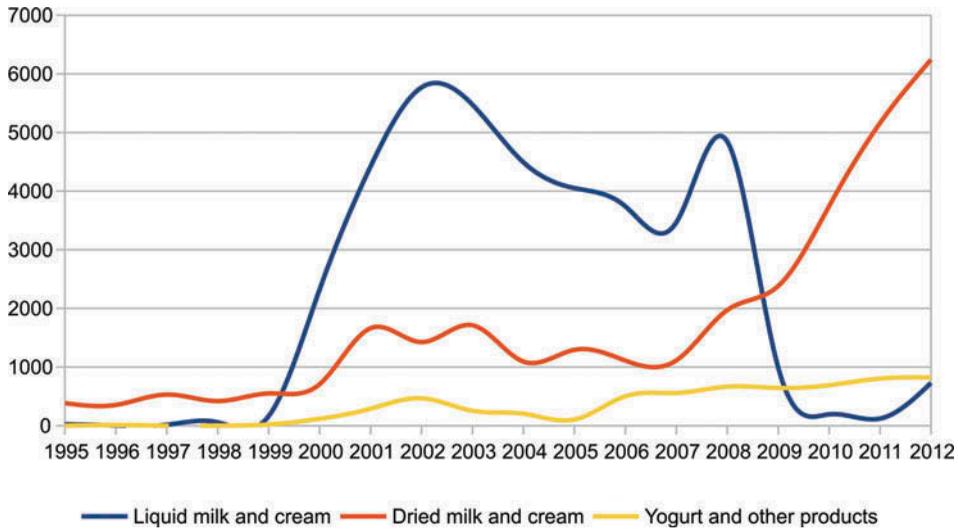


Figure 1. Dairy imports to Mongolia (tonnes), 1995–2012. Data source: Mongolian Customs Authority.

domestic market demand. There are approximately three million cows in Mongolia, making up 6% of the country's total livestock herd, and slightly surpassing the human population; 878,700 of these animals are listed as dairy cows,¹⁹ equivalent to 0.31 dairy cows per capita. By comparison Canada, a country with a strong dairy sector oriented primarily toward the domestic market, has 959,000 milk cows for a population of nearly 35 million,²⁰ equivalent to 0.027 per capita – 12 times lower, in per capita terms, than the Mongolian dairy cattle population. New Zealand, which exports around 95% of its milk, has 6.4 million dairy cattle, or 1.44 dairy cows per capita.²¹

Pure milk: scientific and cultural standards

Recent institutional measures by the Government of Mongolia in the dairy sector have largely focused on ensuring an affordable supply of milk to urban consumers, by way of supports to domestic dairies offered through the 'White Revolution' Program (1999), the Dairy Food Security project implemented in cooperation with the FAO (2004–2007), and the 'Milk' National Program (2006).²² Current institutional measures reflect an urban-centric view of agriculture sector development in which 'food security' is equated to stable and safe supply for the city population, and in which small-scale, domestic production is broadly positioned as 'unsafe' or 'inefficient'. Promoters of industrial milk production argue that vertically-integrated food chains are 'safer' due to the absence of points of contamination or adulteration, pointing out that brokers, wholesalers, and merchants of raw milk have been found to extend milk products or limit spoilage by mixing water, flour, or soda, in contrast to the more stringent production controls imposed on ISO-9001 or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point-compliant dairies.²³

Public acceptance of the notions of 'safety' and 'purity' implicit in these standards is by no means universal, however. Tellingly, in the view of many Mongolians raw milk from the countryside is generically more safe and pure than industrially-processed milk, even when containing organic contaminants such as cattle urine or dirt. Ts. Baasansüren,

editorial commentator for the newspaper *Daily News*, argues that Mongolians need to make a choice between drinking foreign ‘milk with poison’ or Mongolian ‘milk with urine’ – pointing out that Mongolian milk may contain cattle urine, but at least no one ever died from drinking it.²⁴ Focusing on the distinction between the ‘natural’ and the ‘artificial’, arguments such as these critique the tendency of food safety standards to construct ‘purity’ of dairy products as an absence of natural substances or biological organisms. The apparently lax food safety measures among rural herders effectively stand in contrast to the standardized processes of industrial producers, which preclude contamination from ‘natural’ sources but do not prevent contamination with ‘artificial’ (poisonous) substances.

The concerns raised by Baasansüren and other commentators parallel similar discussions elsewhere. The production and sale of raw milk and unpasteurized cheese in the United States has become a site of biopolitical contestation, where the seemingly unproblematic definitions of food safety employed by the state are directly challenged by citizens espousing a ‘post-Pasteurian’ scientific view.²⁵ Similarly, the requirement for ‘zero’ microorganisms in European food safety regulations has been described as threatening the fundamental qualities of artisanal cheese, and as jeopardizing food diversity, by imposing scientific definitions that contrast with local understandings of risk.²⁶

The concern over milk imports in Mongolia is not primarily economic but cultural. Milk is a highly symbolic commodity representing purity, the pastoral heritage, and maternalism. Milk, along with various other pure white objects, is associated generally with the concept of ‘purity’, which encompasses goodness – including thoughts unadulterated by selfishness or guile, in the sense of *tsagaan setgel* (‘white mind’ or ‘white thought’) – and, through association with pure white milk (*ekhiin tsagaan süü*, ‘the mother’s white milk’), maternalism or the mother–infant relationship. These connotations are reflected in a Mongolian analogic proverb:

White milk, the highest food
White mind, the highest trust²⁷

The above proverb uses the terms *deej* and *deed* for what I have glossed as ‘highest’; both are derived from *dee-* (‘high’). *Deej* refers to the first, top portion of milk or another food, which is reserved for ritual offerings or for honoured guests and the like. The first quantity of milk (*deejis*) is often offered in libation to local mountains or spirits, using a special spoon (*tsatsal*) if available; this custom is called *tsatsal örgökh*, which translates roughly as ‘sprinkle offering’ (Figure 4). Drawing on these associations, Mongolian President Ts. Elbegdorj initiated a campaign in 2010 to offer ceremonial toasts with bowls of milk, rather than alcohol – setting an example with his own New Year’s toasts.²⁸ The association of milk with purity can also be seen as linked to a variety of customary rules and taboos ensuring that the sanctity of milk is maintained.²⁹

Milk and ‘pure (white) thought’ can both be seen as deriving from a close, trusting (e.g. maternal) relationship. Mongolian dairying practices are rooted in the idea that the mother’s continued giving of milk is contingent on her ongoing maternal care for her offspring: young livestock are not weaned until winter, when the cattle stop producing milk in preparation for spring birth, and calves are always allowed to suckle briefly before the cow is milked by humans. An additional set of customs involves coaxing (*uyaraakh*) mother animals who refuse their young (*golokh*), through special musical melodies and calls intended to induce heightened emotions – drawing on the understanding that milk production is related to a special emotional state associated with the mother–infant bond.³⁰

The cultural value of milk is further related to a widely held view of biological symbiosis between Mongolians and their natural environment. Many Mongols extol the virtues of a summertime diet consisting exclusively of dairy foods (*tsagaan khood*, or 'white food', a term now also used to translate 'vegetarian'). I have often heard it asserted that the consumption of meat in summer is a relatively recent, urban phenomenon; the 'authentic' Mongolian diet is a seasonal one, consisting almost exclusively of dairy products in summer and only meat in winter. Drinking milk in summertime, according to this account, provides nutrition and strength, while eating meat (and mutton fat) in winter offers the body protection against the harsh cold. Such claims are sometimes invoked by the pastoralists with whom I work, in explaining my apparently uncanny ability, for a non-Mongolian, to eat a meal consisting entirely of boiled meat and fat: since I come from Canada – a 'cold country' – my organism must be adapted to the need to consume large amounts of meat in order to stay warm in winter. Diet, according to this viewpoint, is not simply a matter of personal taste, but a set of practices governed by inherited biological needs, which are conditioned by generations of subsistence in a particular ecological environment. The view that staple foods that are not locally sourced may indeed become 'poisonous' to the Mongolian body can be considered a clear extension of this argument.

Positioning of 'natural' and industrial milk

Mongolian milk products are contrasted in public discourse to their Chinese counterparts as 'pure products of nature' (*baigaliin tsever büttegdekhüün*). The purity of these products is linked to minimal human control. The livestock themselves are of native breeds, raised using 'natural' methods as opposed to being bred through 'scientific' means of artificial insemination, hormone injections, and controlled feed diets. This view is clear from the comments of one informant:

I joined a technical study delegation to see the Mon Milk factory in Hohhot, and it was shocking what we saw. There were thousands of cows in individual stalls, all given artificial feed, and sitting in their own dung. The cows were trained to walk by themselves into the fully automated milking parlour, and leave when they were done. It looked like they never went outside. The cows were given injections to increase their yield. They didn't even seem to me like real cows, since they were produced by artificial insemination. Since then I've never bought Inner Mongolian packaged milk, even though they sell it here.

This consumer's rejection of Inner Mongolian milk overlooks the similarity of industrial dairy production in Mongolia, which increasingly involves stall feeding and artificial insemination from 'high-yield' breeds. Yet the comment belies an understanding that industrially produced milk is 'artificial' and 'unnatural', leading to a product that is no longer 'pure milk' – something that is merely collected and packaged by humans – but a manufactured commodity.

Mongolian dairies' labelling and marketing practices explicitly aim to position products made from imported, reconstituted milk as 'pure' and 'natural', drawing on an existing language of Mongolian symbols defining milk and its purity in relation to the cultural, ecological, and spiritual environment.³¹ The packaging for liquid milk produced by the beverages manufacturer APU, a former state entity, is a case in point (Figure 2). The milk ingredient listing indicates 'dried cow's milk' and 'softened water'. Yet the package is labelled 'Pure milk', and contains an image of a Mongolian yurt surrounded by dairy cows, in a landscape of tall grasses with mountains in the background, surmounted



Figure 2. Package of liquid milk produced by the beverage manufacturer APU.

by the blue sky; the wisp of smoke from the chimney of the yurt suggests a calm day. The first side panel describes the milk in terms indicating that the product is actually ‘natural’ but has simply been packaged using modern technology: ‘Pure milk is a pure product of nature that has been sterilized and packaged using UHT progressive technology’; the panel text further indicates a shelf life of 6 months, as well as compliance with MNS 0219:2011 and ISO 22,000 standards. The opposite panel contains a poetic eulogy of ‘pure milk’, in the manner of the traditional *yerööl* or *magtaal*:

Beginning with our elderly and ancestors
 Followed by youth and children
 Vivifying [all] with healthy energy
 An aggregation of minerals and nutrition
 Abundantly rich in vitamins
 Perfection of flavourful goodness
 Symbolizing the bounty of food
 Pure white milk
 Rich with cream
 Fine, thick, pure milk

Television marketing of milk products similarly makes frequent reference to traditional and ritual practices that situate milk as a pure or sacred product. An example of a typical



Figure 3. Vitafit ‘Morning Milk’ commercial. Making milk tea inside the yurt. The action depicted here is *süü samrakh*, which involves ladling raw milk or tea from the pot and pouring it back in, to allow the milk to scald without boiling over. B. Lkhagvasüren’s wife is depicted wearing fancy national dress.

television commercial is the Ugluu (Morning) Milk spot featuring author B. Lkhagvasüren, produced in 2009 (Figures 3–5).³² Although the product in question is made from imported dried milk, it is shown here incongruently being consumed and



Figure 4. Vitafit ‘Morning Milk’ commercial. Standing at the entrance of her yurt, and wearing her fancy hat, B. Lkhagvasüren’s wife makes a ritual offering of the *deejis* of the milk tea (*tsatsal örgökh*), in the direction of the rising sun. The home is revealed to be a herder’s winter or spring camp.



Figure 5. Vitafit ‘Morning Milk’ commercial. Poet B. Lkhagvasüren drinks milk tea from a silver bowl, as a young girl (implied to be his granddaughter) looks on. Blocks of aaruul and clotted cream are set out on a platter on the table before them. The yurt is revealed – somewhat inconsistently with the exterior depiction of an ordinary pastoral household – to contain fancy furnishings and decorations in the national style, including a leather painting (rear centre) and a Buddhist scroll (right).

offered within a pastoral household, in direct association with objects and practices of a recognizably ‘traditional’ and ‘national’ character, within a setting of ‘pure nature’. The commercial shows Lkhagvasüren’s wife preparing milk tea and making offerings in the direction of the rising sun, after which the poet drinks slowly from a silver bowl, savouring the milk tea. The commercial includes imagery of infant livestock at the tethering line outside the herders’ home, livestock heading off to pasture, and a panoramic shot showing the steppe with mountains in the distance and clear blue sky, evoking the ‘pure natural landscape’ of the Mongolian pastoral countryside.

The Goyo Tarag controversy

The recent controversy over Goyo Tarag provides a useful point of entry into current expressions of how notions of purity are tied in with questions of ethnic-nationalism, industrial production, and food security. Since 2012 Goyo Tarag has been targeted by the ‘Dairy Consumers’ Centre’ NGO (DCC), which led a media campaign alleging that the product is mislabelled and does not comply with national food safety standards. Headed by consumer activist B. Tseren, the DCC demanded that the company cease production of Goyo Tarag, as it contains ‘E number’ preservatives that are not permissible according to the ‘national tarag fermentation technology’ standard – E441 (gelatine, used as an emulsifier) and E330 (citric acid, used as a preservative and flavouring agent). The DCC launched a class-action lawsuit against the manufacturer, which promptly counter-sued, demanding 78 million tögrög in reputational damages.

In 2013, the DCC published further alleged evidence that the manufacturer of Goyo Tarag had falsified food safety inspection documents. The DCC later joined forces with the Consumer Rights and Education Federation (*Khereglegchiin erkh, bolovsrolyn*



Figure 6. Goyo Tarag label, as updated in 2013. The label reads: 'Ingredients: purified water, dried cow's milk, sugar, stabilizers (E1442, E440, E451, E331III). Lactic acid cultures: *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*. Storage period: 28 days in cool conditions, +2°C-+6°C'. The label indicates compliance with standard MNS 4229:2011.

kholboo) in claiming that bacterial culture counts from laboratory samples of Goyo Tarag had been falsified, as actual live bacteria counts were 100 times lower than the minimum required by law.³³ The NGOs alleged collusion between food safety inspectors and Orgil Foods, asserting that the tarag is an 'ordinary white-coloured beverage' but not a natural dairy product (Figure 6).³⁴

Following shortly on these reports, an editorial by J. Erdenechimeg was published on several news sites, alleging that Orgil Foods was selling Chinese yogurt drink as Goyo Tarag.³⁵ The text of this editorial begins with an evocation of Mongolia's pastoral heritage, situating tarag consumption within a system of 'traditional' practices that link Mongols to a living natural environment ('tarag is a living food'), their resilience (Mongolians 'can live for several months on tarag alone during times when meat is unavailable'), and an 'uninterrupted' tradition. The author points out that tarag is one of the *naiman neriin baraa*, or 'eight staples' that newly privatized shops were required to sell beginning in the 1990s. Erdenechimeg goes on to argue that the Mongols, who obtain over 80% of their consumer goods from China, are 'now no longer able to make even our national dairy products with our own hands'. Drawing heavily on the reports issued by the Dairy Consumers' Centre, the author claims that Goyo Tarag is evidently not tarag because it contains chemicals giving it a shelf life of 90 days, but something else entirely – a 'foreign' beverage. The 'real' tarag is a living food, linked to a domestic national tradition, which spoils rapidly precisely because it is natural.

Terminological uncertainty

These reports and discussions call attention to popular uncertainty over what should actually be defined as 'tarag'. The industrially produced product is chemically and biologically similar to the 'traditional' one, but bears little resemblance to it in social and cultural terms. Mongolian consumers express different perspectives on the defining features of *tarag*, in attempting to negotiate the boundaries between categories such as *tarag*, *elgen tarag* (fresh, unstirred tarag), *isgelen tarag* (sour tarag), and *yogurt*.

The popular term *elgen tarag* – used to describe the most desirable form of tarag – refers to fresh, creamy yogurt that has set and not been stirred, resulting in a gelatinous yogurt that shivers but keeps its form when touched, similar to a raw sheep's liver (*eleg*).

The liver, as linguist G. Gantogtokh suggests, is a significant metaphor since it is the organ Mongolians associate with love, in the same way that Europeans view love as coming from the heart. In commercial terms, *elgen tarag* may specifically refer to a product manufactured according to a technology patented in 1992 and employed in several major dairies.³⁶

Government regulations on dairy processing and sale do not mention *elgen tarag*, but define three specific types of yogurt for commercial labelling purposes.³⁷

‘Yogurt’ refers to a fermented dairy product high in non-fatty solids, that has coagulated evenly or has been stirred to provide an even texture.

‘Tarag’ refers to a product coagulated through inoculation with a culture of tarag spores, which contains a variety of microorganisms existing in unique symbiosis.

‘Mongol tarag’ refers to a traditional product coagulated through inoculation with a mixed culture containing local strains of *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*.

These definitions are somewhat confusing, insofar as they describe products with characteristics that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The term *tarag*, as officially defined, refers to ‘live yogurt’, containing live culture bacteria. It overlaps with the terms ‘bio-yogurt’, used for example in Russian standard GOST R 51,331-99, which defines only ‘yogurt’ and ‘bio-yogurt’ (probiotic yogurt), which is made from *Bifidobacteria* and *Lactobacillus acidophilus* or other bacteria with special health benefits. Yet the specific meaning of ‘probiotic’ is not included in the Mongolian definition; rather, *tarag* is presented in contrast to *yogurt*, which is essentially a thickened, fermented dairy product – but not necessarily one that includes any live or probiotic bacteria.

The term *Mongol tarag* differs only from regular *tarag* to the extent that it is required to be made with ‘local strains’ of conventional (rather than probiotic) cultures, and that it is a ‘traditional product’. But the extent to which bacterial strains used by contemporary herders are truly ‘local’ – or even contain the specified bacteria – is questionable. In one recent study, microbiological analysis of samples taken from three pastoral households’ yogurt in Dundgovi revealed that only one of the households’ tarag contained *L. delbrueckii* subsp. *bulgaricus* (one of the bacteria required for labelling as ‘Mongol tarag’) – whose presence the authors attributed to the possible use of commercial yogurt as a starter, dismissing the possibility of local origin.³⁸ Other cultures encountered were *L. helveticus*, *L. kefir*, *L. fermentum*, *L. acetotolerance*, *L. acetotolerance*, *I. orientalis*, and *K. marxianus* in varying combinations. In a separate study conducted in Govi-Altai and Övörkhangaï aimags, scientists reported that the predominant cultures were *L. fermentum* and *L. helveticus*, which together accounted for 81.6% of lactic acid bacteria isolates; in an even broader study involving 31 samples from six aimags, 184 strains of lactic acid bacteria were isolated, including 50 strains of *L. delbrueckii* subsp. *bulgaricus* and 57 strains of *L. kefir* subsp. *kefir*.³⁹ The distribution of lactic acid bacteria types across different samples tells a further story. No single type of bacterium was found universally in all samples in the above studies, although *L. kefir* was found in all samples of camel tarag. *Lactobacillus helveticus* was the most common type of bacterium, but was still found in fewer than two-thirds of the samples. Such findings demonstrate that the bacterial composition of tarag varies considerably by region, livestock species, and even by household. Furthermore, it is clear that effectively none of the tarag made domestically by herders’ households in Mongolia satisfies the food safety regulations’ definition of ‘Mongol tarag’.

Given this terminological confusion, it is hardly surprising that Mongolian consumers are uncertain as to what constitutes a 'pure' dairy product. Commenters on news reports concerning Goyo Tarag frequently claimed that industrially produced tarag is not in fact 'real', but rather a chemical product with unusual and potentially harmful properties, resulting from an unknown industrial process:

AIMAAR: Really if you let it go sour it turns into something nasty, bitter like medicine and pitch black, I've no idea what it's made of but it's definitely not milk⁴⁰

MONGOL LADY: It's true, if you leave the bottle out eventually a thick black residue forms, ordinary tarag doesn't do that. Don't give it to your kids.⁴¹

ANONYMOUS: I drank a bottle of this once with my son, and we both got terrible food poisoning, after that we've stopped buying it⁴²

ZA ZA: milk your cow, boil the milk, let it sit and remove the clotted cream, then make your tarag, only then will you have real Mongolian [sic] quality. Obviously any product that is made by industrial process is produced for a profit, bastards who have no qualms about anything can only do things like this, pretty soon they will probably have artificial meat produced on order by our southern neighbours then import it and deceive us⁴³

MMM: it would be good to know soon whether this [claim that Goyo Tarag is Chinese] is true or false. Until then it would be best not to buy this stuff. Obviously if there are ingredients such as E421, E312 etc. listed on a food product they're all chemicals. These [ingredients] are even on the tarag produced by mon suu the children's milk factory. Only a few [products] actually have these written on the label. There are lots more where it isn't written. we have no idea what we are eating and drinking ...⁴⁴

Consumers' confusion in attempting to distinguish the 'national' (*Mongol tarag*) from the 'foreign' (*yogurt*), and the 'real' (*jinkhene tarag*) from the 'industrial', is compounded by rumours that some 'national' products are in fact imported. In 2013 *Ünen* newspaper published side-by-side photographs comparing Goyo tarag and Chinese yogurt, implying that the products are identical apart from the pasted-on Mongolian label.⁴⁵ A similar editorial was run several months later by the popular news site *Olloo.mn*, asking whether the visual similarity between Goyo Tarag and its Chinese counterparts was due to Orgil Foods copying the Chinese packaging, or using the same production technology: 'Why must they have the same packaging', the article asked, arguing that the similarity to Chinese products 'gives rise to suspicions that the product might be made in China'.⁴⁶

Chinese 'poison'

In early 2014, a photograph posted on Facebook, allegedly showing crates of Vitafit 'Goyo' tarag being unloaded in Ulaanbaatar from a train boxcar arriving from China, provoked a much wider debate on purity and food safety. Although some commentators questioned the author's assertion that the tarag was being imported from China, others interpreted the photographs with expressions of ethnic hostility toward the Chinese, drawing on the notion that Chinese were attempting to 'poison' the Mongols with their milk. As interest in the photographs spread, mainstream news outlets began to report on them widely. A brief item was published by the news site *Tsag.mn*, containing an editorial appeal to resist Chinese products:

We are unable to avoid a sensation of fear in observing that products from our southern neighbour such as Yeli and Mon Milk, known to us as 'milk with melamine', which killed a large number of young children and which were prohibited from import for a time, are now

visible on the shelves in food markets and shops. These photographs, distributed among public social networks over the weekend, reinforce this fear.

Mongols, we have the freedom to make healthy and safe choices, so we call on you not to use uncertain products.⁴⁷

This brief editorial conflates several categories of ‘unsafe’ products: milk products tainted with melamine, milk with a long shelf life, and Chinese goods. These are collectively ‘uncertain products’ (*ergelzeetei бүтээгдэхүүн*), referring to the uncertainty over their origin, contents, and production process, reflecting the *possibility* – though not necessarily the conclusive fact – of non-safety.

Many of the initial Facebook commenters were in fact sceptical of the photographic evidence. Some posters suggested that the photographs actually showed Goyo Tarag being shipped to the countryside. Yet a large number of commenters expressed a lack of surprise, possibly even indifference, given the assumption that Goyo Tarag – among other products – might have been suspected to have been Chinese all along:

M. ENKHÜÜSH: In general everyone already knows this! Everything we eat and drink is imported from China!⁴⁸

B. BASKHÜSLEN: Didn’t you know, in general all mongolian tarag and milk is imported as dried powder from the south.⁴⁹

BAYARSAIHAN BAYARJARGAL: That very same goyo tarag and such are Chinese [sic] yogurts they have exactly the same green cap and white bottle all they do is change the plastic label and import it here.⁵⁰

AMARJARGAL BAT-OCHIR: The taste and smell are exactly the same as the stuff you can buy in china, stands to reason.⁵¹

The discourse took on ethnic dimensions through commenters’ use of the racial epithet *khujaa*. In some cases the epithet was used to describe Goyo tarag itself, implying not only Chinese origin but inferior quality:

A. AMARBOLD: Obviously that tarag is *khujaa* ...⁵²

ANONYMOUS: Once when I was in Ereen [Erlian, the Chinese border town] I bought and drank a bottle of tarag. It tasted exactly the same as this goyo tarag, as soon as I tasted it I began suspecting that goyo tarag is actually *khujaa* tarag.⁵³

KHUJAA2: We’ve known all along that that stuff is *khujaa* tarag, our family never uses it ...⁵⁴

Other commenters associated the prevalence of Chinese (*khujaa*) products with Chinese territorial encroachment, accomplished through a ‘conquest’ of the Mongolian people by taking control of their staple food supply, including milk and meat:

D. OYUUMAA: So what should we eat ... should we just make all our own food at home? even if we tried of course all the fruit and vegetables are *khujaa*.⁵⁵

ALTANBAYAR ODGEREL: If we go around saying ‘that’s imported from *khujaa*’ we’ll all end up starving to death, the *khujaa* are even taking hold of meat, if you ask what isn’t imported from *khujaa* you’ll get a fairly low number [of goods], forget about the mongols, there’s probably not a country left without *khujaa*.⁵⁶

A few went so far as to suggest a conspiracy led by ‘half-breed’ Chinese in Mongolia, to take over the country with Chinese ‘poison’:

GARIDAA: I saw the advertisement in TV Zone magazine and bought some to try out, but left it on the window overnight, and had to throw it out [in the morning] because it had turned into a nasty thick black substance. This is the kind of thing our newspapers and magazines take money to promote. They say that TV Zone is [pop music composer and businessman] Balkhjav's magazine. These nasty *khujaa* are joining forces with the half-breeds who have got wedged themselves in [to our society] here and will probably poison us Mongols to death.⁵⁷

This comment refers to pop music composer Balkhjav, who is rumoured to be part-Chinese, and who has managed to 'wedge' himself into Mongolian business and politics, as the manager of Ulaanbaatar Broadcasting System (the city-owned public television station) and as a successful businessman.⁵⁸

In a few cases, commenters found fault with Mongolians themselves, claiming that Mongolian nationalism is rooted in a false identity that in fact borrows much from China, and as such involves little more than empty symbols. The following comment refers to the nationalist singer S. Javkhlan, who had recently held a concert series commemorating his own birthday, entitled *Mongold mendelsen ödör minu* (My date of birth in Mongolia) – the publicity still for which showed Javkhlan wearing historically reconstructed 'authentic' Mongolian clothing (the 'Hunnu [Xiongnu] deel') and engaged in calligraphic writing.⁵⁹

TUMUR: Goyo Tarag is not *khujaa* tarag. Tarag from factories in China tastes better. The reason being that it is made from pure Inner Mongolian cow's milk. In our country all milk products are made from milk powder. Since they stopped transporting milk by official means, the Mongolian factories that produce milk and dairy products have all resorted to mixing milk powder to make various products. So what now. This people who are brainwashed by singers who go on about 'Mongol birthday' but dip their Chinese brushes in Chinese ink and write Chinese style calligraphy might as well chase after their 40 million livestock and fill their bellies with powdered milk.⁶⁰

Some online comments, blaming Mongolian herders, belie the extreme cultural gap that has emerged between rural and urban Mongolians. The following comment, in response to a previous commenter's suggestion that things were better in the socialist days, abusively describes pastoralists as 'citizens without civilization' (*irgenshilgüi irged*):

CITIZEN: OK so that's how things used to be, now tell us what we can eat today, safe food is rare though so that shouldn't take much time. This is what happens when herders greedily raise the price of everything, they lose all their livestock and move to the city so [now] there are increasing numbers of uncivilized citizens [living] in disorder, but that's not all, they constantly complain and make huge demands, which they think is some kind of 'struggle' but thanks to these rural savages Mongolia's development is coming to a standstill, today these filthy ruralites of ours are living like half-idiots, drinking airag and fooling around with their neighbours' wives.⁶¹

Notwithstanding assertions by nationalist elite intellectuals that Mongolia remains a 'pastoral nation' that must stand by its heritage as a 'nomadic civilization' (see Tsetsentsolmon, this issue), it is clear that many urban residents view 'traditional' pastoralists as an impediment to development.⁶² The comment quoted above outlines an argument commonly found in online discussion forums addressing pastoralists: the notion that herders are lazy but greedy, resulting in their inability to produce commodities efficiently and sell them at 'reasonable' prices, or even to keep their livestock alive during periods of ecological crisis. The perceived culture of entitlement ascribed to

herders, according to this argument, translates into urban consumers needlessly paying high prices for domestic goods, and in the state bailing out irresponsible and inefficient producers – both of which are not only obstacles to economic growth, but indeed foster ‘backward’ and inefficient production systems.

The end of the rumours?

In retaliation against the DCC allegations, the director of Orgil Foods, N. Batzayaa, gave a newspaper interview in June 2013, during which he asserted that Goyo Tarag is made with cultures from the Netherlands (Chr. Hansen), stabilizers from the USA (Cargill), and dried milk from New Zealand. Batzayaa explained that the company uses liquid milk from ‘Atar Chandgana Süü’, a sister company located in the town of Ölziit in Kherlen sum, Khentii aimag, a dairy farm with 400 cows built on the site of the former Chandaga State Farm, but admitted that the liquid milk supply is not adequate to meet production needs, requiring imported reconstituted milk to be used in the production line and combined with fresh milk.⁶³

In late February 2014, the producers of Goyo Tarag held a second press conference to debunk the Facebook rumours. Showing a freight shipping slip as proof, the company representatives explained that the photographs posted on Facebook depicted people purchasing goods from a train car at the loading area for freight trains headed to the countryside.⁶⁴ The following day, the company offered a press tour of its facilities as further proof.⁶⁵ For the most part, commenters responding to published images of the factory production line expressed a degree of satisfaction that the product had been made ‘visible’. Readers of the reports were not all convinced, however. Some reiterated their conviction that the product was identical to that found in China, that it was obviously imported, or that the news story was nothing more than a sponsored item planted by the company.

Ultimately, the crisis of uncertainty provoked by the rumours surrounding Goyo Tarag resulted from a combination of factors, reflecting concern over survival in every sense – biological, economic, ecological, and cultural. The threat perceived as being posed by ‘Chinese poison’ is aggravated by increasing reliance on Chinese foods, over which Mongolians have little control. Underlying much of the discussion of food safety and food security is an assumption that Mongolians have become too individualistic – in other words, that they have come to put private gain ahead of national solidarity. Criticisms were thus directed against the Goyo Tarag producers, food safety inspectors, and even customs officers, all of whom were suspected by some readers of involvement in corrupt practices:

ANONYMOUS: We’re the ones who should be called stupid animals. We have the opportunity to eat the most original [i.e. natural] food available anywhere yet we’re a stupid people, when we see someone starting to stumble we just sit by and hope they will fall.⁶⁶

ANONYMOUS: What are the professional inspection agencies staffs doing? So long as they can blackmail people into giving them a bit of money they have no interest in whether the public are being poisoned, or even dying. As a citizen, I am extremely perplexed that such people are above the law.⁶⁷

ANONYMOUS: Why don’t those professionals who are supposed to be monitoring and checking [such things] speak up? Probably they are either fake-diploma graduates without any knowledge, or else bribe takers. ... America, Japan, even China import [food], but the thing is they have stringent standards and laboratory tests, why can’t we implement these?⁶⁸

Purity and civilization

The above discussion has revealed some of the ways in which the symbolism of 'pure milk' operates to position Mongolian people and culture as biologically 'natural'. As I have pointed out in relation to the consumption of meat and dairy products, the 'traditional' diet is widely held by Mongolians to be at least partly determined by biology, as an inherited adaptation by the Mongol human organism to the natural environment of Gobi and steppe. This diet is further embedded in the symbiotic relations between pastoralists and their livestock, which tend to be viewed as the result of co-evolution rather than domestication.⁶⁹ As suggested by the parallel maternal behaviour identified by Mongolians in humans and livestock – *shilrekh* ('running away'), the post-partum psychological state, and the need for maternal attachment as a prerequisite for lactation – livestock are not perceived in simple economic terms as 'meat-producing' or 'milk-producing animals', but as sentient beings who need to be nurtured and coaxed. It is no coincidence that herders often describe milk as the gift or 'bounty' of their animals (*malyn khishig* or *buyan*): the offering of milk is considered conditional on the lactating mother's willingness to give milk, which in part is predicated on a psychological bond with her offspring. Milk is thus not merely a commodity to be consumed, but a substance that derives from a reproductive process involving a 'pure' state of mind. As the epitome of purity and bounty, milk further becomes the highest of offerings to the natural world, sprinkled in expression of positive relations with the mountains and waters (*uul us*).

The industrial processing and commodification of milk clearly undermine everyday reproductive relations between pastoralists and livestock. Yet, as the advertising messages by industrial milk producers show, the symbolism of milk as 'pure' and 'natural' retains some resonance, despite its dislocation from the practices in which the symbols originate. The articulation of biological purity through milk implies, above all, opposition to the culturally and technologically defined civilization of the neighbouring Chinese. Whereas China may constitute a strong civilization with greater political, economic, and technological power than Mongolia, the public discourse I have referenced in this article presents China as inferior to Mongolia in many ways. The Chinese – or '*khujaa*' – are implied to be selfish, vile, and cunning; their land is polluted; and their food products are unnatural, to the point of being poisonous. These messages suggest that while Mongolia may be smaller and weaker than its neighbour, it is nonetheless superior due to its positioning within a pure and 'natural' environment. The symbiosis of the Mongols, their livestock, and their grassland territory implies a wiser or more noble form of subsistence than one that gives rise to a poisonous mindset (*khoron sanaa*) and poisonous products (*khortoi büteegdekhüün*).

To a large extent, the public discourse on food safety in Mongolia constitutes a critique of industrialization processes, which in the context of the present discussion we might read as a critique of 'civilization'. The distancing of Mongolians from pastoralism and the accompanying shift to commodified production weaken human–ecological relations, while the rise of dishonest business practices has generated uncertainty over the safety of food products. Concern over these changes is expressed by some commenters as a fear of becoming 'like the Chinese', dirty and impure. Meanwhile the adoption by producers of the language and symbols of 'pure milk' and 'pure ecological products' subverts the underlying 'anti-civilizational' (primitivist) message of this discourse, by positioning commodified products as authentically natural, or as belonging to romanticized pastoral practices – as in the images of drinking milk tea in a pastoral yurt and offering libations in the Vitafit 'Morning Milk' commercial. Although Mongolian

consumers may not be fooled by messages proclaiming that reconstituted and industrially processed milk is ‘natural’ or ‘pure’, the practices of drinking (and offering) *Mongolian* milk do indeed constitute an assertion of national identity, with links to the pastoral heritage. Despite the transplanting of milk consumption from the pastoral to the urban setting, we can expect the symbolic dimensions of milk use to persist as elements of nation-building in Mongolia for the foreseeable future. At the very least, Mongolians can distinguish themselves from the Chinese by identifying themselves as a milk-drinking nation – and a people who still consume five times milk as much as their neighbours to the south.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. See for example the public posts by ‘Duulian Shuugian’ [1], ‘Delhijgees Zail’ [2], and ‘Yuu khiigeed baigaam be?’ [3]. Archived copies of all resources retrieved from the World Wide Web and cited in this article are available on request from the Mongolian Digital Ethnography Archive [4]. URLs for electronic resources cited in this article are referenced by numbered citations in square brackets, and listed in full below.
2. Throughout this text I use the Mongolian term *tarag* to refer to the runny, drinkable yogurt made by Mongolians, in contrast to the gelatin-thickened industrial product known in Mongolia by the foreign term *yogurt* (‘yogurt’). This terminological distinction is not merely a popular one, but is embedded in food labelling regulations, as discussed below.
3. Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, 200–1.
4. See for example E. Amarlin, Anti-Nuclear Movement Mongolia, Golomt.org, 2 January 2012. ‘Сэрэмжлүүлэг № 1: Хүнсний аюулгүй байдал – хортой сүү, самар, тос [Warning No. 1: Food safety – Poisonous milk, nuts, and oil]’ [5]. This article was republished on a number of mainstream news sites, including Zindaa.mn [6] and news.mn [7].
5. Kh. Saikhan, ‘Хортой сүү Монголд орж ирчихсэн юм биш үү [Is it not the case that poisonous milk has been brought into Mongolia?]', mminfo.mn, 19 August 2013 [8]; ‘АПУ, Сүү, Витафит компаниудын хортой сүү ард түмнийг хордуулахаар лангуун дээр өрөөстэй байх уу [Is the poisonous milk from companies APU, Süü, and Vitafit going to stay on the store shelves to continue poisoning the public?]', Chuhal.mn, 7 August 2013 [9]. Tests of milk product samples taken from markets in Ulaanbaatar ultimately did not reveal any contamination; see ‘Шинэ Зеландын “Хортой” сүүний талаарх мэдээлэл [Notice on the ‘Poisonous’ New Zealand milk]’, National Centre for the Study of Infectious Diseases, 12 August 2013 [10].
6. Anonymous, 18 June 2013, comment on Unen.mn, ‘Packaged from Chinese tarag’ [11].
7. Sherratt, ‘Plough and Pastoralism’; and Greenfield, ‘Secondary Products Revolution’.
8. Greenfield, ‘Secondary Products Revolution’.
9. Hong et al., ‘Identification of Milk Component’.
10. Outram et al., ‘Earliest Horse Harnessing and Milking’.
11. Rubruck, *Journey to the Court; Polo, Travels of Marco Polo*; Przhhevskii, *Mongolia, The Tangut Country*, vol. I, p. 54; and Huc, *Travels in Tartary*.
12. FAO Statistics [12].

13. Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia (MOFA), 2012, 'Хүнсний үйлдвэрлэл: Сүүний салбарын өнөөгийн байдал [Food production: Current state of the dairy sector]' [13].
14. Burdukov, 'Value of Dairy Products'; Tsevel, 'Mongolian Dairy Products'; Badamkhatan and Tserenkhand, 'Dairy Products', in *Ethnography of Mongolia*, vol. I, 210–24; Indra, 'Mongolian National Dairy Products'; Indra and Erdenebaatar, 'Camel's Milk Processing'; see also Indra and Nyamaa, *Milk and Dairy Products*; and Accolas et al., 'Le lait et les produits laitiers'.
15. Luvsanjav, 'Milk in the Mongol Customs'.
16. On the consequences of the zud see Red Cross, *Dzud: Final Report*; Sternberg, 'Environmental Challenges in Mongolia's dryland'; and Sternberg et al., 'Pressurised Pastoralism in South Gobi'.
17. Ser-Od and Dugdill, *Mongolia Milk Processing*.
18. Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Mongolia.
19. Mongolia, Ministry of Industry and Agriculture, 'Сүү үйлдвэрлэлийн салбарын танилцуулга [Introduction to the Milk Sector]' [14].
20. Statistics Canada, 2014. 'Cattle inventories, by province (Canada)' [15].
21. Statistics New Zealand, 2013. 'Dairy cattle numbers, by age, sex and farm type (ANZSIC06), at 30 June 2012' [16].
22. Government of Mongolia, 'Milk National Program' (2006); and Parliament of Mongolia, 'Mongolian Livestock National Program' (2010).
23. This line of argument is rigorously advanced by L. Damdinsüren, Professor of Dairy Science at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST), and one of the leading proponents of dairy process standardization. See for example Damdinsuren (2013), 'The Milk Market in Mongolia', and Хуурай сүүний тухай үнэнийг өчих нь [Disclosing the truth about dried milk] (Interview), 'Food Industry' blog, <http://www.fim-must.com/2010/04/blog-post.html>, April 20, 2010).
24. Ts. Baasansüren, 'Гадаадын хортой сүү уухаар дотоодын шивтэртэй сүүгээ увал яасан юм [Instead of drinking foreign poisonous milk, why don't we drink our Mongolian milk containing urine?]', dnn.mn, 27 March 2014 [17].
25. Paxson, 'Post-Pasteurian Cultures' and *The Life of Cheese*; Kurtz et al., 'Contested terrain'.
26. Cruz and Menasche, 'Tradition and Diversit'.
27. 'Идээний дээж цагаан сүү/Итгэлийн дээд цагаан сэтгэл'
28. 'Монгол Улсын Ерөнхийлөгчийн Цахиагийн ЭЛБЭГДОРЖ-ийн он солигдох мөчид хэлсэн үг [Words spoken by Tsakhiagiin ELBEGDORJ, President of Mongolia, at the moment of the arrival of the new year]', 31 December 2012 [18]. See also 'Ерөнхийлөгч архи хэрэглэдэггүй Монгол, архи хэрэглэдэггүй нийгэм болохыг уриаллаа [The President calls for a vodka-free Mongolia and vodka-free society]', 24 December 2010, Office of the President of Mongolia [19].
29. Nyambuu and Natsagdorj, *Taboos*, 42.
30. On the camel-coaxing ritual see Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni, *Ingen nulims [The Story of the Weeping Camel]* (film), 2003; Sampildendev et al., *Mongolian Ritual*, 40–4; and Mongolian Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 'Coaxing ritual for camel calves' Nomination file no. 00548 for Inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2011 [20].
31. The packaging of liquid milk reconstituted from milk powder frequently includes deceptive labelling as 'pure milk' or containing imagery suggesting local origin. This practice continues despite announcements by the state agency responsible for food safety that such milk labelling is illegal. See, for example, the news report 'Сүү үйлдвэрлэгчид [Dairy producers]', Eagle Television, 13 April 2010 [21].
32. Ugluu (Morning) Milk TV commercial featuring author B. Lkhagvasüren, 21 December 2009 [22].
33. The standard (MNS 4229:2011) requires a minimum 1×10^7 count of desirable bacteria per millilitre, and requires that the 'E code' for additives must be indicated on the label (section 7.3).
34. M. Soniuch. 'Мэргэжлийн хяналтын байцаагчид "Гоё" тарагны шинжилгээг хуурамчаар үйлджээ [Safety inspectors falsified tests for 'Goyo' tarag]', 2013-06-11 [23]. T. Janyerke.

- “Гоё” тараг стандартын шаардлага хангадаггүй [‘Goyo’ tarag does not meet standards]’, *Time*, 2013-06-11 [24].
35. J. Erdenechimeg, *Niigmiin Toli*, 18 June 2013. “‘Оргил хүнс” хятад тараг савлав уу [Did ‘Orgil Foods’ package Chinese yogurt?]
 - 36. ‘Элгэн тараг бүрэх арга [Method for producing elgen tarag]’, L. Damdinsüren and G. Gombo, 1992, Mongolian patent No. 770, code A23C9-137.
 - 37. Appendix to Decree No. 304 (2011) of the Government of Mongolia, ‘Сүү, сүүн бүтээгдэхүүний үйлдвэрлэл, худалдаанд мөрдөх техникийн зохицуулалт [Technical Specifications to be Followed in the Manufacture and Sale of Milk and Dairy Products]’: MNTR 2:2011. Sections 2.1.33-35 [26].
 - 38. Uchida et al., ‘Microbiota of “airag”.’
 - 39. Sun et al., ‘Dominant Lactic Acid Bacteria’; Watanabe et al., ‘Diversity of Lactic Acid Bacteria’; see also Yu et al., ‘Diversity of Lactic Acid Bacteria’.
 - 40. Comment on ‘Бидний амтархан уудаг “ГОЁ” таргыг Хятадад үйлдвэрлэдэг үү? [Is the tasty ‘GOYO’ tarag that we drink made in China?]', Factnews.mn, 24 February 2014 [27].
 - 41. Comment on ‘Made in China?’, Factnews.mn, 24 February 2014 [27].
 - 42. Ibid.
 - 43. Ibid.
 - 44. Ibid.
 - 45. “‘Оргил хүнс’-ийнхэн “Гоё” таргаа хятад таргаар савладаг [‘Orgil Foods’ package their “Goyo” tarag from Chinese yogurt]’, *Ünen*, 18 June 2013 [11].
 - 46. 27 February 2014. “‘Гоё” тараг Монгол уу, Хятад уу [Is ‘Goyo’ tarag Mongolian, or is it Chinese]’ [28]. The image accompanying the article appears to have been taken from Twitter [29].
 - 47. ‘Зарим нэр төрлийн тараг, ундаа, салатууд Хятадаас оруулж ирдэг шуугиан дэгдэв [Rumours fly that some brands of tarag, beverages, and salads are imported from China]’. This editorial was republished from Tsag.mn [30] on several news sites, including bolod.mn [31], uls.mn [32], and fact.mn [33].
 - 48. Comment on Facebook post [2].
 - 49. Ibid.
 - 50. Comment on Facebook post [34].
 - 51. Ibid.
 - 52. Comment on Facebook post [2].
 - 53. Comment on ‘Made in China?’, Factnews.mn, 24 February 2014 [27].
 - 54. Comment on ‘Orgil Foods’, *Ünen*, 18 June 2013, [11].
 - 55. Comment on Facebook post [34].
 - 56. Comment on Facebook post [3].
 - 57. Comment on ‘Made in China?’, Factnews.mn, 24 February 2014 [27].
 - 58. Ironically, Balkhjav is the composer of the music for a significant number of nationalist pop songs.
 - 59. See the image on ‘С. Жавхлан: Төрсөн өдрөөрөө “Монголд мэндэлсэн өдөр мину” тоглолтоо хийнэ [S. Javkhlan: I will perform the concert ‘The day of my birth in Mongolia’ on my birthday]’ [35]. The comment also evokes debate over the decision to replace Proclamation Day, a holiday commemorating the proclamation of an independent Mongolia, with ‘Great Emperor Chinggis Khaan Day’, informally known as ‘Chinggis Khaan’s birthday’. Some Mongolians have viewed ancestor worship, or birthday celebrations, as foreign traditions; see for example E. Erdenesuvd, 9 December 2012, ‘Темкагийн төрсөн өдөр ба Монгол төрийн “Хятаджих” бодлого [Temka’s birthday and the ‘Sinification’ policy of the Mongol state]’ [36].
 - 60. Comment on ‘Mongolian or Chinese?’, olloo.mn, 27 February 2014 [28].
 - 61. ‘Citizen’, comment on ‘Orgil Foods’, *Ünen*, 18 June 2013 [11].
 - 62. For a discussion of such arguments, see Marin, ‘Between Cash Cows’; Murphy, ‘No Room for Nomads’; and Bruun, *Precious Steppe*.
 - 63. “‘Оргил хүнс” ХХК-ийн захирал Н.Батзаяа: Тарагны савалгаа хүртэл нарийн технологитой. Үүнийг мэдэхгүй хүмүүс биднийг Хятад тараг савладаг гэж хэлдэг [N. Batzayaа, president of ‘Orgil Foods’ Co. Ltd.: Even the packaging for tarag has its own specialized technology. People who don’t know this say that we package Chinese yogurt]’, *Ünen*, 19 June 2013 [41].

64. Baatar.mn, 26 February 2014. “‘Гоё тарар’ хятадынх биш гэдгийг баталлаа [‘Goyo Tarag’ confirmed not to be Chinese]” [37].
65. ‘Н.Батзаяа: Түүхий сүүгээр жилийн дөрвөн улиралд тарар үйлдвэрлэхээр ажиллаж байна [N. Batzayaа: We are working towards producing tarag from raw milk in all four seasons]’, Time.mn, 26 February 2014 [38]. See also the video report on the factory tour broadcast by Eagle TV [39], and its accompanying online news article, “‘Гоё’ тарар, “‘Гоё” технологи [‘Goyo’ tarag, ‘Fine’ technology]”, 28 February 2014 [40].
66. Anonymous comment on ‘Orgil Foods’, *Ünen*, 18 June 2013 [11].
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Fijn, *Living with Herds*.

Referenced URLs

- [1] <https://www.facebook.com/duulian.shuugian/posts/275014779325338>
- [2] https://www.facebook.com/DelhijgeesZail/posts/433907273409096?stream_ref=10
- [3] <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=233793430077896&set=a.195242403932999.1073741827.191588557631717&type=1&permPage=1>
- [4] <http://purl.org/mondea>
- [5] <http://golomt.org/2012/01/02/warning1/>
- [6] <http://news.zindaa.mn/16jn>
- [7] <http://id.news.mn/content/94060.shtml>
- [8] <http://www.mminfo.mn/content/48048.shtm>
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