

# WHAT IS THE O'VOLJOO FOR MONGOLIAN HERDERS? THE RIGHT TO LAND IN PASTORAL REGIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST MONGOLIA

KAZATO Mari

Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

E-mail: [kazato@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp](mailto:kazato@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp)

## Abstract

This paper discusses how Mongolian herders have dealt with the *o'voljoo*, winter campsites with shelters and corrals, and the surrounding pasture, in response to post-socialist changes such as the privatization of land. Since the socialist period, the state has owned the pasture. However, international organizations are now exerting pressure on the government to establish private ownership of land as a measure against pasture degradation caused by overgrazing.

During the socialist period, the livestock, shelters and corrals of the *o'voljoo* were the common property of animal husbandry co-operatives. At the beginning of the 1990s, the co-operatives were dismantled and the livestock, shelters and corrals were distributed to the herders. In 1995, the government issued certificates assuring each household of the possession of land where the shelters and corrals of the household stood in the *o'voljoo*. The external logic of private property rights thus became central to the state's land policy.

Though the administration guaranteed possessory rights to the *o'voljoo*, local people did not necessarily adhere to the land rights themselves, as they regarded the right to the *o'voljoo* as incomplete in the absence of actual use. There appeared to be a gap between the state policy and herders' attitudes toward their rights to the *o'voljoo*. The herders' perspective was as follows: The core part of *o'voljoo* is the special soil called *buuts*, which consists of dung accumulated throughout many winters since ancestors' time, and serves as an indispensable "mattress" for animals, protecting them during the cold winter nights. It is necessary to build shelters and corrals to protect the *buuts* from weathering as well as to protect livestock from the cold. The rights to as well as the value of the *o'voljoo* can be generated only through usage in daily pastoral practice and active maintenance of the shelters and corrals and the digging up of *buuts* to move the hard part away.