

AAINews

APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL

CO., LTD

TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250

-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN

E-mail: aai@koushu.co.jp Home Page: <http://www.koushu.co.jp>

Nomadic pastoral system in Mongolia - supporting a shifting livelihood system

Since April 2003, I have made several visits to the Gobi Desert in Mongolia as a member of a development study team. Our works are to review and to investigate diverse ways to improve and support the stock raising system of the area, which is currently at the mercy of social reform and natural disasters. For me it has been a good opportunity to come into contact with another pastoralists, this time in Eurasia, after my encounters with the Baqqara tribe in Syria.

In Mongolia, the socialist planned economic system collapsed in the 1990s. This led to the break up of collective farms called "Negdel" and as a result private ownership of livestock became possible. Under the new market economy system, the number of livestock showed a drastic increase, and the number of stock raising households also increased in accordance with the growth in unemployment. On the other hand, many water supply facilities, such as wells, which had earlier been maintained and managed under the negdel system, became deserted and deteriorated during the period of social confusion. Moreover, the generous support given to livestock keepers during the socialist era was no more, and their lives are going through a period of drastic change.

Apart from the changes caused by the shift in social and economic systems, a variety of "movements" can be felt in Mongolia in general. The rainfall level changes greatly between years, and therefore the growth rate of grasses changes accordingly. Also, unlike settled farming, nomadic stock raising (which is the common style of stock raising in Mongolia) is based on constant movement and does not involve any crop cultivation and does not need fixed residences. In other parts of the world, such nomadic pastoral system "based on shifting livelihood" has gradually been losing its traditional style under the settlement policy of modern nations. While it may also be true that the unique natural conditions have necessitated it, it is surprising that the traditional style of nomadic pastoral system has survived to date in Mongolia even though with some changes under the influence of Soviet socialism.

In addition to the scarce and unstable rainfalls typical of arid land, Mongolia has another difficult climatic condition for stock raising; the severe coldness in winter. Such climatic conditions lead to the low productivity and instability of plant growth. In a place like the Gobi Desert, therefore, sustainable and stable cultivation is a very difficult dream to realize if not completely impossible. Pastoralists have learned to skillfully overcome the low productivity and instability of the pasturage by moving with their livestock. In the Gobi Desert, it seems crucially important to keep moving around in order to utilize the limited pasture resources, which are unevenly distributed under varied seasonal and regional conditions. Or in other words, owing to the fact that the pastoralists became nomadic, the limited grazing resources of the desert have been conserved. Here people's faces look very much like ours, but the agricultural techniques and planning methods of Japan are not readily applicable to the mobile livelihood system. Among them I contemplate the future of the nomadic pastoral system of Mongolia, in the midst of a transition to the market economy.

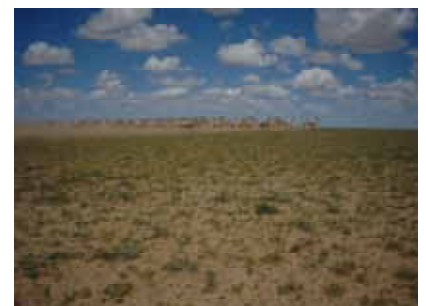
(By Koga in Saynshand, Dornogovi, Mongolia, 2003 November)



Bactrian camels of the Gobi



Spring camp with last patches of snow



Herd of Asiatic wild asses on the run