

Paper for Global COE Program

In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa

Mari Kazato, PhD., Researcher, Center for Integrated Area Studies

TITLE

What are the Cultural Values of Precious Metals in Rural and Urban Mongolia Today, Especially those of Silver Goods?

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

In Mongolian pastoral society, silver and silver goods (I call both of them just “silver”) are highly valued, which is also true of livestock, and utilized, inherited and exchanged. This study discussed what the economic and cultural values of silver in comparison to livestock are. I analyzed how they use, exchange and claim rights to silver, focusing on gender.

MAJOR FINDINGS

International organizations have put pressure on the Mongolian government to privatize land, whilst many countries took an interest in the underground resources of Mongolia such as gold. However, scholars argued that the local notion of the right to land was collective. In fact, the land is possessed by the state and used by local people collectively. Furthermore, it is the case with livestock. The Mongolian constitution states that livestock is the state’s property, though it is owned by each family collectively represented by the male head of household in practice.

Silver is possessed by individuals regardless of age and sex. There are varieties of silver goods such as horse gear ornaments, wooden bowls covered with curved silver, and adornments for women and men. They are inherited both from maternal and paternal ancestors and play roles as keys to evoke memories of ancestors. Furthermore, Buddhist monks advise putting on metal adornments such as silver due to silver’s association with health and fortune. On the other hand, silver is exactly valued in economic aspect. Actually, an old man told me that he bought a lump of silver from his first salary in the socialist era in the 1940s.

It is noteworthy that silver might be divided and put together, as the need arises. Artisans called *darkhan* go round in pastoral regions and reform pastoralists’ silver articles, at their request, by ways of casting and chasing. The purposes of their clients are not only a change of design or sort of articles but also to put together and recycle tired, fragmented silver, and to distribute their property among the children. Finally, I argue that the Mongols’ way of utilizing and circulating silver is similar to the case of livestock, as both silver and livestock may be integrated and divided.

PUBLICATION PLANS

Not yet decided upon



Left: Silver ring with ruby handmade without a mold.



Right: Saddle and other horse gears ornamented with silver.