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The Price on Our Practices: Motivation and Cultural Commodification in the Mongolian Tourism Industry

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**The Price on Our Practices:
Motivation and Cultural Commodification in the Mongolian Tourism Industry**

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Abstract

Mongolia, a country as rich in culture as it is in natural resources, is beginning the process of diversifying its economy beyond the mining sector. This process is opening the door to new industries such as tourism, and more specifically, culture-based tourism. The development of such an industry often leads to a phenomenon known as cultural commodification, by which local communities and peoples alter and sell cultural practices and experiences to tourists in return for a profit. Economically, the marketing of cultural practices is beneficial to local communities within Mongolia, but this conclusion is often drawn without considering other implications of a growing tourism industry. Through the methodology of participant observation and interviews of 20 individuals in Khuvsgul, Bayan-Olgii, and Ulaanbaatar, this study attempts to understand the motivations for developing the Mongolian tourism industry and the effects of this development on local peoples who participate in the industry. The participant observation research was conducted among two community groups, the Tsaatan reindeer herders of Northern Khuvsgul and the Kazakh eagle-hunters of Bayan-Olgii. The Mongolian tourism industry is in its infancy, and therefore presents the ideal climate for research and obtaining results that could influence future decisions pertaining to tourism within the country, both at the national and local levels.

The research and analysis allowed for the drawing of four sub-conclusions, which contributed to the greater understanding of the Mongolian tourism industries development and effects on local communities. These sub-conclusions include the ideas of misunderstandings of tourism development, systematic unawareness of community-based tourism initiatives and their development, the multi-motivational reasoning for the development of community-based ethnic tourism, and the effects of cultural commodification on perceptions of authenticity of cultural practices.

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Introduction:

Understanding Tourism and Cultural Commodification in the Mongolian Context

Looking out from 30,000 feet above, I realized that nothing quite prepares you for a country like Mongolia. China's bustling cities and cultivated fields give way to the vast openness of the Mongolian landscape, an area rich with culture and possibilities, but also rich with natural resources. It is estimated that close to 500,000 tourists took this, or a similar journey, in 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015), as they arrived in the land of eternal blue skies, but still, even with the contributions of these tourists, the economy is dominated by extractive industries. Attempting to avoid a phenomenon known as the resource curse, in which countries with an abundance of point-source, non-renewable resources tend to have less economic growth and worse development outcomes, Mongolia is seeking to diversify its economy, opening the door to the expansion of the underdeveloped tourism industry. As of 2014, tourism and its related industries made up only 5.2% of the nation's total GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015), yet Mongolia is a land spilling over with natural beauty, unique cultural heritage, and callings for adventure. Why then, is the development of the tourism industry stifled? Simply stated, miscommunication and misunderstanding of the development of a tourism industry.

Lonely Planet, a publishing leader in tourism travel guides, would not have the world believe that the industry is underdeveloped. In fact, their guide to Mongolia boasts the country as, "an adventure destination where travelers can see the traditions of the past still practiced today by hardy nomads" (Kohn, Kaminski & McCrohan, 2014). This statement seems to me to be quite a romanticized version of what I have found on the ground in Mongolia, but still, it does speak true to some dominant trends in the existing industry. Mongolian tourism is highly based upon cultural experiences and community-based initiatives, operating in more remote areas of

the country and using the appeal of exoticism to draw in foreign visitors. This type of tourism is known as ethnic tourism, and is defined as, “a desire of a tourist to experience and interact with exotic ethnic peoples” (Jafari, 2000). What has yet to be considered in Mongolia are the effects that the promotion and implementation of ethnic and culturally based tourism has on the lives of the local peoples involved in the industry. This study seeks to find that understanding.

In undertaking a study of the tourism industry in Mongolia, two main questions were considered. First, what forces are motivating the development of the Mongolian tourism industry and how is the industry developing? This question presents the possibility for a more macro-perspective on tourism development in Mongolia. Secondly, what effects beyond economic success does ethnic tourism, and the process known as cultural commodification, which ethnic tourism brings about, have on the lives and perceptions of local peoples? This question takes the study to the micro level, focusing on the everyday lives of peoples within the country who participate in the industry. One of the main focuses of the study is on the phenomenon of cultural commodification. Within the discipline of anthropology, cultural commodification is defined as, “the process by which cultural themes and expressions come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value. These cultural expressions and aspects become “cultural goods”; transformed into commodities to be bought, sold and profited from in the tourism industry” (Cohen, 1988). Using the idea of cultural commodification, this study looks beyond the economic benefits in an attempt to understand the processes of change associated with commodified culture in the tourism industry, specifically in the Mongolian context. The processes were studied among two specific community groups within the country, the Tsaatan reindeer herders, and the Kazakh eagle-hunters, two groups that are currently prominent attractions in the ethnic tourism industry.

Because its tourism industry could still be considered in its infancy, Mongolia provides the ideal platform for studying cultural commodification, as the process is occurring in the here and now, which makes the study even more necessary. An understanding of localized effects of tourism development will be highly important in the coming years, as policy decisions, government and community actions, and foreign company investment will increase with the development of the industry. The effects of such developments must be highly considered, both in the realms of macroeconomics and politics, as well as in the on-the-ground context of local communities. This study will also aim to understand the system of development in Mongolia, specifically in tourism, and the place that local people do, could, or should occupy within the system. This will lay the groundwork for well-informed decision making in the realm of community-based tourism initiatives.

Before moving into the methodology of the study and its corresponding results, it is important to establish a foundation of background information that has previously been researched and published in the areas of tourism development and cultural commodification.

As the world continues to become globalized and ease of travel becomes increasingly available, tourism development and tourism industries have become a common topic for research. As Azarya explains, "Tourism is the world's largest and fastest growing industry. It is the largest employer in the world and is estimated to account for the largest export earnings by an industry" (Azarya, 2004). There is no denying that tourism is major force in today's world, increasing rapidly as interconnectivity increases across the globe. Researchers have attempted to comprehend the development of tourism industries in the age of globalization, creating models that are more systematic and understandings of development schemes, or even citing trends in the tourism industry as results of the effects of globalization on the West. Hjalager, in her work

Stages in the Economic Globalization of Tourism, describes a four step systematic process in which tourism development occurs in a new location, and the ways in which this development is driven by globalization. These stages have been titled, “Missionaries in the market”, “Integrating across borders”, “Fragmentation of the value chain”, and “Transcending into new value chains” (Hjalager, 2007). This systematic model will later be used in examining the development of the Mongolian tourism industry. It has also been proposed that changes within and expansion of the tourism industry are direct results of other trends in globalization. The desire for ethnic tourism, or interactions with the “other” increases because, to paraphrase, as boredom increases due to global uniformity, the expanding middle class systematically scavenges the world for new experiences and exotic destinations (Azarya, 2004). Here could be found an explanation for the expansion of the tourism industry to Mongolia, a country that had been sealed off from the world for almost 70 years prior to the 1990s. These studies focused mainly on the trend of overall growth in the tourism industry, but for the sake of this research, special attention must be given to the development of community-based tourism. Both urban communities and rural settlements play important roles in the shaping and structuring of the tourism industry within a country. Milne and Ateljevic, who undertook the task of understanding the global-local relationship in association with tourism, explain the importance of community-based tourism and its place in the tourism system:

‘Community-based’ approaches are central to many tourism development plans around the world and there is a growing realization that localized cooperation, trust, and networking are essential ingredients in providing the right mix for successful tourism development outcomes. Indeed, tourism is often seen as a key element that can enable communities devastated by economic restructuring to

regain and enhance their economic foothold in regional and national economies (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001).

Even beyond the regaining of economic stability, research has shown that community-based tourism industries can serve to empower local communities, increasing esteem, pride, confidence, and external contacts. However, these smaller tourism initiatives face the challenge of socioeconomic integration brought about by globalization and the expansion of tourism industries. In her study of the nature and challenges of community-based cultural tourism, Cole explains that integration into the globalizing system runs the risk of destroying the appeal of local communities. As they are integrated into the system, they are seen as modernizing, and at the same time, losing their “exotic” or “primitive” appeal (Cole 2005). Researchers continue to debate the changes brought about to local communities by tourism, and if the benefits will outweigh the costs.

Although tourism has become a prominent topic for study, there is a major gap missing in the field of academic research devoted to tourism, which this project will attempt to fill; “the study of tourism has been handicapped by inattention to the supply side, and we have long argued that comprehending tourism requires understanding of how the tourism production system manipulates and shapes tourist places and destinations” (Debbage, 2004). In Mongolia, this gap in knowledge is especially prominent, as minimal research has been done on the tourism industry, and even less done on the supply, or local, side of the industry.

One of the major effects of tourism development that has been studied, though not heavily in Mongolia, is the process of cultural commodification. To gain a background platform off which to build analysis, it is necessary to turn to research in other regions of the world related to the topic of cultural commodification. In some studies, such as that of Bunten among

indigenous Alaskans, cultural-based tourism is branded as part of the “heritage industry”, and cultural commodification is described as a two-part process, both an economic response to a globalizing market, and a politically motivated expression of identity. This means that local communities, viewing the trends of tourism development and the opportunity for economic success, choose to market their cultural practices, but at the same time, use the marketing of cultural practices as an expression of self and cultural identity (Butten, 2008). Other studies, such as Pigliasco’s among Fijian firewalkers, reveal the more negative implications of cultural commodification. In Fiji, while local communities did gain revenue by opening their practice up to the public, the scarcity of the practice was sacrificed, and therefore became commonplace. The study denotes the possibility of losing cultural authenticity, which can be brought about by the marketing of cultural practices (Pigliasco, 2010). In summarizing the literature that currently relates to tourism development and cultural commodification, tourism development is both a product of and shaped by the process of globalization, and tourism is beginning to move to the community-level. Community-based tourism have varying effects on those involved in the industry, including empowerment, changing identity, and cultural commodification.

With a comprehensive background off which to build an argument established, it is possible to lay out a thesis that the study will attempt to prove or refute. The misunderstanding of tourism development by the Mongolian government is causing the tourism industry to develop more in community-based initiatives focused on cultural and ethnic tourism, rather than a noticeable, systematic, national development. The community-based tourism industries both serve as a form of income and as a way of cultural preservation for local community groups, but as tourism grows, these groups are beginning to be affected by the process of cultural commodification. Increasing international recognition and cultural commodification are

beginning to create changes within communities such as the Tsaatan reindeer herders and Kazakh eagle-hunters, with the potential of changing perceptions of cultural authenticity, but these changes often go unnoticed by members of the communities. To simplify, due to misunderstandings of tourism development by the Mongolian government, the tourism industry develops around community-based initiatives, which cause changes, including cultural commodification, among the communities participating in the industry.

Methodology

During the frigid one month period of late October and early November of the fall of 2015, my research took me from the capital of Mongolia to remote corners of the country, seeking to understand the ongoing systematic, or in some cases, anti-systematic changes brought about by the development of tourism in the Mongolian countryside. The research period involved multiple methods of data observing and recording, work with multiple groups of people with varying ranges of intersectionality, and analysis and conclusion drawing based upon multiple sources of data. In order to fully understand the participants, process, and scope of the research, the following methodology have been included.

Methods of Research

Attempting a multi-level study such as the one that has been employed in this research of the Mongolian tourism industry requires a unique set of research methods. Approaching the study from a mainly anthropological perspective, one of the main components of the research methodology is the practice known within the anthropology discipline as participant observation. This method of research involves an effort by the investigator to gain entrance into and social

acceptance by a foreign culture in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the structure of the society (Merriam-Webster, 2015). This process normally takes between six months and two years, but has been employed on a much shorter and less-complex scope for the purpose of this project. Because the study revolves around the tourism industry, participant observation was approached as both a researcher and a tourist. In so doing, an understanding could be gained of the interworking of small tourism communities, as well as a documentation of the tourism experience could be recorded. Although the participant observation periods were short, four days with the Tsaatan people and six with the Kazakhs, this time period was sufficient to gain a basic understanding of the daily functions of the communities, and the ways in which these functions may be changing due to the tourism industry. The short exposure period also allowed for a more realistic tourist experience, as tourists would not spend months and months of time within communities, but instead would experience them in quick, compressed time periods.

Through participant observation, data is collected by taking part in the activities and happenings of communities as they occur, and becoming immersed in within these activities, both as a researcher and a tourist. During periods of participant observation, data was recorded using three main techniques, observation journaling, photography, and personal journaling. Observation journaling involves the recording of scratch notes in a small notebook as significance events or simple daily life is occurring, then reflection upon these events and the journaling of the combined observations and reflections to draw full observational understanding. These observations are later compared with the observations of others, or information gained in interviews, allowing for the discovery of similarities or inconsistencies between what participants say about their lives, and what is actually occurring on a daily basis. Photography allows for a more physical collection of participant observation data. Photographs

were taken, with the consent of individuals, of both daily life activities and tourism experiences. Reviewing photographs often creates a memory triggering experience, which aids in the comprehension of emotional expressions brought about by experiences, which are important in understanding the experience of tourists and their draw to Mongolia. Photographs also provide physical representations of participants, places, and activities that are difficult to describe in words, and can serve as better representations than any written description. Finally, personal journaling was employed as part of participant observation. This is a highly important method of data collection, especially during periods of immersion. Because the mind and body become caught up in the daily activities of the community in which the researcher is participating, it is possible to miss small subtleties that may slip through observation journaling. Personal journaling, based more around personal experiences and the emotions they produce, can often fill in the spaces these missed subtleties should have occupied in the observation journal. This type of journaling gives more insight into the tourist experience, and the ways in which communities involved in the tourism industry draws reactions from their tourist visitors. The combination of these three methods of data collection, along with participation in daily activities, account for a well-grounded use of the participant observation methodology, even in the short periods of study.

The second main method of research used in this study were structured and semi-structured interviews. When working within participant communities, interviews are highly complementary to participant observation. Interviews with community members were undertaken at the convenience of the individual being interviewed, and consisted of a structured set of interview questions and responses interpreted through a translator, and a period of semi-structured interview conversation. The double aspect of the interview allowed for the obtaining

of desired information based on outlined questions, as well as information the participant found relevant to the study or simply wished to share through the conversational period of the interviews. Using interviews alongside participant observation among small communities allows for a comparison of the perceptions of daily life by the participants as told through interview responses, and the actuality of their circumstances as observed through participant observation. Any similarities and differences can be analyzed to determine their significance, account for the holding back of information by participants, or of differing perceptions of participants on daily life and larger processes that affect their communities. While working among participant communities, interviews were conducted through a translator, with responses either being directly recorded with ink and paper, or recorded using a recording device and later transcribed. Throughout the periods of participant observation, six interviews were conducted with Tsaatan peoples, three interviews were conducted with tour guides of tourism organizers in Khuvsgul, and eight interviews were conducted among Kazakh peoples.

The structured and semi-structured interview method was also used outside of participant communities to gain information on the Mongolian tourism industry and perceptions of those who observe the industry from a macro-perspective. Such interviews were conducted among academics, tourism organizers, and government workers, some through and translator, and some without. The same structure of targeting questioning followed by a conversational period was used, and interviews were recorded and later transcribed. During the research period in Ulaanbaatar, where most of the non-participant observation study was conducted, three interviews took place among academics, government workers, and researchers. Twenty interviews were conducted over the course of the research period, and an interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

The final method of data collection used during this study was background research through written or electronic sources. In studies centered mainly around participant observation and interviewing of participants, it is important to build a base of information off which to base analysis of observed and recorded data. Background information was drawn from a variety of sources, including travel guides and brochures, statistical data publications, and academic works. The data collection was undertaken through both online computer research and the reviewing of published materials. Although participant observation and interviews were the main methods of research, without background researching, there would be no basis off which to base observations, create comparisons, or draw conclusions. The combination of these three methods of research have allowed for a comprehensive study of the Mongolian tourism industry, and the ongoing effects of this industry on the lives of the Tsaatan and Kazakh peoples.

In order to ensure academic integrity and the protection of participants, informed consent, both verbally and through consent forms, was obtained, allowing for the use of names of participants, or pseudonyms to represent, them and the locations in which they reside.

Locations and Participants

Throughout the one-month research period, research was conducted in three separate areas of Mongolia, each with their own unique cultural backgrounds and significance to the study. These areas included Khuvsgul Aimag, Bayan-Olgii Aimag, and Ulaanbaatar. Each area, and those who participated in the study within each area, were specifically chosen for their importance to the Mongolian tourism industry.

Along with the Gobi Desert region, Khuvsgul, Mongolia's northern Aimag (administrative district in Mongolia), is one of the top tourist destinations in the country. Among

its natural beauty and pristine lake, Khuvsgul boasts being the home of the Tsaatan, communities of people who herd reindeer in the countries northern taiga. According to Lonely Planet, the Tsaatan are a main attraction of Northern Mongolia, and a visit to the community is described as, “ a fascinating experience... a rare chance to learn about a unique traditional way of life... a highlight of any trip to Northern Mongolia” (Kohn, Kaminski & McCrohan, 2014). The Tsaatan are often considered an “isolated peoples”, though the truth of this will later be examined. However, the idea of isolation plays into the exoticism and the appeal of ethnic tourism. The Tsaatan also represent a cultural minority group in Mongolia who have come to profit heavily from the development of the tourism industry. Research for this study was conducted among a small Tsaatan community, no bigger than 15 individuals, taking up winter residence in the Western Taiga of Khuvsgul. The community welcomed my translator and me, and we conducted participant observation and interviews among them, spanning a four-day period. In a way, the community does live in isolation, with a 2-day horse journey required to reach them from the nearest drivable roads, and therefore serve as an interesting study group for the process of cultural commodification as the tourism industry begins to reach the reindeer herders.

Within Khuvsgul, research, mainly interview-based, was also conducted in the Aimag center of Murun and a small, northern community known as Soyon. Both locations serve as stopping points and centers for accommodation on the journey to the Tsaatan people, giving context to the nature of adventure and ethnic tourism, and allowing for the gaining of insight from individuals involved in the tourism industry who are not necessarily members of the Tsaatan community.

To the far west of Mongolia, Bayan-Olgii was chosen for its high concentration of ethnic Kazakh eagle-hunters, a group rapidly becoming well-known around the world for their practice

of hunting with golden eagles, and a main group for tourist visits within Mongolia. Returning to the Lonely Planet travel guide, eagle-hunting is listed as one of the top 15 experiences to have in Mongolia, and given the following description: “For centuries, using eagles to catch prey has been a traditional sport... the sport is alive and well today, but you’ll only find it in a small corner of Mongolia”, (Kohn, Kaminski & McCrohan, 2014). In this description lies the ideal situation for studying cultural commodification; a centuries-old sport that is now becoming well-known and opened to tourists. Bayan-Olgii is also the site of community-developed cultural festivals, which adds an important component to the study of tourism in the region.

Within the Aimag, two main community locations were used for participant observation, both with their own resident eagle-hunters. The smaller of the two, Altamsongs Village is a winter residence village, home to between five and ten eagle-hunters. Within the location, both participant observation, including an eagle-hunt experience, and interviews were conducted. The second, a Soum center (administrative unit smaller than an Aimag) known as Sagsai, was chosen both for its residency of ten to fifteen eagle-hunters, and for its development of a local eagle-hunting festival. Sagsai serves as an interesting counterpart of Altamsongs Village. While Altamsongs is only beginning to see the arrival of tourists and feel the corresponding effects, Sagsai has served as a destination for tourists seeking the ethnic tourism experience of eagle-hunting since the late 1990s. A comparison of research within the two sites will allow for an understanding of changes brought about by the tourism industry in a similar ethnic and cultural region.

Aside from participant observation, research was conducted in a third site, the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. This location was chosen as Ulaanbaatar serves as the major tourism hub for the Mongolian industry, and is the site of major administrative decisions that may affect the tourism

industry. Within the city, research, mainly interview based, was conducted among academics, researchers, and members of the government. These individuals provide a more overarching and better-educated perspective on the development of tourism in Mongolia, and often play a direct or indirect role in the development of the industry. Ulaanbaatar also served as the location in which background information was gathered for the study. Together, these three locations, though diverse, aid in a dual micro-macro study of the Mongolian tourism industry.

Methods of Analysis

In taking an anthropological perspective for conducting research, most of the data gathered throughout the study is qualitative, based upon opinions of participants and observations of the researcher. Due to the nature of the data, most analysis is based on comparisons between observed data and data obtained through interviews, seeking to gain a comprehensive understanding of circumstance and change brought about by tourism development. These understandings are then compared to previously gathered data on the subject, and final conclusions are formed. Through participant observation, an outsider is able to gain perspective on happenings and events that may go unnoticed to members of the participant community, and therefore is in a position to draw more generalized conclusions about the effects that tourism has on these communities; affects that members of the community may be unable to see or comprehend due to the blinding effects of familiarity. Interview data was recorded, transcribed, and compared to find similarities and differences among answers, attempting to understand the perspective of community members on the events and forces that shape their lives within the tourism industry. Once data was gathered and analyzed, conclusions were drawn about the nature of the tourism industry and its effects on local people. These analyzed

conclusions will be discussed following a presentation of data gathered throughout the research period.

Data and Results

In conducting an ethnographic study based mainly on participant observation and interviews, data must be presented in more of a narrative account, describing daily activities, the observed processes, and the generalized answers of community members who participated in the study. Results will be organized based on the two separate participant communities, as well as a section dedicated to more quantitative data outlining the current development trends of the Mongolian tourism industry, and the qualitative data from interviews which corresponds with the more statistical figures.

Development of the Mongolian Tourism Industry

It is often difficult to quantify the concept of development, especially in a country like Mongolia where statistical data is limited, but the numbers that do exist seem to show a decrease or stalling of tourism development within the country. Since 2007, tourist arrival numbers have dropped from nearly 650,000 to around only 500,000, and the contribution of tourism to the Mongolian GDP has dropped significantly from 20% in 2009 to only about 5.2% in 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). The full data set for tourism arrivals can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Graph of tourist arrivals to Mongolia between 2004 and 2014, with projections for 2024 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015).

According to Odongerel, a worker within the Mongolian Ministry of Tourism, this corresponds with the recent economic decline the country is facing. She noted that, while Mongolia has great potential for tourism, which is highlighted in a report conducted by the Netherlands, citing Mongolia as a destination for both natural and cultural heritage (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2013), a lack of government action and an unfavorable economic climate are stalling the development of the industry (Odongerel, 2015). Through interviews, and in an attempt to understand the stalling of development, participants offered a few main reasons for the lack of tourism development in the country. Sabine and Keith, professionals in the field of conservation and tourism development, noted that lack of government understanding was the main reason for the faltering of the industry. Sabine explained that most development focus has recently been on extractive industries, that the institutions and policies for tourism development are not in place, and that there is a lack of cooperation between the private sector and government. She also noted that she believed that there are major misconceptions of tourism, and that most politicians do not understand what attracts tourist to Mongolia (Sabine & Keith, 2015). Only recently have government officials inside the Ministry of Tourism began to understand the marketing potential of Mongolia’s

nomadic culture, producing in 2014 the new marketing slogan for Mongolian tourism:

“Mongolia Nomadic by Nature”, the image of which can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 2: Promotional logo of the Mongolian Ministry of Tourism

Still, even with recent government initiatives, both Keith and Odongerel noted that the government still lacks major understanding of how to properly develop and market the tourism industry. Instead of capitalizing on the ethnic tourism industries that currently exist within the country, the government is attempting to create attractions such as water parks and ATV adventure tours, which in no way correspond with the marketable aspects of Mongolia’s culture or natural beauty.

In order to compare Mongolia’s tourism development to other systematic trends and identify the progress of developing the industry within the country, data from interviews will be compared with Hjalager’s four-stage outline of systematic tourism development. In examining the four-stage model closely, it almost seems as if Mongolia does not fit at all, but if it had to be placed within the model, would occupy the first stage, known as “Missionaries in the Market”. Within this stage, there is representation of tourism through a tourism board, international marketing collaboration by regional and national tourism enterprises, and market expansion of the tourism industry (Hjalager, 2007). However, Mongolia’s tourism industry would be considered underdeveloped even by these standards. Odongerel explained that one time there was a tourism board used for collaboration between the government and private sector, but that it was quickly disbanded due to lack of funding,. This disbanding highlights the lack of private sector and government cooperation that Sabine noted in her interview. International market collaboration is severely lacking, and although Mongolia did attend a national tourism

convention in Germany in 2013, efforts stopped there, and development of tourism presentations and strategies have been halted along with the disbanding of the of the tourism board (Sabine & Keith, 2015). Lacking most of all the expansion of the tourism industry, and government support for the localized tourism initiatives. While the government does supply a minimal amount of funding for festivals and major tourism events, such as the Tsaatan festival around Lake Khuvsgul (Oyunta, 2015), there is still a lack of uniform funding and support for the development of tourism throughout the country. In fact, some members of community-based initiatives also mentioned the lack of understanding of government tourism development. Batsayaa, a herder who lives on the outskirts of the Tsaatan community with who I conducted research, described a government initiative to develop a tourism camp in the region that would directly impact his and other herders winter pastures. He expressed that tourism can be extremely positive when done correctly, but that the Soum government had no understanding of the impact that their lodge would have, and that local community members better understand how to handle tourism in their areas (Batsayaa, 2015).

The most notable developments in the tourism industry of Mongolia are not those of the national government, but instead of community-based initiatives, such as those run by the Tsaatan reindeer herders and Kazakh Eagle-hunters. Although they do exist in the larger scheme of globalized ethnic tourism, these initiatives have many grass-root components, and have been the most successful initiatives in the tourism industry. Experts in the field of cultural tourism, such as Munkhjargal, believe this is because the initiatives tap into the cultural and “exotic” marketability of “isolated” Mongolian cultures (Munkhjargal, 2015). The data collected during fieldwork with these two community groups shows the daily lives of these peoples, the nature of

community-based tourism development, and perceptions of the relationships between culture and tourism.

Field Work Among the Tsaatan Reindeer Herders

The Tsaatan reindeer herders of the Mongolian taiga are often considered one of the most unique and isolated cultures within Mongolia. Their history, as told to me by Puujaa, a guide for tours to the taiga, began in the USSR as a member of the Tuvan ethnic group, who continue to herd reindeer in Russia today. During the purges within the USSR following World War II, members of the Tuvan population attempted to migrate to Mongolia, but were repelled and sent back across the border twice by the Mongolia government. On the third attempt, the Tuvan were allowed to remain in Mongolia, but were integrated into a multi-ethnic system established by the Mongolian socialist government, and relocated to Ulaan Uli (Puujaa, 2015). This integration into the system during socialist times reveals that, although today the Tsaatan live in hard to reach areas and consider themselves an almost separate culture, they are not truly isolated peoples, having once been part of the larger system from which they could not remain unchanged. Following the decline of socialism in Mongolia, the Tsaatan chose to return to the Taiga and to their primarily reindeer herding lifestyle, and in so doing, have remained a mystery to both foreigners and Mongolians alike. Halzan, a tourist host and shaman explained that when festivals in Khuvsgul began to feature the Tsaatan, other Mongolians were surprised to learn that the Tsaatan were just normal men and women (Halzan, 2015)

The semi-isolation enjoyed by the Tsaatan have allowed for the preservation of a traditional reindeer herding lifestyle in which revolves around the reindeer. In observing the cultural practices, Tsaatan daily life can be described in the following ways. Members of the

community live in both tepees and proper wooden houses, with reindeer as the main source of sustenance. The reindeer is used for meat, milked for dairy products, and ridden for transportation. The hide is also used for boots, rugs, and other products, antlers are carved and sold. A pattern of rotational herding is used, where some men of the community remain in the settlement, while others herd the majority of the reindeer in the mountains, and the roles are switched on a week to two-week basis (Jargal, 2015), while the women maintain the settlements, make bread and food, and care for the children. Along with reindeer herding, horse raising and logging are also common practices. Figure 3 shows Tsaatan community members using reindeer to move logs and lumber.



Figure 3: Tsaatan community members using reindeer for the transportation of logs

In discussing tourism with members of the Tsaatan community, there was an overwhelming approval for tourists, and even when there were minor complaints, individuals still wish for tourist numbers to increase. The main two issues that arose about tourists were their misunderstandings of timing and effects of their arrival, and disrespect of nature through littering. These issues were described to me during my interview with Halzan. His biggest complaint was that tourists arrive at random times without considering the impact it could have

upon the herders. He explained that during the spring, reindeer give birth, and if strangers visit during the birthing period, they will disrupt the spiritual relationships between the nature and the reindeer, and the reindeer will die. Even though the Tsaatan people attempt to explain the circumstances and ask that tourists do not visit during the birthing period, some guides and tourists still visit, and the death of the young reindeer is extremely harmful to the lifestyle of the Tsaatan. Halzan also complained of the prominence of littering, especially among Israeli tourists, and how tourists do not understand that everything in the world is connected, the Tsaatan, the reindeer, and nature, and if the littering of the tourists disturbs one, the system will be put off balance (Halzan, 2015). Still, even with these complaints, Halzan agreed that tourism was an important aspect of his life and the life of the community, and expressed his desire for the increase of tourism numbers. Motivations for this desire did vary between interviews, with some individuals citing the personal connections and benefits they gain from tourists interactions (Batsayaa, 2015), while others focused on the international recognition gained from tourists (Puravhuu, 2015), (Jargal, 2015), but one answer remained consistent: income. In fact, one participant made no attempts at hiding that money was the main motivator, answering the question about the benefits of tourists with, “no other benefits, just money” (Baatar, 2015).

Members of the community also held firm to the idea that their lives had not been significantly changed by tourism, and that they still practice the traditional herding style of their ancestors. Tartag explained that they do not seek out tourists, but because tourists come to them, they welcome the tourists into their homes and share their lifestyle. There is a belief that because the community is not taking active steps or making changes to pursue tourism, which their lives are not being changed (Tartag, 2015). However, this is slightly contradictory to what was observed. Although the lifestyle of reindeer herding does not seem to be greatly altered, there are

other changes to daily life. During the summer months, every family in the community will set up their own guest tepee in which tourists can stay, will produce hand-carved items for tourists to buy, and will, although maintaining the focus of reindeer herding, also give major focus to hosting tourists. Still, from what was observed, there is truth to the responses that the herding culture does not seem to have been altered by tourism, at least not among the community that I observed.

Field Work Among the Kazakh Eagle-Hunters

In comparison to the Tsaatan, Kazakh Eagle-Hunters of the Bayan-Olgii Aimag are far less of an “isolated people”, living, at least in the winter months, in organized communities throughout the Aimag. However, the actual practice of eagle-hunting only remains in the lives of about 80-100 Kazakhs who keep the tradition alive today. In inquiring about the history of the hunting tradition, I encountered a few different tales, but most revolved around the idea of a poor Kazakh man who could not afford to herd animals. Seeking a way to gain sustenance for his family, he captured an eagle, trained it to hunt, and sold the furs for income while keeping the meat for nourishment (Sailau, 2015) (Iris, 2015). Since then, the practice has traditionally been passed down from father to son, and exclusively kept within the Kazakh ethnic group. One of the most prominent results of interviews among eagle-hunters was the pride taken in the heritage and ethnic background associated with the practice, and I often heard that, “eagle-hunting only belongs to the Kazakhs” (Sailaukhan, 2015).

While eagle-hunting is a major cultural influence in the lives of those who participate in the practice, it is not the defining characteristic of the lives of the hunters. Eagle-hunters are often also herders, and on a daily basis take on the tasks of herding, including the maintaining of

livestock, horse training, milking and production of dairy products, and slaughtering of animals. During the time of my visit, the Kazakh families were undergoing the winter slaughter, a period before the harsh winter arrives in which families slaughter a large number of livestock and horses in preparation for the winter months. During the winter months, Kazakh peoples move into proper house complexes, and some even into community villages, such as Altamsongs Village. It is during the winter months that most eagle-hunting occurs, with ideal conditions following a fresh snow.

When asked about change occurring in daily life or in eagle-hunting, the generalized response was that, aside from accommodating tourists, things were not changing. While the mechanics and techniques of eagle-hunting may not have change, the nature of the practice however, is a source of differing opinion. Jensibek, the younger eagle-hunter whom I interviewed, described the practice as more of a sport, focusing on the skills and physique needed to handle a horse on the mountain, train an eagle, and compete in festivals (Jensibek 2015). Arman, another young eagle-hunter, described the practice as traditional, but also that it is used as a form of cultural show for tourists (Arman, 2015). Following the trend of pride in heritage, Sailau described eagle-hunting as a sport and an activity for show, but most importantly as a necessity, because he must continue eagle-hunting and pass on the practice to keep his tradition alive (Sailau, 2015). Sailau and his eagle can be seen following a hunt in figure 4.



Figure 4: Eagle-hunter Sagsai from Altamsongs Village following a hunt

Whether done for sport, show, or necessity, eagle-hunting is an extremely interesting practice that I was able to experience first hand, which allowed me to have a better understanding of the experience tourists are seeking when visiting Western Mongolia. Eagle-hunting requires at least two individuals, one hunter and one scarer. The hunter, with his eagle, rides the peaks of the mountain ridges, keeping an eye on the valleys below. The scarer rides lower on the slopes of the mountainsides, using shouts, the throwing of stones, and the lashing of leather to scare prey, mainly foxes, from their places of hiding and into the valleys. If a prey animal is spotted, the hunter unhoods his eagle, and the eagle swoops down upon the prey catching and killing it with its claws. The hunter is then able to ride down from the mountain and retrieve his hunting prize.

In discussions of tourism with the Kazakh eagle-hunters, an overwhelming approval of tourists and tourism was apparent. I cannot recount one individual who described a negative condition brought about by increasing tourism in Western Mongolia. Some of the positive perceptions of tourism include benefits from tourists outside of money, including English books, pens and pencils, and other educational devices that tourists may give to children (Iris, 2015). Sailau believes that tourism helps keep the tradition of eagle-hunting alive, bringing about curiosity both from tourists and from Kazakhs who, in his words, have “modernized” and reminds these Kazakhs of their cultural heritage (Sailau, 2015). Of course, among most if not all of the hunters I interviewed, monetary income was a major benefit of increasing tourist visits.

One of the more interesting topics of discussion throughout my interviews related to eagle-hunting festivals, their purpose, and the way they are shaped by tourists, and in turn, shape competitive eagle-hunting. These ideas will be more heavily discussed during the analysis section of the paper, but the presence of festivals as cultural representations sheds light on an interesting form of cultural commodification throughout Mongolia.

Analysis and Discussion

Through the compellation participant observation, interview, and background research, and building off a body of previously published literature, an analysis of the development of the Mongolian tourism industry and its effects on local peoples had been undertaken. This analysis has resulted in four sub-conclusions, each that will be analyzed and discussed throughout this section of the work. These sub-conclusions include; Tourism Development and its Misunderstandings, Feelings of Individualized Development within an Invisible System, Multi-Motivated Community Tourism Development: Economics, Culture, and Engagement, and International Community Recognition: Implications on “Realness” and Authenticity of Practices in an Era of Globalization. Each sub-conclusion, once analyzed and discussed, will contribute to an overall conclusion about the nature of the Mongolian tourism industry.

Tourism Development and its Misunderstandings

In examining the development of the Mongolian tourism industry, both through the opinions of those involved in the industry and statistical data supplied by analysts, it is easy to conclude that the industry has reached a halt in its development. This halt continues today, mainly due to the inability of the Mongolian government to promote progressive development within the industry. Within current systemic development models, the Mongolian tourism industry lacks even the qualifications for the first stage of development, with the main components being the establishment of a tourism board and cooperation of the government with local initiatives (Hjalager, 2007). Mongolia’s marketability lies in its natural beauty and unique cultures, and while this exploits the idea of exoticism, it properly presents Mongolia for what it has to offer the realm of tourism. Here the government lacks much understanding. Instead of the

promotion of local communities, and the development of a national tourism initiative based on cultural and ethnic tourism, the government is attempting, with little success, to create a mass tourism market based around amusement parks, high-end luxury hotels, and environmentally harmful attractions such as ATV tours (Sabine & Keith, 2015). How, in a country so famed for its unique nomadic cultures and hospitality, does the government have such a misunderstanding of ways to market tourism? Because tourism development does not exist in vacuum, the misunderstanding can actually be traced back to the high levels of government turnover within the country, especially at the ministry level. As ministries are shuffled and individuals are removed from office, a lack of expertise develops in the corresponding topics of jurisdiction, including tourism. Individuals within the Ministry of Tourism, seeking to make profits off the tourism industry, are looking to the more global trends of mass tourism and seeing the success in other countries, but are failing to acknowledge the circumstances within Mongolia that will not allow for the success of this type of development. These circumstances include a lack of infrastructure, lack of standardized tourism practices and standards for accommodations, high travel prices to reach Mongolia, and an over competitive market in which Mongolia cannot hope to compete (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2013).

Until the Mongolian government is able to come to gain an understanding of the way in which to properly market the country and to cooperate with the private sector, tourism development will remain stalled (Munkhjargal, 2015). Recently, the Ministry of Tourism has been taking steps in the right direction by beginning to market Mongolia as a destination for ethnic tourism, but still, the effort is miniscule in comparison to the potential Mongolia has in the realm of ethnic tourism. Due to the lack of national systematic development, the tourism industry in Mongolia has grown up more around community-based initiatives and local tour companies

who operate outside of heavy government jurisdiction (Munkhjargal, 2015). Unfortunately, the locations of these initiatives are often in hard-to-reach areas of the country, and therefore, no matter how well marketed they may be or how great the appeal of ethnic tourism they can produce, the industries will still remain underdeveloped without a definitive national policy promoting the development of infrastructure and funding for the ethnic tourism industry.

While in the field, it was apparent that community-based tourism initiative felt the lack of government influence in the tourism industry, often feeling that they themselves were developing their own tourism industries, outside of any larger systematic development. This perception will be examined in the next sub-conclusion.

Feelings of Individualized Development within an Invisible System

While the Mongolian government may not be promoting a systematic national development scheme, the community-based tourism industries that have arisen in Mongolia have not developed independently from global systems or in isolation. However, the two groups analyzed within this study seems to have, in varying intensities, a feeling of separation from possible development trends that may have affected the development of their initiatives. This is a state of mind known as systematic unawareness within the fields of anthropology and globalization. Participants, living within a larger system that influences their actions and the outcomes of these actions, fail to acknowledge or comprehend the system in which they are operating, and therefore feel a sense of independence for outside influences.

The Tsaatan community with whom I stayed exhibited less systematic unawareness, and more of an uncertainty of the extent to which their community existed in larger development trends. When asked about government influence in tourism development, most responses

concluded on a lack of knowledge about the subject. It is possible that this lack of knowledge can be accounted for by the isolated location in which the Tsaatan reside. However, there is one obvious sign that the Tsaatan people exist within a larger development system, and that is in the monthly stipend that each member of the community receives from the government for the purpose of, “maintaining their practices” (Tartag, 2015). The stipend comes monthly in the amount of 65, 000 tugrik for children and 130,000 tugrik for adult. This monetary gift is a sign of integration into a larger government system, but because the Tsaatan do not actively seek tourism, they do seem to have a sense of separation from the development of the tourism industry. When speaking to the eldest member of the community and discussing why she chose to host tourists, Jargal explained that, “I receive people because they visit. I cannot turn them away” (Jargal, 2015). From this answer and similar answers gathered from other members of the community, tourism hosting is almost obligatory, not something that the Tsaatan people are actively seeking, although the desire for income from the visiting tourists may tell a different tale. Still, it is interesting to examine the way the Tsaatan see themselves as both incorporated in and separate from the systematic development of tourism.

Kazakh eagle-hunters, on the other hand, experience high degrees of systematic unawareness, and this experience is driven, interestingly enough, by perceptions of democracy. When eagle-hunters were asked about the influence of the government in the development of their tourism initiatives, they quickly reminded me that Mongolia is an independent country, and that the people make their own decisions. To quote Elik, “there is no push from the government. This is an independent country and we choose to develop tourism on our own” (Elik, 2015). The concept of democracy, which seems to have strong influence in the Western Aimags of Mongolia, has led Eagle-hunters to believe that they have developed their own tourism industry

independent of government influence of any kind. The Kazakhs acknowledge that they are receiving international recognition because of tourism, and that their cultural practices are now being marketed as tourism attractions, but feels that this is all due to their grass-root development of a tourism industry and the establishment of eagle-hunting festivals. Much credit must be given to the eagle-hunters of Bayan-Olgii for their successful integration into a tourism system, but their sense of independent development places them in the realm of systematic unawareness.

If Mongolia lacks a national government system of development, then exactly what larger system do the Tsaatan and Kazakhs operate within? In the current era of globalization, tourism camps and hosts, even in isolated corners of Mongolia, are incorporated into the larger system of globalizing travel, development, and exchange of information. Local tourism development exists within a larger system known as the global-local nexus, in which larger economic, cultural, and environmental elements interact to create local development outcomes (Milne and Ateljevic, 2001). While Kazakh eagle-hunters may think they developed their tourism industries out of their own desires and free will, it is more likely that their initiatives were shaped by larger global factors. The democratic transition in Mongolia open the country to the world, and increasing ease of travel made Mongolia accessible. Increasing curiosity for the “other” and the rise in ethnic tourism drew tourists to “attractions” such as eagle-hunting, and foreign tour companies began the promotion of visits to such communities. While it is important to take pride in the accomplishments of local tourism initiatives, systematic unawareness of the initiatives place in the larger schemes of development can allow for change by outside forces that the hunters do not recognize, and therefore will not know how to adapt. The Kazakh and Tsaatan peoples have not gone unaffected by the globalization of tourism and effects of cultural commodification, and these changes will be discussed later in the final sub-conclusion.

Multi-Motivated Community Tourism Development: Economics, Culture, and Engagement

Although the larger development trends effecting community-based tourism initiatives may not be understood or acknowledged, there is still local motivations driven the development of these initiatives beyond the influence of the larger systems. Throughout participant observation and the interview process, three main common theme emerged as motivators for the development of community-based tourism initiatives: economic income, cultural preservation, and interaction and engagement with foreigners.

The most obvious of the three motivators, economic income is both a major influx and important outcome of tourism development. Following the collapse of socialism in Mongolia, the Tsaatan people returned to their isolated home in the Taiga, but lived extremely impoverished lives, herding only reindeer and resorting to hunting wild birds for sustenance (Puujaa, 2015). In accepting tourist visitors, the Tsaatan community sees an income 10,000 Tugrik per person per night, 10,000 Tugrik for photography, and between 5,000 and 20,000 tugrik for handmade souvenirs. With this income, the Tsaatan are able to live comfortable while keeping their reindeer herding tradition alive in isolated locations. The Kazaks are also able to pull in a relatively good profit in conjunction with the profits made from their herding practices. Staying with an eagle-hunting host family costs between 20,000 and 30,000 tugrik per night, renting a horse for participating in a hunt costs around 20,000 tugrik, and participation in the hunt costs 40,000 tugrik. In speaking to Sailau, he expressed his gratitude for these incomes, as they allow his family to maintain a good living and for his children to be educated (Sailau, 2015).

The second major motivating factor for tourism development is the preservation of cultural practices. This motivating factor takes two different forms among the Tsaatan and the Kazakhs. As described above, economic income from tourism allows the Tsaatan to maintain

their isolated form of living, and therefore welcome tourism for its economic development, which creates a sort of cycle of cultural preservation. Because the Tsaatan maintain a traditional lifestyle, tourists seeking exoticism are attracted to them and the Tsaatan profit from these visits. The profits made from tourists allows the traditional lifestyle to be maintained, and therefore attracts more tourists, and the cycle continues.

For the Kazakh's, cultural preservation is a highly important aspect of tourism development. Because eagle-hunting numbers dwindled during the socialist times, and Kazakh youth moved to urban centers and began to modernize, there was a risk of losing the cultural practice of eagle-hunting. Allowing tourists to visit their communities gave eagle-hunters a way to gain global recognition, and show the younger generations among them the importance of their cultural practices. This is one of the main reasons the Kazakhs decided upon the founding of eagle-hunting festivals. According to Sailau, the festivals have two purposes. First, the festivals serve as a source of cultural preservation and cultural education for Kazakh youth, and second as a cultural attraction for ethnic tourism (Sailau, 2015). The festivals not only aid in the preservation of eagle-hunting, but also larger Kazakh culture through competitions of other Kazakh traditional games. Small-scale tourism allows for the preservation of cultural practices, but as industries expand, the communities begin to experience the effects of cultural commodification.

The final motivating factor is the one that I found most interesting throughout my research. Participants told stories of their engagement with foreigners and the ways in which these engagements positively impacted their lives. Halzan, a shaman and reindeer herder in the Western taiga shared his story of his relationship with an American researcher named Paula. Halzan explained how she spent thirteen years studying shamanism, culture, and ethnic traditions

in Northern Khuvsgul, and how she always returned to visit him and share what she had learned. (Halzan). Batsayaa, another member of the Tsaatan community, hosted an American man who took Batsayaa's daughter to the United States when she grew ill and paid for her medical care, and has expressed interest in help the daughter with her education (Batsayaa, 2015). Elik shared that interactions with tourists not only allows him to spread recognition of eagle-hunting to other countries, but also to learn about ways of life and people different from his own (Elik, 2015). These positive interactions further motivate the development of community-based tourism. Together, these three motivating factors continue to drive the development of ethnic tourism among communities in Mongolia, and while the benefits to the communities seem to be going without cultural change, signs of cultural commodification have begun to emerge among the communities.

International Community Recognition: Implications on "Realness" and Authenticity of Practices in an Era of Globalization

It is in the nature of ethnic tourism that increased exposure to foreigners and continual cultural commodification will eventually lead to the standardization of practices and the potential for loss of authenticity (Jafari, 2000). While community-based initiatives in Mongolia are currently focused on cultural preservation, some early signs of the effects of cultural commodification are being seen and challenging perceptions of authenticity by community member.

Among the Tsaatan peoples, a division has become noticeable between the communities of the eastern Taiga who reside closer to the tourism centers around Lake Khuvsgul, and the community with which I stayed in the western Taiga. Puujaa and his son Sambuu explained that

the Tsaatan of the eastern taiga are for more incorporated into a tourism system, often relocating closer to Lake Khuvsgul to make access for tourists easier (Sambuu, 2015). When discussing this trend with Keith and Sabine, they noted that the Tsaatan have even began to change their herding practices, moving their reindeer into warmer, less isolated areas, which can be biologically harmful to the animals, and setting up tourist camps around the lake (Sabine and Keith, 2015). These Tsaatan people have also began to alter their traditional practices based on international recognition. Increasing interest in the Tsaatan led to the filming of a documentary/movie based on the lives of the Tsaatan titled “Sodura”, and depicted a form of carving that was actually rarely used among the Tsaatan. Because of the international recognition of the movie, Tsaatan families of the eastern taiga began to change their carving practices in order to fit them to those being recognized in the movie, increasing their profits from hand-made souvenirs (Oyunta, 2015). Although this is a small change, it is a definite sign of cultural commodification among the community. While the Tsaatan of the eastern taiga are beginning to alter their lifestyles to fit the tourism model, the western taiga communities are experience cultural commodification in a different form, known as “reinforce primitivism”. Here I take time to once again note that the Tsaatan receive monthly stipends from the government to maintain their cultural practices, playing into the system of reinforce primitivism. By definition, reinforce primitivism is a situation in which; “groups are accommodated in protected areas as long as they conform to certain traditional stereotypes. They are displayed as a relic from the past, or an illustration of local color and diversity, so that they can be attractive to tourists” (Azarya, 2004). By accepting government stipends and maintaining traditional lifestyles for the sake of tourism, the Tsaatan of the western taiga are in a way imposing reinforce primitivism upon themselves.

International recognition and the process of cultural commodification among Kazakh eagle-hunters heavily involves the development and annual continuation of eagle-hunting festivals. As Iris, the eldest eagle-hunter I interviewed expressed, “it [eagle-hunting] is international, famous in the world. That’s why I think it’s a sport now, and the Kazakhs do the sport (Iris, 2015). While many eagle-hunters still hold eagle-hunting as a cultural practice, the nature of a sport is its ability to become internationally known, and therefore effected by globalizing processes. Prior to major tourist arrivals at eagle-hunting festivals, live animals were used as prey in the hunting competitions, but in the early 2000s, tourists began to complain of the cruelty of using trapped animals in sporting competitions. Because of these complaints and a need to keep tourists satisfied, live animals were replaced with pulled furs, which the eagles would track and capture (Shaimurat, 2015). Not only has the presence of tourists and the development of a festival economy altered the proceedings of eagle-hunting festivals, it has also began to alter perceptions among community members of how “real” eagle-hunting is defined. Jensibek, the youngest eagle-hunter whom I spoke with described his initial interests in eagle-hunting as a way to gain recognition and make money from a sporting competition (Jensibek, 2015). While he learned to eagle-hunt in a traditional manner, and does hunt outside of competition, his initial desire shows the changing of prioritization of a younger generation with more exposure to the tourism industry than their parents and grandparents. This changing of prioritization and desire for fame has led to the creation of “fake” eagle-hunters, as described by Sailaukhan; “Because there is sport games, people only want to compete year after year, and only hunt for the competitions” (Sailaukhan, 2015). In further discussion, it was clear to see that the younger generation, seeking fame and money, neglect to learn the cultural and traditional importance of eagle-hunting, and only learn the skills required to win competitions. The ability

of hunters to recognize what they consider as “fake” hunters shows a shift in perception of authenticity and what the “true” or “real” practice of eagle-hunting includes. Changing perceptions within a community show a realization that tourism is making changes to cultural traditions, and by commodifying practices, some cultural authenticity is being sacrificed in order to gain a profit.

Beyond the two focus communities, as discussed in an interview with Oyunta, a festival organizer, tourism is having altering effects on larger aspects of Mongolian culture. As she explained, because families realize that money can be made off hosting tourists for a night, the aspects of hospitality are decreasing, as local peoples see tourists as more of an opportunity for profit and less of a friendly visitor. Meals, tea, and snacks begin to have price tags, and hospitality becomes more of a marketing practice than an authentic offering (Oyunta, 2015). Changes such as these often go unnoticed by the peoples on which they are occurring, and therefore are not viewed as changes at all, but simple capitalization on presented opportunities within a cultural context. For this reason, it is important to have outside perspectives looking into the changes to a cultural or cultural practices brought about by tourism, so that an understanding can be achieved and possible solutions proposed for maintaining authenticity while also gaining profit.

Conclusion:

Weighing the Costs and Benefits to the Mongolian People of the Marketing of Cultural Practices

The world is constantly changing, people move closer together, and products and ideas spread across borders and even reach the most isolated corners of the world, and in all these

processes of globalization, there is a quiet dignity in the preservation of traditional cultural practices. Communities within Mongolia, though allowing their lives to be impacted by tourism, strive to maintain the maximum amount of cultural authenticity possible while developing ethnic tourism. However, it is in the nature of ethnic tourism that, “ethnic groups may actively modify their behavior, dress, methods of production, and customary practices in order to facilitate the tourist experience” (Jafari, 2000), this process being known as cultural commodification. In the coming years of tourism development, as the government attempts, be it seemingly unsuccessfully, to implement industry expansion, local communities will struggle with the challenges of maintaining cultural authenticity and commodifying practices for the sake of profit.

In attempting to understand this current and future struggle, research was conducted among the Tsaatan reindeer herders and Kazakh eagle-hunters, who occupy well-known spaces within the ethnic tourism system of Mongolia, as well as research on the more general development scheme of tourism within the country and its motivations. In doing so, it can be concluded that the current stall in tourism development can be equated to a misunderstanding of the country's marketability, and lack of government-private sector-local community cooperation by the government. Without systematic development, ethnic tourism development has fallen to small-community initiatives, influenced by the larger globalizing system of tourism, although this influence is not often actively recognized or understood. Local communities are multi-motivated by economic income, cultural preservation, and the opportunity for foreign engagement in developing their local tourism initiatives based around cultural practices. Although, at the moment, there seems to be a happy balance between cultural preservation for the sake of authenticity and cultural commodification for the sake of profit, signs of cultural change are becoming noticeable, and perceptions of the “realness” of practices are changing

among community members. As tourism continues to increase, if it continues to increase, there is a high possibility of conflict emerging between cultural authenticity and cultural commodification, but I am not in a position in which to mark this as a guaranteed claim.

The question that must be asked in the future as this conflict arises is what is more of a priority to community members, maintaining cultural authenticity, or gaining profit from the marketing of cultural practices. In offering suggestion to this conflict, I turn back to the nature of ethnic tourism, and the drive for seeking the “other” or the “exotic” brought about by globalization. While profit is an important part of maintaining a reasonable living, Mongolia has its best chance of tourism success in the very specific fields of ethnic and adventure tourism. Mass tourism is already heavily developed in many surrounding countries such as China and Russia, and therefore it would be highly difficult for Mongolia to compete in the market. What will allow Mongolia to prosper is the marketing of truly unique, authentic experiences that cannot be found elsewhere in the world. While this suggestions may be influenced by my western romanticization of foreign cultural practices, as of now the most successful tourism initiatives in Mongolia are those based on authentic ethnic tourism, and with proper support from the government and increasing community engagement in the initiatives, Mongolia has the potential to develop and successful tourism industry that is beneficial to both the economy, local communities, and cultural authenticity.

Three months ago, I looked out the plane window and saw a place that, over my time within it, would shape my perceptions and understanding of tourism, cultural commodification, and cultural authenticity. As I prepare to board a train to cross the northern border, I think back fondly upon my research travels and experience among the Tsaatan and the Kazakhs, but also have to wonder, as tourists continue to come and go, will this place ever be the same again.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

| Participant | Location | Date |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Tartag | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 3, 2015 |
| Halzan | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 4, 2015 |
| Puujaa | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 4, 2015 |
| Puravhuu | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 5, 2015 |
| Baatar | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 5, 2015 |
| Jargal | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 5, 2015 |
| Batsayaa | Western Taiga Tsaatan Community | November 6, 2015 |
| Sambuu | Soyon | November 8, 2015 |
| Oyunta | Murun | November 9, 2015 |
| Shaimurat | Altamsongs Village | November 13, 2015 |
| Sailau | Altamsongs Village | November 14, 2015 |
| Iris | Altamsongs Village | November 15, 2015 |
| Mana | Sagsai | November 16, 2015 |
| Jensibek | Sagsai | November 16, 2015 |
| Elik | Sagsai | November 16, 2015 |
| Arman | Sagsai | November 17, 2015 |
| Sailaukhan | Sagsai | November 17, 2015 |
| Sabine and Keith | Ulaanbaatar | November 23, 2015 |
| Munkhjargal | Ulaanbaatar | November 24, 2015 |
| Odongerel | Ulaanbaatar | November 25, 2015 |

