

Notes for April 12 lecture pastoral ecology and society.

We want to follow the same sequence we followed with the Han farming examples, showing how ecological-behavioral realities and cultural values influence and reinforce each other. Not only within the nomadic cultures, but between the nomadic cultures and the agricultural, settled Chinese we can see the interaction of culture and behavior. Will try to do this for three frontiers-- Mongol/Han; Kazak/Uyghur; Tibetan/Han and Tibetan/Tibetan though it might be over-elaborated.

What the cases of Mongolia, Turkistan, Tibet have in common--

There is really no completely independent pastoral society. At a macroecological scale, agricultural zones and pastoral zones are complementary pieces of a larger, macroregional economy.

Agriculturalists can live without the pastoralists, but pastoralists have a much harder time being self-sufficient and living without the agriculturalists' products. So the relationship is asymmetrical.

In each case, pastoralists are lower pop. density, lower productivity, more mobile, property rights belonging more to groups than to individuals or single families, and political systems being less hierarchical or even "despotic," and more consultative.

Go into reasons for this: First the characteristics of pastoral societies, from climate to culture, then the role of ecology in the frontier at different times in history, leading up to the Chinese colonization and environmental harm in the 20th and 21st centuries, which we will preview here but take up in detail in two weeks.

A. Characteristics of Life in the Pastoral Zone

1. Lower density

Rainfall

Grass

Limited primary productivity, inefficiency of animals as converters

2. Mobility

Daily

Seasonal

Year-to-year

3. Impossibility of intensification

No equivalent of adding nutrients or adding water

Marginal returns for labor go to zero (important in thinking about cultural values)

4. Property rights

Communal in land: territory more than ownership

Private in herds

5. Political systems

Tribes rather than administrations
Kin-based rather than locality-based
Consultative rather than hierarchical

6. Cultures of nature: Williams's ideas:

Williams: Would like to hear your reaction to his cultural analysis.

Prompt if necessary: stereotypical? Oversimplistic? Profound?

To what extent does his near caricature of Chinese spatial ideas--squares, circles, boundaries, walls, fixed demarcations--fit with what else you have learned at the local level? Do you see any reflections of this in your own experience in China, if you have been there? How does it lead to the stereotypes of Mongols and Kazaks that you find among Chinese--primitive, uncivilized, lazy, thieving, like animals, like bandits,

Emphasizes a series of dichotomies: bounded vs. limitless, square or circular vs. amorphous, fixed vs. fluid, stationary vs. mobile. Reinforced by Svanberg's accounts of Kazaks:

"To see their herds growing, to have many horses, to go hunting with good or well-trained hunting eagles constituted the highest quality of life for the Kazak men..."The kazaks fancied freedom, bravery, and martial ideals" Stealing horses as cultural ideal.

7. Differences between the Chinese-Mongolian Frontier and the Tibetan and Xinjiang situations: need map.

Implications for the Pastoral Areas as Part of a Chinese World Order: Things that all the frontiers have in common:

1. Mutual dependency
2. Mutual contempt:

"Reciprocal disdain" for alternative lifestyles. Important feature of Han-Mongol and Han-Kazak relations. Also Kyrgyz/Uzbek in C. Asia.

Also (Williams may not talk about this so much) the distrust of "dishonest" and "shifty" Chinese as opposed to "morally upright and honorable" Mongols.

3. Shifting frontiers across history
4. Pastoralists as invaders, rulers, civilizees.

Lattimore reading says more about the ecology; Williams reading says more about the culture. Svanberg: vertical transhumance with the seasons.

Lattimore's story of the emergence of a clear distinction, and thus hostility, between pastoral and agricultural peoples. This goes along with both the hostility, but also the real cultural

differences, including those about ecology, that are set out in Williams's article. Important thing is that the pastoralists live where agriculture is not possible--see quiz map but also go over maps of why.

The development of the tribe as a primary political and economic unit, and the ascendancy of kinship over locality as an organizing principle above the level of the family. See this among Kazaks and Kirghiz as well: patrilineal genealogy

Difference between common-pool resources (the only sensible way to manage pastures--see Williams later on?) and agricultural land, which is advantageously divided into individually owned parcels. As the Kazak lineage or group of migratory that has its pasturelands demarcated from those of other lineages, but no fixed property on the household level.

Mobility becomes an ecological necessity, both because of spatial and because of temporal variation. 2 kinds of temporal variation--seasonal and more random year-to-year. And, consequently, becomes an index of wildness, untrustworthiness, and backwardness for the Chinese peasant civilization.

Then back to the common-property resources in Williams's discussion of Hardin. They seem not only adaptive but perhaps necessary in cases of high uncertainty and variability. Bring up territoriality and the axes of variability and defensibility of resources.

Things that differentiate one frontier from the other:

A. In the case of the Mongol-Chinese frontier (the ethnicity of the pastoralists doesn't make much difference):

The differences here are macro-ecological. There is essentially no place in Mongolia where there are cities or agriculture, and can see how this led to macro-level political and military adventures.

B. In the Xinjiang frontier: Mix of macro-and micro-ecological boundaries. A long way from China Proper, so that military control was always iffy, and had its own urban civilization, unlike anywhere else in the current PRC (with partial exception of Lhasa—see below).

But micro-divisions between agricultural/urban oases and pastoral areas, which becomes a cultural/ethnic identity question as well as an ecological one. Reproduces on micro-scale the social distinctions between Chinese and Mongols. Even though languages, religion etc similar, a lot of mutual prejudice between Uygur/Kazak, Uzbek/Kyrgyz, etc:

Urban societies social classes, literacy, more devout attention to religion, merchant ethic, something rather similar to the Chinese. Meaning stereotypes of city/agricultural peoples as being crafty, stingy, untrustworthy, and stereotypes of pastoralists as wild, honest, a bit dumb.

Also social structure: clan, egalitarian among the pastoralists, and class, hierarchical, neighborhood among the urbanites and villagers.

C. The case of Tibet

1. Its own medium-large scale polity, which included one small city (Lhasa) a few market towns, large agricultural populations in the valleys, and nomadic populations on the plateaus.

2. Feudal system in Central Tibet, with the majority of the agricultural population serfs of major estates, including governmental, noble, and monastic. Paid grain tributes and labor services. Unlike Xinjiang, the pastoralists (you've seen this in Goldstein and Beall readings) also subordinate to estates, sometimes. Similar stereotypes.

3. Peripheral provinces of Kham and Amdo. Not under rule of Central Tibetan government, but most communities connected by religious ties. Different languages. Micro-divisions between agricultural and pastoral, like the micro-divisions between valley states and mountain non-state peoples in the SW Upland Zone. In fact, shading over into the upland zone, as one goes eastward (downward) from the high plateau area.

4. This means that within Tibet there are micro-ecological frontiers, but between Tibet and the Upland Zone, and between Tibet and the Intensive Agriculture zone there are frontiers rather than borders.