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Mobilizing against Dispossession: Gold Mining and a Local Resistance Movement in Mongolia

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1. Introduction

Civil society scholars and practitioners have long been curious about the mechanisms that enable ordinary people to take collective action in conditions that normally would present little opportunity of emergence and sustenance, be it local or global.¹ It was the same kind of intellectual curiosity that led this research to examine a local resistance movement in rural Mongolia, which emerged in response to the threats imposed by gold mining.

With its coverage of extensive surface and expansion into new territories, gold mining activities across the Mongolian countryside since the late 1990s have presented a significant challenge to the livelihood of Mongolian herders.² Mining expansion has threatened the environmental, material, and cultural bases of the livelihood of herders (Tumenbayar 2002; High 2008; Dierkes, in press). Local herders in Mongolia, whose living environment has been affected by mining activities, have rarely complied with such disturbances without opposition.³ Local resistance movements emerged in response to mining-related environmental problems and livelihood risks since the early 2000s in Mongolia presented in part a societal defensive reaction to the forces of irresponsible mining activities. However, the majority of the local resistance movements have not been able to produce sustained collective action or community-based struggles. Even though, both academic and popular writing about mining, mobile pastoralism, and environmental management in Mongolia have discussed the role of local resistance movements, there is a lack of understanding of the actual staging ground of local collective action. What are the contradictory trends that facilitate or undermine local resistance movements? What forms of organization and collective action repertoires are available to local citizens in Mongolia?

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² A third of Mongolia's population of 2.7 million lives in rural areas, in which semi-nomadic livestock husbandry is the major economic activity. Water, grazing land, and mobility are central to nomadic pastoralism.

³ Recently, some violent clashes between local herders and mining companies have been reported. On April 23, 2010, a local herder died during a land dispute between local herders and a mining company in the southeastern Mongolian province of Dornogovi. In 2011, similar incidents also happened in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region of People's Republic of China, where local herder communities were struggling to protect grazing lands and water sources from the growing mining activity in the region (See Byambajav *et al* (2011) and Asia Pacific Memo (2011) for a discussion of these clashes.

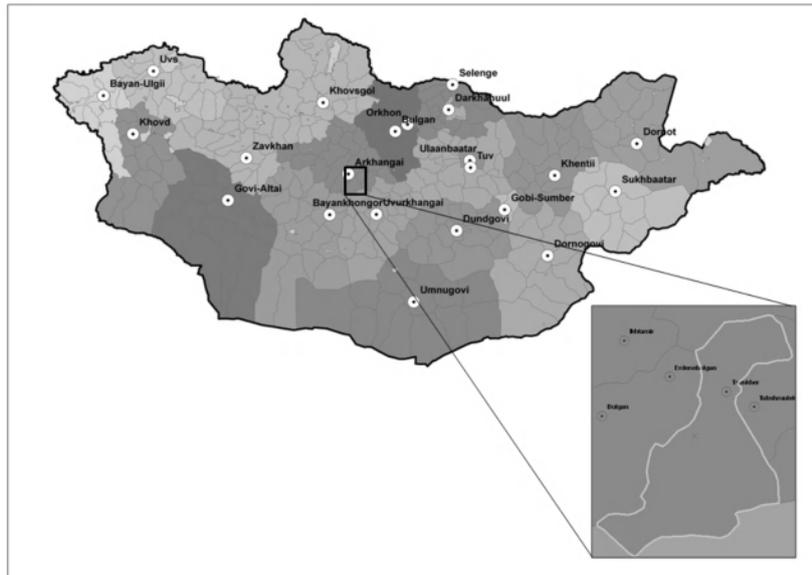


FIGURE 1. Map of Mongolia with a study area (Tsenher *sum*)

This article examines these questions by tracing the trajectory of a local resistance movement, which emerged in direct response to the expansion of gold mining in the Tsenher *sum* (district) of Arhangai *aimag* (province) (Figure 1). Unlike local resistance movements in other rural areas of Mongolia, the movement in the Tsenher district involved a three-month-long road blockade in Nariin Hamar Valley in 2005. This modest, but 'fascinating' case provides an opportunity to examine how local herders or communities in Mongolia—who are often perceived as “voiceless and powerless” when they face with the expansion of formal and informal mining activities into new territories (World Bank 2006: 47)—can form and sustain collective resistance.

The literature on social movements has added rich detail in understanding collective action and analysis of local grassroots movements in particular have provided insights into the complexity of local resistance (Rootes 1999). However, the literature has been criticized for its focus on Western societies. There is now a growing literature on social movements in the developing world and this article aims to contribute to it. While local social mobilizations in developing countries are often discouraged much by resource deficiencies and formal institutional malfunctions (Shigetomi and Makino 2009), research has demonstrated that there exist a variety of enabling conditions and mechanisms, as well (Thompson and Tapscott 2010).

This article begins with a theoretical framework. It is argued that local social mobilizations emerging around mining can be understood as a collective response to the loss (or its risk) of the material, environmental, and cultural bases of the livelihood of local communities and the concept of dispossession captures the nature of that process. The second section of this article traces the trajectory of a local resistance movement in the Tsenher district and explores factors that facilitated or inhibited its emergence and sustenance. It is argued that while the local social and environmental settings determined much of the trajectory of the movement, the existence of an intermediary between urban and rural areas, the local homeland council, and its active participation was an important

enabling factor. Intermediaries or middlemen diffused local political pressure and linked local herders and like-minded organizations. The mobilization of local herders depended much on the availability of local informal groupings or herder groups and the 'recycling' of 'traditional' means of ensuring herders' compliance with community decisions. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main arguments.

2. The research study

This article is based on data collected between 2008 and 2010. The author visited the Tsenher district in 2008 and interviewed local citizens. The interviewees were chosen based on a snow-ball sampling. The initial sample of interviewees identified for the author other movement participants (either local herders or citizens of *sumyn töv* (district-centre)). Movement participants who lived in Ulaanbaatar were interviewed, as well. A 35-page logbook, on which movement participants reported about the day-to-day situation during the road blockade, provided valuable data. Furthermore, articles and interviews published in the daily newspapers and television reportages presented important information.

3. Understanding local social mobilizations emerging around mining

Local social mobilizations emerging around mining can be interpreted as collective resistance against the loss (or its risk) of the material, environmental, and cultural bases of the livelihood of local people. Specific combinations of these real or perceived threats constitute a critical precondition of local resistance movements.

The locals' loss of their material base of livelihood can be interpreted as the process of dispossession in the context of capital accumulation (Harvey 2005; Bebbington *et al.* 2008; Holden *et al.* 2011). Dispossession stems from the take-over of local mineral resources by powerful private or state interests, which involve displacing local people and dispossessing of their rights to access to their indigenous land and environmental resources. Furthermore, dispossession can entail an unequal (and often unjust) distribution of the wealth generated from local mineral resources: the wealth may tend to be concentrated in the hands of few or at the national government level while contribution of mining to the local economy remains limited.

At the same time, the intervention of mining on ecosystems in a way that generate an immediate or gradual degradation can ultimately lead to local discontent as well as national or transnational opposition to mining. In many developing countries where regulations on the environmental and social impact of mining are not enacted or not well enforced by state institutions, local and indigenous people often face a wide range of environmental threats and health risks (Evans *et al.* 2002; Newell and Wheeler 2006).

Furthermore, cultural and psychological losses might arise when the meaning instilled into landscapes lose their physical embodiments. Individuals create symbolic linkages to a place because of their genealogical, socio-economic, and spiritual connections such as being born and raised and having a long residence or ancestral worship in a particular place (Sampson and Goodrich 2009). Such attachment to a place is also important in the formation and maintenance of one's identity (Gieryn 2000). In this logic, local resistance movements may be motivated and mobilized by non-local people

who have a strong attachment to a particular locality affected by externally-imposed threats.

Grievances and contestation around a particular mining project may constitute critical preconditions for the emergence of local resistance movements, but research on local contentious politics necessitates "an examination of the forms of organization and networking (informal as well as formal) available to protestors, as well as their collective action and claim repertoires" (Kousis 1999). The emergence and sustenance of the movement depend much on the availability of public spaces (such as public meetings and mass media) that encourage "consensus mobilization" (dissemination of information and discussion) as well as on organizations and networks that can channel resources for "action mobilization" (Klandermans 1984).

Many problems associated with mining in developing countries are the repercussions of weak state capacity and political unwillingness to create effective institutions that can protect livelihoods and the natural environment. Democratic and participatory governance is not present or not well consolidated. The channels between the state and its local actors are often blocked. Even though citizens mobilize themselves, their actions face repression from a state-capital symbiosis, which is the extent to which the interest of power holders is interwoven with mining. Connectedly, the relations between the relative power of local resistance movement and mining companies can determine the sustenance and influence of the local movement (Bebbington *et al.* 2008). Local resistance movements may have different outcomes depending on the economic and geographic scale of mining operations.

As a mechanism that diffuses or resists local repression and transcends localism, the interaction and connectedness between local groups and groups and organizations at the national or transnational level have been much discussed (Keck and Sikkink 1998). When power holders at the national and local level violate or refuse to recognize the rights and concerns of local groups and communities, they may directly search out allies at the national or transnational level, such as NGOs, mass media and international organizations, to bring pressure upon the local power holders from outside. Such outside contacts may amplify the demands of local groups and make a local struggle visible nationally (or transnationally). However, interaction between local groups and their potential allies at the national and transnational level often occur via individuals and organizations positioned between them. The importance of these middlemen (intermediaries) is likely to be high "in situations where the levels or groups they mediate between are separated or segmented by barriers of culture, language, distance or mistrust"(Gould 1989: 534), and can be reduced when those barriers get thinner.

In the case of local resistance movements, intermediaries can be situated in the middle between the urban and rural or between the local (national) and transnational as a result of their social structural position. Middlemen may be perceived as a member of a rural community because of the connection to the community while enjoying better access to information and potential allies as dwellers in the city. Yet, middlemen may avoid the patronage of local authorities due to their mobility between different locations and their connection to non-local allies. However, it might be hard for them to maintain strong

presence or leadership in the rural area they represent because of their mobility, as well.

4. Gold mining and resistance in Tsenher district

4.1 The growth of gold mining Mongolia

When Mongolia suffered a severe economic crisis after the collapse of state socialism in 1990, the government set the promotion of mining as a way to earn fast cash. The government implemented the Gold Program (*Alt h t lb r*) from 1992, which disclosed information about identified gold deposits, allowed private companies to hold mining permits, and provided financial support to mining companies via central bank loans. Furthermore, a new minerals law was passed in 1997 as part of Mongolia's neoliberal economic reform.⁴ It was acknowledged by the international mining community as "the most investor-friendly and enabling law in Asia" (World Bank 2004: 52). The new law relaxed rules for obtaining a license, permitted full foreign ownership of mining ventures, and eased gold export restrictions. As of 2005, the Mongolian government granted 5913 mineral licenses, which covered 44.5 percent of the territory of Mongolia (Batbold 2011). The number of mining licenses increased dramatically from 2004 to 2006, of which approximately 60 percent were for gold (MRAM 2010). Mongolia's annual gold production increased 17-fold in the period 1991 (700kg) to 2001 (12059kg), but it reached a record high in 2006: 22 tons (Grayson and Tumenbayar 2005; MRAM 2010).

In contrast to mining of other types of minerals such as copper, coal, or fluorspar, gold mining was carried out by numerous small or medium-sized companies (both Mongolian and foreign) as well as informal, artisanal miners. The number of gold mining companies increased from 3 in 1992 to 138 in 2005 (Grayson and Tumenbayar 2005). As of 2006, an estimated 20 percent of the rural workforce or 100,000 people were involved in informal gold mining (ILO 2006).

4.2 The consequences of gold mining in Tsenher

Tsenher sum (district) is located in the central Mongolian province of Arhangai (Figure 1). The distance from Ulaanbaatar to Tsenher is 438 km. 70 percent of the territory of Tsenher is pastureland and 24 percent is forested area (Tsenher sum 2011). Compared to the average district population in Arhangai province, which is 4030, Tsenher is a relatively large district, with 5387 inhabitants and 1513 households (NSO 2008). Approximately 70 percent of the households are herder households. Tsenher has about 150,000 livestock, which mainly consist of sheep, goats, cattle, and horses (Tsenher sum 2011). Nearly a third of the district population lives in *sumyn t v* (district-centre), which is a village where the local government and public institutions are located.

⁴ The Government of Mongolia, which was formed after the Democratic Coalition won a historic electoral victory over the ex-communist party, Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, in 1996, introduced a series of 'neoliberal' economic reforms.

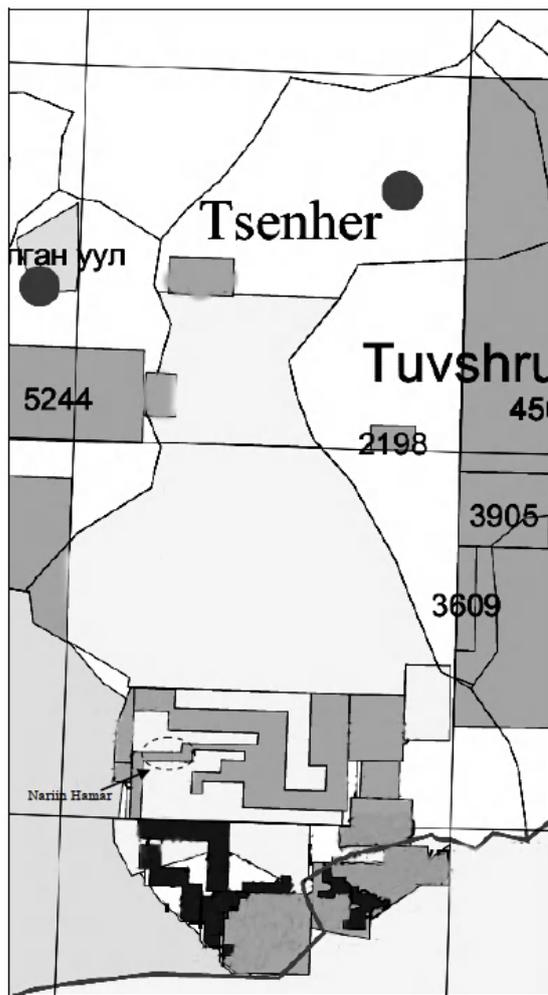


FIGURE 2.
Mining and mineral exploration areas in the Tsenher district

By 2005, twelve mineral exploration licenses and seven mining licenses were granted in the territory of the Tsenher district.⁵ The licenses were granted in the period from 1998 to 2002. The "Mongol Gazar" (Mongolian) and "Altan Dornod Mongol" (Russian) companies were the main licence holders. Orhon *bag* (sub-district), the southern sub-district of Tsenher, was a 'hotspot' of gold mining.⁶ All mining operations in Tsenher had taken place in Orhon (Figure 2).

The local opposition to gold mining activities in Orhon grew gradually since the inception of the gold mines. As of 2005, all active mines in Orhon were engaged in placer gold mining.⁷ Placer gold deposits or alluvial deposits are usually found in sand or gravel in streambeds. Placer gold mining involves excavating extensive areas of land surface and using a large amount of water to extract gold from the soil. The majority of the gold mining companies in Mongolia have used ineffective, out-dated mining technologies in their mining operations

(Farrington 2000).⁸ The environmental impact of placer gold mining in Orhon was deleterious. Many mines illegally diverted river streams and released dirty water into a river system. This caused extensive damage to local rivers such as the depletion and pollution of rivers (presence of sediment particles and nutrients) (Ulsyn Ih Hural 2007).

⁵ Mineral exploration license is a document granting the right to prospect or conduct geological and exploration survey. Mining license is a document granting the right to conduct mining (extracting and producing minerals) (Ulsyn Ih Hural 1997).

⁶ In Mongolia, *bag* (sub-district) is the smallest territory-administrative unit. The sub-district governor is directly elected by the Citizens' Meeting, which is open to all citizens of a sub-district. The Tsenher district has six sub-districts.

⁷ Gold is known to occur in three main deposit types: lode gold deposits, bulk-tonnage disseminated mineralized zones, and placers. The extensive placer gold deposits scattered throughout Mongolia (World Bank 2004).

⁸ The placer mines use a variety of techniques, including large scale bucket-line dredges with onboard wash-plants and cable excavators, bulldozers and haulage trucks with static, semi-mobile or mobile wash-plants (World Bank 2004: 67-68).

The capacity of the state to enhance the implementation of the legal requirements and to enforce accountability has been largely reduced by its pro-investment 'enabling' policy and an ineffective monitoring system (Tortell *et al* 2008).

Environmental degradation and a lack of returns to the local economy contributed to the disappointment and a feeling resentment among local herders in Orhon.

Ours [Orhon] was a really beautiful *nutag* [local homeland]. A few years ago, there were so many streams and rivers. But now these rivers all became dry river beds. There is no progress and development in this *nutag* despite that the gold was taken and the nature was degraded. Mining companies promised a lot when they first arrived here, but nothing was realized. At the end, we were left with numerous holes in our homeland (The author's interview with a local herder).

Even though there were legal provisions for getting the prior consent of local communities, conducting adequate land rehabilitation, and informing local citizens, mining companies and local authorities in Tsenher failed to carry out that responsibility (Mongol Nutag Minu Eysel 2008). Local herders in Orhon have opposed an expansion of gold mining into new areas by sending a petition, resisting moving from their pastureland, and staging sit-ins on targeted mining sites. Local conflicts between local herders and mining companies and attacks and abuse from mining companies' security staff have been reported.

In March 2002 they [mining company] finished mining in Nahialt and were moving up [to other area]. We were sitting there [in the targeted mining site] and were erecting a small *ger* [to protest a new mine]. They [security staff of the mine] dismantled it and threatened us with sticks and weapon (Forum 2005).⁹

Despite the sizeable profits gained from the natural resources, contribution to the livelihood of local people from mines has been very limited. Local citizens shared similar concerns over the economic effects of gold mining in Orhon.

In 1999, when gold mining began in Orhon, we, the local people, thought it was beneficial to the country and the people. But it wasn't. Now, herders, whose pastureland is occupied and water sources are degraded by gold mining activity, have to move to other's pastureland (Önөөдөр 2005).¹⁰

4.3 Opposing gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley

Nariin Hamar Valley is in the southern downhill of Mount Suvraga Hairhan (Figure 3).

⁹ This excerpt is taken from a transcript of the television talk show "Forum," which was aired on the Mongolian National Television in January, 2005. It was a short interview with a local herder in Orhon *bag* in the Tsenher district and was included in a short video clip, which was showed during the talk show.

¹⁰ While pastureland is state owned in Mongolia, it is de facto managed as common property based on customary rights (Mearns 1996).



FIGURE 3. Nariin Hamar Valley

Note: The photo was taken before gold mining operations.
(Credit: the Aruin Suvraga Movement)

Mount Suvraga Hairhan is famous for its pristine environment and unique landscape. Local citizens worship the mountain as a sacred, protecting deity and hold occasional *ovoo* (stone cairn) ceremonies there, as well. Nariin Hamar Valley is a low area between hills, with streams and rivers flowing through it, which are the origin or headwaters of several local rivers.

There was a strong local opposition to gold mining in Nariin

Hamar Valley among Tsetserleg *bag* citizens from the time when a mineral exploration license was granted in 1999 to the “Mongol Gazar” company. The license was for an area of 13,000 hectares in the territory of Tsenher including Nariin Hamar Valley. The Citizens’ Representatives’ Meeting of Tsenher district issued a decree in 2000 claiming that Nariin Hamar Valley is strictly for district’s special needs.¹¹ According to the Mongolian Minerals Law and Land Law, local governments have the right to identify lands within their territory as “land for special needs,” thereby restricting mining operations.¹² However, the “Mongol Gazar” company opposed the decree and brought the case to the court. The Supreme Court of Mongolia found the decree of the district meeting invalid in 2003.¹³

Nariin Hamar Valley is in the vicinity of the Tsetserleg *bag* (sub-district), which is north of Orhon *bag*. Having witnessed the increasing environmental degradation caused by gold mining in Orhon *bag*, the people of Tsetserleg tried to find a way to stop gold mining in Nariin Hamar beyond the legal battles. While local herders tried to resist,

¹¹ The Citizens’ Representatives’ Meeting consists of members directly elected by the local electorate. The election takes place every four years. Depending on the population size there are 15-25 members.

¹² The Minerals Law states that “if a special needs land overlaps entirely or in part with a territory covered by a valid license, thus precluding further exploration or mining in such an overlapping area, the State administrative body [the district administration] that decided to establish the special needs land shall assume an obligation to compensate the license holder” (Ulsyn Ih Hural 1997)

¹³ According to (Tseveenkherlen 2005), there were two main arguments behind the Supreme court ruling. First, the district administration made a procedural error. According to the Minerals Law, when the central government or a local government recognizes specific lands as the lands for special need in accordance with the Land law, a written notice should be delivered to the office geology and mining cadastre within 10 business days after the decision is made (Ulsyn Ih Hural, 1997). However, the district officials did not deliver that by the deadline. Secondly, the court ruled that the decree of the district government to define Nariin Hamar Valley as a district's special needs land was not supported by adequate evidences.

citizens of the *sumyn tuv* (district-centre) organized action groups and protest campaigns, as well.¹⁴

As of 2005, Tsetserleg *bag* had approximately 300 herder households. They sent a petition to the government of Mongolia in February, 2005 in opposition to gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley. Although two senior citizens went to Ulaanbaatar as district delegates to get an official response from the government and help from the Member of Parliament elected from their district, there were no government response.

The last resort of the desperate rural herders was Tsenher's *nutgiin zövlöl* (local homeland council) in Ulaanbaatar. Indeed, the local homeland council's involvement in the protest against gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley had important consequences. *Nutgiin zövlöl* is an organization established by urban inhabitants with an attachment to the same rural localities such as *aimag* (province) and *sum* (district). All provinces have their "local homeland councils" in Ulaanbaatar and districts also have their homeland councils in Ulaanbaatar or in the provincial centres.¹⁵ The aims of these councils are usually to link people in Ulaanbaatar to their native localities, to support youth, and to promote networking among the council members. Provincial homeland councils in Ulaanbaatar are the largest and most active councils. They usually recruit people with a "high perceived level of achievement in a range of different vocations" such as politicians, rich businesspeople, famous artists, and lamas (Sneath 2010: 258). These councils thus constitute a formal network of local 'elites'. The basis of these councils is the attachment to one's *nutag* or local homeland.¹⁶ Inter-personal networks stemmed from provincial 'roots' resemble an 'imagined' or abstract belonging to the same community, but networks of the people of a district or more specific locales often rely on shared life-experience and direct social links. More specifically, notions of *neg sumynkhan* (the people of the same *sum* or *district*) or *neg bagynkhan* (the people of the same *bag* or sub-district) are constructed on a strong attachment to particular locales and landscapes.¹⁷

A member of the Tsenher's local homeland council explains how the council was associated with the protest:

In 2004, I attended a funeral in Tsenher. I was told by the local elderlies to take action to avoid what happened in Orhon from happening in Nariin Hamar. I talked with the members of *Nutgiin zövlöl* in Ulaanbaatar and we decided to form a movement organization later.

¹⁴ According to citizens of the district-centre, there was a local secondary school teacher who tried to organize meetings and campaigns, but he failed to attract enough support and to mobilize people. There were two other similar efforts to mobilize locals in Tsenher.

¹⁵ The Tsenher district has a website www.tsenher-sum.net. The website introduces local government organizations: the district governor, the citizens' representatives' meeting as well as the *nutgiin zövlöl*.

¹⁶ The meaning of *nutag* might range from one's birthplace to the place one grew up to one's parents' originated province and district.

¹⁷ Humphrey (2001:67) argues that the Mongols have a strong sense of 'place', that is, particular, meaningful, named sites to which things belong.

In May 2005, council members visited Tsenher soum. The head of the council was a high-ranking official in the Ulaanbaatar city administration and a highly respected person among locals. Another member of the sum council who accompanied him was a retired man in his sixties who was a frequent visitor to Tsenher. They persuaded district government officials to accompany them to Nariin Hamar Valley.

When we came to Tsenher, local people gathered together. Maybe that we were from *Nutgiin zövlöl* in Ulaanbaatar was influential. We were senior people and local government officials did hear our words, as well.

The visitors held a citizens' meeting at Tsetserleg *bag* (sub-district). Herders, local environmental inspectors, the members of *Nutgiin zövlöl*, and district officials (including the governor) formed a local movement organization, which they called the "Aruin Suvraga Movement" (Sacred Suvraga Movement). The meeting elected a member of *Nutgiin zövlöl*, the retired man, as the head of the 'movement'.¹⁸ After returning to Ulaanbaatar, the head of the movement contacted NGOs and international donor organizations seeking assistance.

When an old man asked for assistance to protect the environment and livelihood of rural herders, most organizations I contacted told me that I was doing the right thing. Some organizations helped me to organize training sessions for local herders and some organizations helped me to file a lawsuit against gold mining.

Unlike rural herders, he was in an advantageous position to look for information and find supportive allies. He represented Tsenher, a rural, remote locality, in Ulaanbaatar, representing the periphery in the center. Rural people viewed him as '*um uzsen hun*', a person who has a lot of experience or knows how things work elsewhere. People in Ulaanbaatar perceived him as a civic entrepreneur representing nomadic pastoralists. However, he was neither a strong local leader nor a national activist in part due to his intermediary social position. Consequently, he tried to bridge local herders and like-minded allies in Ulaanbaatar. Furthermore, unlike local citizens whose efforts might be repressed locally, his altruistic action and mobility between Tsenher and Ulaanbaatar avoided the repressive pressure from the local administration and the mining company. Equally important, *Nutgiin zövlöl* presented a strong backup as well as a control over his tenacity.

5. The local resistance movement in Tsenher

5.1 The road blockade in Nariin Hamar Valley

On May 16, 2005, in direct response to information that the "Mongol Gazar" company would relocate its facilities to Nariin Hamar Valley, the local leaders of the Aruin Suvraga

¹⁸ He became responsible for registering the organization as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Ulaanbaatar. Local non-governmental organizations are registered in the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs in Ulaanbaatar.

Movement mobilized local herders to erect a barricade on the road that runs through Nariin Hamar Valley.

Several conditions led the herders to undertake such a form of action, which was a unique in rural Mongolia. First, the founding of the Aruin Suvraga Movement gave considerable momentum to the local people's protest and created a strong basis for solidarity. Furthermore, the involvement of local government officials and the members of *Nutgin zövlöl* in the movement encouraged local herders to engage such a contentious action. Secondly, the relocation of the mining company necessitated an immediate local action. The narrow valley that has only one road running through presented a perfect place for putting up barricades (stone barriers). Third, the governor of the sub-district was a skilled organizer, and with the help of several elderly men (the most active protestors), she quickly mobilized local herder households.

A barricade was erected to block the road. Banners bearing their protest slogans such as "Don't touch the ancestors land" and "Protect water sources!" were hoisted. Protestors erected a small *ger* (yurt), as well. It was crucial for the protestors to retain the blockade once it begins. A donor funded project had facilitated the mobilization of local herders in Tsenher into organizing "herder groups" in the previous several years.¹⁹ Herder groups consisted of seven to eight households and each had its leader. Thus, this social organization of the local herders provided the local leader with an opportunity to mobilize them quickly. A schedule of days for herder groups to guard the barricade was set up. Each herder group was responsible for patrolling the site for two consecutive days.

Herder groups reported the situation after finishing their gate keeping duty on a logbook and had to pass it onto the next group (Figure 4). The first page of the logbook was filled with poems describing the beauty of the Mongolian homeland, which began by "This is my birthplace, the beautiful country of Mongolia."²⁰ The logbook presented a way to facilitate solidarity of the local movement. It also presented an effective means for controlling free riding and ensuring equal participation among local citizens. A logbook is often used in reporting routine gate-keeping or patrolling duties in different circumstances in Mongolia ranging from different workplaces to schools, which can be said as an inherited social practice from the socialist period. By listing group members and scheduling work shifts for them a logbook is used as means by which groups and organizations keep members' compliance of their duties. As the group members' names were listed and daily reports were recorded on the logbook, local herders knew participation and non-participation of other herders. On some occasions, herders reported those herders who did not come on their shift days as well as those who over-worked and those who voluntarily came to help from other *bags*.

¹⁹ According to NZNI (2006), herders groups in Tsenher were a result of a top-down process of dividing households into "herder groups" facilitated by a donor organization. They were organized as a result of the "Arhangai Rural Poverty alleviation Project" implemented by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) from 1996 to 2003. Herder groups were formed as voluntary groups of herders to work together for pasture management and income-generation (MOFA 2009).

²⁰ These are famous lines from the poem "Minii nutag" (My homeland) written by Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj.



FIGURE 4. The blockade logbook

Note: The first page is filled with poems describing the beauty of the Mongolian homeland and the importance nature protection. The second page introduces the schedule of days for herder groups to guard the barricade. .

The following excerpts from the logbook illustrate the course of events after the mining company stormed the barricade on May 29, 2005 and relocated their facilities into the valley.

May 29-30, 2005: [Mongol Gazar] broke the barrier and entered into Nariin Hamar during the night of May 29. Citizens of the sub-district demanded them to leave the valley. Because they didn't accept our demands, we protested correspondingly. They used tear gas and weapons and threatened women.²¹

Herders were unable to force the company facilities and workers out of the area. They rebuilt the barricade and restricted the passage of vehicles. According to the logbook, after the clash with the mining company, the protestors frequently received visitors from the district, the province and Ulaanbaatar such as officials from the district administration, the provincial environmental inspection agency, and the local homeland council. The district administration had showed solidarity with the protestors issuing a resolution on May 30, 2005 banning gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley, but it did help the gold mining company to maintain their relocated mine camp. Even though the movement leaders demanded stricter guarding of the barricade, local herders were not able to ignore local authorities who asked them to allow the company cars to enter the site temporarily for

²¹ According to local herders, they, frustrated by the 'attack', tried to move the mining facilities out of the area, which turned into a clash between them and the security staff of the mining company. More than 150 people gathered during the clash. A video recording of the time shows that some local herders fought with the security staff and some tried to dismantle the mining company's *gers*. Local herders reported that the security staff fired warning shots and several people were injured including women. Police officers came from the district-centre to resolve the conflict.

transporting food for the company workers inside the area. Mostly, an official letter from the district governor served as an access pass.

5.2 The opportunities and barriers of the movement

The head of the Aruin Suvraga Movement joined a network of local movement organizations that had emerged in other local areas affected by mining. The local movement leaders came to Nariin Hamar when the clash between herders and the gold mining company erupted on May 29. The clash was exposed to the public and the movements issued a call to action. From the inception of the Aruin Suvraga Movement, the mass media was a crucial component of the local protest. As the warning reports of environmental degradation and the clash between the locals and the mining company appeared in a national newspaper, the other media outlets began to turn their attention.

The local movements and some human rights NGOs in Ulaanbaatar provided resources to the Aruin Suvraga Movement. Some local movements shared with the local activists their experience and provided legal information. Human rights NGOs organized training sessions for the local activists and provided a lawyer.

With the assistance from the lawyer, the Aruin Suvraga Movement filed a lawsuit against the “Mongol Gazar.” Their claim was based on the resolutions of the Citizens’ Representatives’ Meeting of Tsenher district: on the special needs land the resolution issued in 2000 and on banning mining in Nariin Hamar Valley issued on May 30, 2005. Their proposed several arguments for revoking mining license in Nariin Hamar. First, they claimed that researchers at the Geo-ecology Institute in Ulaanbaatar found that gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley would have serious adverse effects on the local ecosystem such as the depletion of water sources (headwaters) and the disruption of natural habitat. Secondly, they claimed that 19 rivers and streams dried up in Tsenher district because the “Mongol Gazar” company did not rehabilitate their previous mining sites in Orhon sub-district. By law, mining companies should not have been granted new mining licenses unless they had adequately conducted land rehabilitation. There were other arguments such as the “Mongol Gazar” company didn’t pay water usage fees, have approved environmental protection plan, and include the prior consent in their environmental impact assessment. However, despite a hard-fought effort by the movement, it was defeated at all three levels of court. The inter-district, provincial, and supreme courts ruled in favor of the mining company confirming the legality of the mining licenses granted in Nariin Hamar Valley. The movement members bemoaned the non-inclusion of local citizens in the court meetings and favoritism toward the mining company.

Unexpectedly, on July 1, 2005, the Citizens’ Representatives’ Meeting of Tsenher district revoked its preceding resolution on May 30 that banned gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley granting “Mongol Gazar” company the permission to conduct mining in 68 hectares of land in Nariin Hamar Valley. The agreement between the mining company and the district on the use of land and water was signed on the same day. The reasons why the district administration changed their previous decision is not obvious, but there were rumors that “the district administration had to reimburse the mineral license fees paid

since 1999 if the licenses were revoked”²² and “The “Mongol Gazar” company promised to invest 50 million *tögrög* to the district” (Tseveenkherlen 2005). There were rumors about corruption among local officials, as well.

The movement activists were hard hit by the court decisions and by the ‘sellout’ of local politicians. Consequently, local herders had to stand up against the local government to stop gold mining. The district administration began to pressure the local movement members to negotiate with the mining company, especially the governor of the Tsetserleg sub-district and local environmental inspectors who were the local leaders of the movement. They eventually negotiated with the mining company over the donation to the sub-district budget and pulled themselves out of the blockade.

Even though the leader of the Aruin Suvraga movement brought journalists from Ulaanbaatar and reports on the situation appeared on major national newspapers and televisions,²³ the absence of the local leaders eventually led to the decline of the number of local herders participating in the road blockade. During late July to early August in 2005, herders finished their last shifts as the keepers of the barricade.

6. Movement outcomes

6.1 Negative views

Some local herders viewed the district administration’s decision to allow gold mining as an unacceptable betrayal. They viewed the local resistance movement as a failure because gold mining degraded the pristine nature and the livelihood of local people in Nariin Hamar Valley.

It was alleged that the mining company donated 15 million tugrik to the sub-district budget as part of their negotiation with the district administration. However, many local herders were not aware of the negotiation details between the district and the mining company. Moreover, the sub-district leaders did not report the expenditure of the donation money. Local herders were disappointed with the fact that local citizens’ meetings became a place for dispute as one side blames the other side as “sellers” of their local homeland. While the local resistance movement accentuated the solidarity of local herders, the unaccountable behavior of local authorities seemed to disrupt that.

The objective of the local struggle was to forestall gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley. The movement failed to achieve this objective. However, there were positive consequences resulted from the movement.

6.2 Positive views

Some people viewed the local resistance movement as a success. Mobilizing nomadic herders and organizing a road blockade were regarded as an exceptional achievement. The clash between mining company and herders has become a kind of local legend. The most remarkable story was about the passion of a pregnant woman who was carried to a provincial hospital after being involved in the clash.

²² Authors interview with a local government official in Tsenher district. August 2, 2008.

²³ The two major national daily newspapers, Today and Daily News, published articles on July 27, 2005 with titles "Tsenher is close to a civil war" and "Aruin Suvraga's Fight in the Mongol Land," respectively.

The area of 68 hectares for gold mining that the district administration approved was regarded as a relatively small area compared to the area of 13,000 hectares that was initially granted for exploration. Even though there were occasional leakages of dirty water from the gold mine into local rivers and expansion of mining area, the local people viewed the operation of the gold mine in Nariin Hamar Valley less contentiously. The mine operated within two years and conducted land rehabilitation amid the legal battles²⁴ and the attention from the mass media.

The emergence of movement brought the problems surrounding gold mining in Tsenher district into a regional and national level discussion. Environmental degradation in Orhon sub-district received greater attention and the government conducted a series of investigations in the area. In 2007, Mount Suvraga Hairhan was approved as a state worshipped mountain²⁵, which was in part a result of the strategy of the Aruin Suvraga Movement to prevent mining operations taking place in the area. Even though worshipped mountains are not outside the legally permitted areas for mining, this was regarded as a way to protect the environment from mining operations.

7. Summary and conclusion

This article has examined the struggles of the people of the Tsenher district as a 'crucial' case of local resistance movements against the threats imposed by the expansion of gold mining in Mongolia since the 2000s. In the analysis of this movement specific attention has been paid to the conditions that enabled local herders to undertake a relatively sustained collective action.

There seemed to be little opportunity of emergence and sustenance of local resistance movement in the Tsenher district until the intervention of non-local intermediaries. While local social and environmental settings such as geographical advantage the geographical advantage for building a barricade and the existence of herder-group networks, the leadership and active participation of the local homeland council members gave major impetus to the local opposition. The attempts of the locals to mobilize themselves and access the decision-making institutions failed in part due to the structural disadvantage of the rural locality, but it was associated with national and local power holders' interwoven interests with mining. The existence of national environmental advocacy networks or coalitions may have been a crucial facilitating condition as in other countries around the world, but the post-socialist transitional country lacked such social

²⁴ Opposing the decision of the district administration, the head of the movement brought the case to the administration court claiming that the decision breached the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment that stated that companies should conduct prior consultation with local citizens. The legal battle was long and the provincial court of Arhangai province denied the decision of the district administration in 2006, but by the time gold mining in Nariin Hamar Valley had already started. Furthermore, the Center for Human Rights and Development, an NGO which a lawyer for the local movement, organized what it called a 'strategic advocacy' campaign for the mining-affected local herders. In 2007, it revealed that the "Mongol Gazar" company used water despite the adequate permit for water usage.

²⁵ State-worshipped sacred mountains date back to Chinggis Khaan and the preceding steppe states. This tradition was restored after the end of the socialist era in Mongolia. Currently, there are eight state-worshipped holy mountains throughout the country. The president of Mongolia officially recognizes holy mountains and participate in the worship rituals, which take place once in every four years.

infrastructure. The local homeland council empowered the local struggle by linking it with potential allies at the national level. Although it was not discussed in this article, it was argued by the author elsewhere that the role of middlemen (or middlepersons) was a crucial variable in explaining other local resistance movements or environmental movements in Mongolia (Byambajav 2010).

What this analysis find most inspiring was that local protestors applied different cultural practices adaptively to draw their strategies of action and retain the participation of local herders. The mobilization of local herders depended much on the availability of local informal groupings or herder groups, which can be said a result of the diffusion of transnational norms and practices, and the 'recycling' of a 'logbook method', which presents a social practice inherited from the socialist period. It suggests that organizations and institutions seeking to promote local collective action need to look at different social and cultural resources and practices that encourage the bonds and collaboration among people.

As it was sketched out in the introduction section, specific combinations of the perception of threats imposed by gold mining on the environmental, material, and cultural bases of local livelihood constituted the local discontent. The national and local state policies and the reality of mining operations in Mongolia have resulted in the widespread marginalization of local mining-affected communities. Local communities have often been the victims of land alienation and environmental degradation caused by mining. Like many other local, indigenous communities affected by externally-imposed mining operations around the world, rural herders in the Tsenher district had little benefits from the extraction of 'their' local resources. Instead, gold mining has tended to dispossess local herder communities of the bases of their livelihood. As this analysis has shown, the sustainability of local communities is contingent in large part on the extent to which local herders mobilize themselves for their shared concerns.

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モンゴルにおける鉱山開発反対運動の展開とその要因に関する考察

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2005年、モンゴルのアルハンガイ県ツェンヘル郡において、牧畜民による金鉱山開発計画反対運動が発生した。そこでは、採掘予定地域の牧畜民が3か月にわたり道路封鎖などの抗議を行った。この抗議行動は、モンゴルで1990年代に始まった急速な金鉱山開発によって引き起こされた環境問題や土地などの生活資源の収奪をめぐる反対運動の事例である。本稿は社会運動論を用いてこの反対運動の動員力の展開要因を考察した。主な知見は次のとおりである。①地域牧畜民と都市部の市民組織が連携して行ったその反対運動の発生と動員には、都市部を拠点とする「同郷会」という組織が大きな役割を果たした。同会は、同郡内での反対運動に対する行政や鉱山開発会社による阻止・妨害行為を乗り越える重要な基盤となった。②牧畜民動員のため、インフォーマルな「牧畜民協力グループ」や、社会主義時代に用いられた「行動記録簿」などの社会・文化資源の利用が有効であった。