

HORSE CULTURE OF MONGOLIA

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Mongolians has been the representative of nomadic culture which is one of many cultures that exist in the world throughout humanity.

One of the major contribution of Mongolians is the creation of “Eriin gurban naamdam” which is three sport games among men e.g. archery, wrestling and horse race. It was closely tied and born from to the living condition and their life style.

In the past, aimags were facing the urgent necessity to increase their army capacity in order to protect their independence. In order to achieve this goal, significant number of warrior soldiers, archers and strong horses were needed. Furthermore, the “Eriin gurban naadam” was initiated as such the wrestling competition improves soldiers’ strength, archery improves archers’ precision and horse race for the selection of the best horses for battle and endurance travels.

Before we go into details of the horse culture in Mongolia, we need to talk about the origin of horses.

Archaeological findings of ancestors of horses found in Mongolia indicate that horses were originated in the Gobi desert of Mongolia and then spread all over the world. Initially horse had five fingers and further evolved to the modern horse with one hoof over millions of years. Throughout the evolution, over 200 species of horses were evolved¹. In the ancient Chinese script, it was stated that Mongolian horse was evolved 6000 years ago². Furthermore, first people who adopted horses were ancient Mongol tribes. Ancient Mongol tribes in the land of Mongolia adopted wild horses, sheep, goats, camels and cows as domestic livestock and initiated the bases of the nomadic culture. Also, brought significant changes to the history of humanity³ and impacted the life of Mongolians in many different ways. Use of horses as a main transportation mean made significant impacts on the economic and culture relations of tribes located in the every corner of Mongolia and for the utilization of the vast land.

Thus, Mongolia gave significant importance for the horses and sometimes the Ministry of horses was initiated. In the land of Mongols, horse and people were connected in every ways of their life and developed horse cultures which have been inherited to the recent time..

Since the Hunnu era, horse race was developed even further due to the army and pleasure necessities. During the Mongol Empire era, wrestling, archery and horse race became the mean of military trainings.

In the Secret book of Mongol, Altan tivch, and Marco Polo’s note, it was stated that very special, fast horses were presented to the superiors when war ended, peace was sustained,

¹М.Сонеvodstva (1975) “Traditional wedding and gathering of Mongolians” – Khailaar 1986

²К.Каталин (1961) “Animal tooth and age identification methods of Mongolia”

³Н.Сэр-Оджав (1977) “Ancient history of Mongolia”

special ceremonies during XII-XIII century. This culture shows that the horse has been the symbol of superior respect.

Culture related to the use of horses in Mongolia

Since the ancient time, horses were used for 6 main purposes.

Herding. Mongolian herding cultures of five kinds of live stock have very close links with each other. Each of these five kinds of live stock has special role in the nomadic life style. Specially, horses have main role for herding live stock. During the summer time, any horse can be used for the transportation purposes. But it is common to young horses such as colts, three to five years old horses. This is the classic technique for training horses for domestic use and test for how it will be used in the future. If the horse is very calm, slow and heavy, it is quite often used for herding. During the winter, most horses are grazed far away, specially selected fat horses are used for herding.

This culture has been inherited from our ancestors to our generation.

Transportation. Since invention of the wheel in 1800 BC and the Bronze Age, carts were used for horses. Use of carts for the horses for transportation brought major changes to the lifestyle of nomadic tribes. After 4000 years, the use horse in the daily life of nomadic people in Mongolia has been reduced, however it has kept its importance. In Mongolia, every horse can be ridden but not every horse is used for the transportation and carts. Only 1-2 horses are usually selected and trained for carts even for wealthy families with many horses.

Special feature of cart horse are following: with heavy bone, strength, tireless when used over 4 seasons, easily fed and gains strength and especially very calm.

Hunting. Hunting was the integral part of people's life style in the ancient time. In order to fully utilise this resource, human and horse relationship played important role. Horse was used to hunt gazelles and also to escape from wild animals. Also, it was noted In the "male two stallions of Genghis khan" that Mongolians used to organise mass hunting as part of the military training. Depending on the cultural and societal developments, even though this culture has been left within the nomadic families, use of horse for hunting wolves, gazelles. Horses selected for hunting are usually light weight, fast, sharp legs. However, they are not able to go through harsh conditions and endure thus they are not used most of the time.

Communication. People used to use signs, voices and languages to communicate. But when people are far away from each and not able to see and hear, horses were first used for this purpose. Mongolia has a lots of experience in using horses for communication and those horses used for this purpose were well noted in the historical sculptures. For example, Mergediin tsagaan, Am tsagaan kheer. Legend of 'Mushiran khuurch' noted the use of horse to travel over the half of the world. Also, 'horse stations' are the main representation. Horse stations initiated by king Ugudei in 1235 has been the main part of the development of Mongolia for 700 years until cars took over in 1950s.

Special features of horses used for this purpose are similar to above. However, when it is needed any type of horse was used.

Military. There is a significant amount of historical cases for the use of horse for military purpose in Mongolia. The powerful horse battalion was the main reason why ancient Mongolians were able to keep their power for long time. Moudun Shaniu of Hunnu Empire om 200BC used 400000 horse army and divided it into 4 sections which he used to attach Chinese king Gao-Di from 4 different sides. The main foundation of the Mongolian powerful army was the powerful horse army and well developed military strategy and experience. Main features of the horse used for the army contains most of the features mentioned above. But, the strength of the horse was considered to be very important. The most recent case is the battle of the Khalkh Gol. In the battles of Mongolian independence, horses have been the close friends of the soldiers for many generations. They have been used even when the military techniques have been developed.

Racing horse. Based on the experience of several generations, Mongolian have developed a way to identify race horse which is challenging task. The characteristic of racing horse depend on the type of the horse and are different for each horse. However, horses in similar conditions have similar characteristics. There is a tradition to check outer, inner and secret characteristics.

1. Outer characteristics. The shape of an animal is closely linked to the capability of the animal and it same for the case of horse. For example, the horse should have a shape that shows the strength which is utilized for the carting, pulling etc or light weight. Thus, 10 characteristics of the horse are specially examined: 1. Head 2. Hoof 3. Tail 4. Shoulder 5. Voice 6. Liquid 7. Feed 8. Teeth 9. Tendon 10. Body

2. Inner characteristics: It has been noted as Sweet taste in the ancient scripts. What is Sweet taste.it is very common to see foamy white molasses in the well trained race horse's mouth which contains sweet taste. Also, inner characteristics are mostly observed from the head of the horse. Capability of the heart is observed from the eyes of the horse while the lung is observed from the noses. The liver capability is observed from the gum

3. Hidden characteristics. It is only observed from the teeth. Mongolian had observed that any animals' strength can be observed from the characteristics of the tooth. Also, the age of the horse is identified by the teeth. The hidden characteristics are mostly those cannot be identified by the state of inner and outer characteristics. There are many hidden characteristics.

Conclusion

Ancient Mongol tribes in the land of Mongolia adopted wild horses, sheep, goats, camels and cows as a domestic livestock and initiated the bases for the nomadic culture. The nomadic life style originated from the life style of Mongolians hence it has still being the part of our lifestyle until the 21st century. Ancient tribes used to select strong and fast horses for the establishment of strong horse army, for the war of independence and to conquer other tribes based on the traditional horse races. Also, used strong horses as a mean of transportation and communications for the economic and cultural relations. From these fact, Mongolian culture for the horse were developed which has been inherited to the current generations. Nowadays, horse culture has been developed also based on the science. Horse trainers are starting to adopt scientific finding in their daily training along with the traditional way of training. Mongolian use family tree and same as this we keep track of horse blood line.

Even though people are becoming more distant from the tradition nowadays, the horse culture is being more developed though out the country.