



Ancient Art of Weather Forecasting (图)

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That night more than two dozen people in Ugtaal locality in Dund Gobi province walked over the top of Kharaatyn Mountain. The group is led by an old herder, M. Baasanjav and his son, Puntsagdorj. Herder Bayar from nearby Undurshil soum also joins them along the way. For many years they have gone to the mountaintop together.

As soon as the moon appears, they raise their binoculars and start to survey the surrounding landscape. Through the night until morning, they will sit and watch intently for the slightest changes in nature. Only the keen and trained eyes of a nomadic herder can detect the smallest changes of colors in the moon lit scenery.

At last, dawn slips in. The group starts a small fire, and sits closely around it, cold and tired. Sparks of similar fire can be seen on top of the distant Baga Zalaa and Toodogijn Tsagaan hills.

When the herders go down, people from neighboring families are already waiting for them in old Baasanjav's home, or gher. Among the guests, is the chief of Choir soum from nearby East Gobi province, also keen for news. All respectfully wait for the old man's words.

However, he offers for the younger herders to speak first. The eldest son of Sharav, a renowned forecaster, tells his opinion. The declining age of his father, Sharavdorj, no longer allows him to spend the cold night on the mountaintop, and he passed all his knowledge and expertise to his elder son.

Finally, once all the men are finished, Baasanjav sums up the results of the long night's observations. "The winter will be a severe one, with occasional strong winds and snow blizzards. Heavy snow will fall east of Choir town. Beneath the Great Rocks Mountain I saw some strange "mana" (a slight flicker of light). I cannot say exactly which kind perhaps it is mousy."

According to the old man, he can distinguish more than 10 kinds of "mana" depending on the place, motion, concentration or color, and interpret their meaning: snow, wind, drought, flood and even illness or plague.

"In the old days, elders knew the difference so well. I know almost nothing compared to them?" sighs Baasanjav.

The people in the gher fall silent. Last year, many of them lost their cattle to an unprecedented outbreak of horse influenza.

"But it seems to me, nevertheless, to be mousy," continues the old man. "Last year, the steppe mouse multiplied, stripping the ground of grass, so the soil must attract this kind of 'mana'".

It may seem impossible to accurately forecast the winter weather from sitting on a mountaintop for one night. But the secret behind this surprising ability lies in the life-long experience of herders, who from early childhood to old age, day in and day out, observe all the changes of nature. This experience is based on millennium-old knowledge of the laws of nature.

Later on I compared old Baasanjav's forecast with the official, scientific one. As predicted, heavy snowfalls occurred that winter in the middle Gobi region, and eastward of Choir town.

As elders say, nothing in the world is without reason and consequence. The motion of the atmosphere, sun, moon and stars, the color of the ground, fitness of cattle, autumn migration of birds, beginning of marmot hibernation - all these are hidden threads connecting nature and human beings.

We all are the children of nature. Is it not the real challenge for humans to learn and understand the true meaning of all these connections?

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