

Mothers in Mongolia

Let me share with you a day in the lives of two very different Mongolian mothers. Dulmaa, the first mother, lives in Battsengel village of Arkhangai Province. She lives with her two children and her husband, who is a third-generation herdsman. This season is known to them as the pleasant autumn, because each nomad family has harvested their vegetables and their livestock are well fed. Dulmaa's two children only stay with their parents on the weekends – from Monday to Friday, they live in a school dormitory. Ever since the students started junior high school, Dulmaa and her husband let the children stay closer to school, because otherwise their commute would be two hours by horse every day.

Tuya is Dulmaa's younger sister, and has a very different lifestyle – she lives in Ulaanbaatar city. Tuya grew up in the countryside, but she had always wanted to attend university, and so she went to the Mongolian National University. After graduating, she started to work in the city. Tuya is also a mother, and she has one three-year old child. Tuya starts each morning at 7a.m. by preparing breakfast for her son and husband, so that they can leave home by 7:45. Her husband works at a Toyota distributor, and the company has a kindergarten service for their employees, so their child goes to work with his father. This makes the young couple's daily routine easy to manage, and they are happy for the kindergarten.

Back in Battsengel village, Dulmaa's morning starts earlier, at around 5a.m., when she has to milk the family's 37 yaks, all by herself. Because autumn is a rich season, and the grass and plants are plentiful, the Yaks produce more milk than any other time. Yak's milk is particularly oily, and is good for making butter. Dulmaa likes to make extra butter, which she sells to the local shops during the long cold season. While Dulmaa works, her husband leads the sheep out to pasture, and goes to the well for water. The yaks work hard here, too – they pull a cart which can carry 100 liters of water. It's hard work every day, but the grasslands are beautiful and the air is crisp and fresh.

Tuya certainly has an easier routine in Ulaanbaatar, but she misses the pleasant autumn of the countryside. The traffic congestion and building construction makes the capital city feel very busy, and the air is polluted and uncomfortable. Battling through the congestion, Tuya arrives at work by 9a.m. She starts her workday by checking her patients in each of their rooms – she is very quick at this now, because she has been working at this hospital for six years. A day at work passes very quickly for Tuya, and she especially enjoys her lunch hour, when she can chat and laugh with her friends, and gather the energy to work through the rest of the day.

Today is Friday, so while Dulmaa milks the yaks, she is planning what to do during the weekend, when her two teenagers will be at home. Because they are old enough to milk the yaks, Dulmaa thinks she will have them prepare dairy products, while she focusses on other important chores. In the weekend, Dulmaa will shear the sheep and take the wool to an agent in the center of Arkhangai province. Autumn is also the busiest season for wool and cashmere agents, who deliver the farmer's wool to the factories which manufacture winter clothing.

Back in the city, Tuya is working hard, and she hopes to leave work by 6p.m., so she can get home to make dinner for her family. If there isn't too much traffic, her husband and child will be back home before 7p.m. Tuya often likes to prepare a week's worth of dinner in advance, and freeze the meals. This way, she can prepare dinner within 30 minutes. The best food for freezing is *Buuz*. They can be steamed and ready in 20 minutes, and go well with any kind of salad and sauce. Tuya also likes *buuz* because she can put any kind of ingredient in the steamed buns, like meat with onion, or broccoli. Her son doesn't like broccoli or onion, so it's difficult to get him to eat them, but he always eagerly devours the steamed *buuz* – even with broccoli or onion in them.

Since Dulmaa's children will be back home tonight, she is also thinking about dinner for her family. She decides to make dumpling milk tea, one of her daughters' favorites. She especially wanted to use some dried meat for the tea soup, and lamb meat for the dumplings. Dumpling milk tea is kind of a Mongolian comfort food, and helps to relieve tiredness. Although it takes a bit of time to prepare, she

knows her daughters will enjoy it, and then be ready to help their mother the next day.

At 7:15p.m., Tuya's husband and son have just come home, and dinner is ready to eat. After putting their son to sleep, she and her husband might share a movie night together. They will have a relaxing weekend for sure.

Far away from the city, and just before sunset, Dulmaa's husband spots two horses galloping towards their home. The family is happy to welcome their daughters home after five days apart, and look forward to having dinner together. Their weekend will be busy, but joyful. Children in nomad's families know how to enjoy their time with the livestock.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. Do Dulmaa and her husband always live in the geographical area?

Answer: Probably not.

Hints/Clues: At the beginning and end of the passage, Dulmaa's family is described as being a 'nomad family,' (遊牧民), from which a certain degree of movement can be inferred. Nomad families often shift their homes in the varying seasons, but the two parents will stay together all that time. Except for families who have horses, they may have to spend some time apart during the grazing season while the husband is out with the horses.

2. Do you think Dulmaa's house has running water?

Answer: Probably not.

Hints/Clues: It is mentioned that her husband goes to collect water from the well – the amount of water (100 liters) also suggests it is either their primary or only source. If they happen to be living in a ger, this also is likely not to have fixed plumbing. (Note: in a later lesson, 4.9: *Bishkek, I Love You!*, 'ger' will be the answer to one of the questions, so the name should be explicitly mentioned to the students, and if possible, they should be shown images of ger).

3. Why do you think it is important that Dulmaa prepares food for the long cold season?

Answer: Because the winters get extremely cold, and food is likely difficult to procure.

Hints/Clues: According to the Wikipedia page for Arkhangai Province, the mean temperature over the winter varies between -30° and -30° Celsius.

4. What kind of food is *buuz*, and is there a similar food available in Japan?

Answer: A steamed bun (包子: パオズ).

Hints/Clues: Students should be able to describe the food from the descriptions of the steamed buns. Also, students might be able to find information on the food with a simple Google search (there is a Japanese Wikipedia page, ボーズ).

5. At what time of day (i.e., ○○ o'clock) did Dulmaa's children arrive home?

Answer: Sometime between 6:00 and 9:00 pm.

Hints/Clues: Firstly, they are a two-hour ride from school by horse. Assuming school finishes in the mid-late afternoon, it should be at least a couple of hours after that. Students should also be encouraged to consider the seasons, and look up more information for the answer, as 'just before sunset' is an important clue. In Autumn, the sunset varies from between just before 9p.m. in early September, to just before 6p.m. in late October.

6. Dulmaa's family has 37 yaks, as well as sheep. Is this a lot, an average number, or a small number for an average family in Arkhangai Province?

Answer: Probably average.

Hints/Clues: To arrive at this answer, the students will need to access the English language Wikipedia page (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkhangai_Province), for which they will likely need guidance. The page states that there are roughly 2 million domestic animals in the province, and a population of near 100,000 people. This means there are roughly 20 domesticated animals per person, so around 40 yaks + sheep for a family of four is likely a fairly average number.