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Trucking with Time: The Emergence of New Mongolian Mobilities in America

Abstract: How do time, space, and movement interpenetrate to shape the life choices of Mongolian men living in Los Angeles? In this article I contribute to an ongoing scholarly debate about how Mongolian lives have been affected both by socialism's 'end' and encounters with capitalism. While attention has been directed to Mongolians remaining in Mongolia, I extend the debate in this article by scrutinizing the experiences of Mongolians who embraced the new forms of mobility that capitalism ushered in; specifically of those who migrated to Los Angeles in search of the opportunity to lead, what they deemed, better, more fulfilling lives. These Mongolian immigrants encountered new and completely foreign regimes of time discipline that sought to structure their lives in ways that were heretofore unimaginable to them. Throughout this article I demonstrate the all-pervasiveness of these encounters which occur in both public and private life, and in areas as varied as people's apartments, public parks, offices, and nightclubs. I also explore how a subset of Mongolian men responded to what they regarded as a profound imposition; how they sought employment opportunities in the logistics sector that allowed them to exert some agency over time and to pursue their own ethical goals. Long-distance trucking, the area of the logistics sector these men entered, might seem a puzzling choice because it has routinely been derided by scholars of logistics as akin to working in a sweatshop. However, I argue, in examining this final puzzle, that the choices these men make complicate scholarly assumptions about contemporary capitalism's workings.

Keywords: time; logistics; Mongolians; Los Angeles; capitalism; mobility; 21st century; ethics

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Introduction

In 2015 the United States' logistics industry was worth \$1.5 trillion.¹ However, it seems that circulating goods in a timely and inexpensive manner did not result in well-paid jobs for most logistics workers. Indeed, David Jaffee and David Bensman have observed that, if anything, work in the sector could be "characterized by low wages, unstable work arrangements, temporary employment relationships, underemployment, economic insecurity, an absence of employer-provided benefits, and a lack of legal and regulatory protections".² Several scholars have argued that retailers' endless pressure on suppliers to cut costs makes low wage labor vital to the industry and that spreading of production across the globe enables a reduction in labor costs.³ In this paper I discuss why, despite these developments, a considerable number of Mongolian men in Los Angeles were eager to become long-distance truckers and enter the logistics trade. I contrast that enthusiasm to the attitudes of other Mongolian logistics laborers. In doing so, I explore how time, space, and movement wove together and shaped Mongolian male immigrants' lives in Los Angeles.

These logistics workers were part of a population of several thousand Mongolians. While this population was dotted across Los Angeles, its cultural activities centered on Koreatown.⁴ Koreatown was the city's most densely populated neighborhood where large Salvadoran, Bangladeshi, and Korean communities resided. The Mongolian presence in Koreatown dated to the late 1990s when students came to study at its many universities. These students

¹ Christine Cooper, Shannon Sedgwick, and Somjita Mitra, "Good on the Move!: Trade and Logistics in Southern California," Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, May 2017, https://laedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/TL_20170515_Final.pdf.

² David Jaffee and David Bensman, "Draying and Picking: Precarious Work and Labor Action in the Logistics Sector," *WorkingUSA* 19, no. 1 (2016): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12227>.

³ Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), chap. 3, Kindle; Nicky Gregson, Mike Crang, and Constantinos N. Antonopoulos, "Holding Together Logistical Worlds: Friction, Seams and Circulation in the Emerging 'Global Warehouse,'" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (June 2017): 388–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816671721>; Kirsty Newsome, "Work and Employment in Distribution and Exchange: Moments in the Circuit of Capital: Work and Employment in Distribution and Exchange," *Industrial Relations Journal* 41, no. 3 (May 2010): 196–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2338.2010.00563.x>.

⁴ Over the course of fieldwork with the Mongolians it became apparent that there was no readily available measure of population size. When the matter was discussed with community organizers, the figure they quoted varied by several thousands. Consequently, this article refers to several thousand rather than an exact figure.

established the Los Angeles Mongolian Association (LAMA) to support co-ethnics. When the millennium began the Mongolians numbered in the hundreds but around 2004, as Mongolia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew, Los Angeles' population swelled. Concurrently it became composed of people whose dissimilar life experiences sprung from the unique ways their different ethnic identities, class backgrounds, gender identities, religious commitments, and legal statuses entwined.⁵ The most profound of these divisions was between Mongolian students and Mongolian settlers. As the latter grew in numbers, LAMA began to place a greater emphasis on community events aimed at preserving Mongolian culture.

In order to understand why Mongolian men became long-distance truckers, in this study I draw on ethnographic fieldwork, several ride-alongs with truckers, and thirty semi-structured interviews of logistics workers, their families, and the wider Mongolian population. Fieldwork was conducted between winter 2013 and autumn 2015 during which a Mongolian logistics worker roomed with me for several months and I volunteered at LAMA. Volunteering allowed attendance at meetings, participation in community events, and eventually a role helping to organize a basketball league. Logistics companies sponsored all these events and through them, I became acquainted with logistics workers. Long-haul trucking involved being absent from Los Angeles for several days at a time making it difficult to formally interview truckers. However, a chance discussion at a 2014 poker tournament, held appropriately enough in the back-room of a logistics company's office, led to an invitation to ride with an experienced Mongolian trucker. After the trip, I was invited to spend more time with truckers and participated in more ride-alongs. Simultaneously, initial interviews with logistics workers led to further interviews with the wider community.

In discussing Mongolian logistics workers and their lives and motivations, I make use of four concepts: time, ethics, mobility, and logistics. Time is employed here with reference to E. P. Thompson's work.⁶ He suggested that time reckoning in pre-industrial and industrial societies was profoundly different; in the former it was distinguished by task completion while in the latter its elapsing was measured. This association of capitalism with a single temporal orientation is scarcely tenable in the wake of a number of workplace studies

⁵ These differences were evident in the growing variety of social organizations and amenities within the community. By the time I concluded my fieldwork in late 2015 there was a Buddhist organization, several Christian congregations, a couple of student associations, an after-hours school, a library, and a basketball league.

⁶ E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present*, no. 38 (December 1967): 57.

revealing huge variations in time-reckoning within a single site.⁷ Paul Glennie and Niger Thrift directly criticized Thompson's position when they argued, based upon their study of the variations in early modern time-keeping practices in England, that rather than a singular clock time a society possessed multiple clock times.⁸ I embrace this point while insisting that task time and clock time can coexist. Furthermore, I equate all time with rhythm. What Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger called communities of practice – people collectively engaging in an activity – create rhythms through engaging with complex material-semiotic networks, like calendrical systems, to develop routines, standardize practices and coordinate actions.⁹ The management of these rhythms extends to narrating the past, like the usage by historical societies of commemorative plaques, and shaping the future, like fortune-telling. The anthropologists Roxana Moroşanu and Felix Ringel label such attempts to manage the rhythms of the past, present, and future through modification, distortion, and so forth time-tricking.¹⁰ Building on this observation I argue in this article that as everyone is part of multiple communities of practice, we not only attempt to trick time into desired shapes but we try trucking and trading between these communities with their distinct rhythms to achieve specific goals.

Communities of practice, the material-semiotic networks they engage, and the rhythms they co-produce are not immutable. In the 70s, Toyota introduced American businesses to just-in-time production. This practice greatly intensified the flow of goods, capital, people, and information across the world.¹¹ Retailers employed logistics – an approach to supply management that originated in 19th century European militaries and became linked to global capitalism in the 1950s – to manage such flows.¹² It aimed to discipline various heteroge-

⁷ Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Mao Mollona, "Gifts of Labour: Steel Production and Technological Imagination in an Area of Urban Deprivation, Sheffield, UK," *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (June 2005): 177–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X05052022>; Donald F. Roy, "'Banana Time' Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction," *Human Organization* 18, no. 4 (1959): 158–68.

⁸ Paul Glennie and N. J. Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300–1800* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 61.

⁹ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29.

¹⁰ Roxana Moroşanu and Felix Ringel, "Time-Tricking: A General Introduction," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (May 2016): 17.

¹¹ Charmaine Chua et al., "Introduction: Turbulent Circulation: Building a Critical Engagement with Logistics," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, no. 4 (August 1, 2018): 619, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818783101>.

¹² Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, chap. 1.

neous temporal rhythms of production and ensure that goods arrived on demand.¹³ While much of the critical work on logistics has treated it as rather undifferentiated, my focus here is on a very particular instance of logistics work. In concentrating on the specificities of the Mongolian situation, I hope to provide an example of the various distinct rhythms that logistics works to integrate. My approach builds upon work by feminist scholars stressing the need to be attentive to capitalism's specificities.¹⁴ They advocate paying attention to "the messiness and hard work involved" in making capitalism's varied local forms appear stable and coherent.¹⁵ Furthermore, such scholars emphasize the fact that contemporary capitalism hinges "on social differences and divisions [...] and forms of social oppression starting from realms of social reproduction".¹⁶ Apprehending how these variations are being generated requires attending to the numerous labor regimes that produce these differentiated laborers. While the term labor regime has a complex and varied history Tania Murray Li provides a helpfully generalized and succinct summation defining it as "the assemblage of elements that set the conditions under which people work".¹⁷ This would involve not just the socio-legal systems of the place being studied, but generally the "heterogeneous processes through which people, labor, sentiments, plants, animals, and life-ways are converted into resources for various projects of production" which include things like marital practices, ideas concerning time, and notions of domestication.¹⁸

Central to the creation of Mongolian male logistics workers are new forms of systematic movement that became possible after the Cold War. Its denouement created the opportunity for a variety of western economic experts to

¹³ Markus Hesse and Jean-Paul Rodrigue, "The Transport Geography of Logistics and Freight Distribution," *Journal of Transport Geography* 12, no. 3 (September 2004): 176, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2003.12.004>.

¹⁴ J. K. Gibson-Graham, "Rethinking the Economy with Thick Description and Weak Theory," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. S9 (August 2014): s152, <https://doi.org/10.1086/676646>; Seo Young Park, "Stitching the Fabric of Family: Time, Work, and Intimacy in Seoul's Tongdaemun Market," *Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 385, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2012.0023>.

¹⁵ Laura Bear et al., "Gens: A Feminist Manifesto for the Study of Capitalism – Cultural Anthropology," *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights* (March 30, 2015), <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/652-gens-a-feminist-manifesto-for-the-study-of-capitalism>.

¹⁶ Alessandra Mezzadri, *The Sweatshop Regime: Labouring Bodies, Exploitation, and Garments Made in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 6.

¹⁷ Tania Murray Li, "The Price of Un/Freedom: Indonesia's Colonial and Contemporary Plantation Labor Regimes," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 2 (April 2017): 247, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417517000044>.

¹⁸ Bear et al., "Gens".

travel to Mongolia and argue for a singular developmentalist teleology. However, they were not alone in seeking to produce new mobilities. Mongolia's Kazakhs, for example, were invited to 'return' to Kazakhstan.¹⁹ Meanwhile commercial opportunities on the Mongolian-Chinese border meant people regularly commuted between Zamyn-Üüd and Erenhot.²⁰ By and large the literature on new forms of Mongolian mobility has centered either on internal flows, movements to near neighbors, or the movement of people, goods, and information into Mongolia. This case study of Mongolian male logistics workers thus provides insight into the mobility patterns of those Mongolians who engaged in a distinctly different pattern of movement.

Any understanding of how mobility is consequential for Mongolian male logistics workers' attitudes to both time and labor must contend with their ethical concerns. This article draws on Foucauldian ideas about ethics and morality. For Foucault morality consisted of three elements: morals, the concrete acts of moral agents, and ethics.²¹ Morals are "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies", which could include the family, the church and state institutions.²² The concrete acts of moral agents referred to how historical individuals reacted to these prescriptive moral codes. Finally, ethics refers to how we choose to interpret and then apply these moral codes to ourselves. Ethics consists of the ethical substance – the part of herself that the person works upon, the mode of subjection – the way the individual relates this conduct to the rules; the ethical work – what one does to become an ethical person, and the telos – the overarching ethical goal of which individual actions form a part.²³ My rationale for adopting this Foucauldian lens stems from Caroline Humphrey's observation that for Mongolians "the more important arena of morality appears in the relation between persons and exemplars" and that in that regard, Mongolians' approach to morality is similar to the division Foucault makes between ethics and morals.²⁴ Thus, a Mongolian interprets their chosen exemplars actions and behavior stressing certain elements of it over others just

¹⁹ Holly Barcus and Cynthia Werner, "The Kazakhs of Western Mongolia: Transnational Migration from 1990–2008," *Asian Ethnicity* 11, no. 2 (June 2010): 210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631361003779463>.

²⁰ Gaëlle Lacaze, "Run after Time': The Roads of Suitcase Traders," *Asian Ethnicity* 11, no. 2 (June 2010): 192–93.

²¹ Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 352.

²² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume Two of the History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. 2. 3 vols. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985), 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2: 26–28.

²⁴ Caroline Humphrey, "Exemplars and Rules: Aspects of the Discourse of Moralities in Mongolia," in *The Ethnography of Moralities*, ed. Signe Howell (London: Routledge, 2004), 25–26.

as Foucault argued those undertaking ethical work would interpret the existing moral codes in order to do so.

The central concern of this paper is why workers actively chose these specific blue-collar jobs. In order to understand that, I explore the livelihoods and lives of male Mongolian truckers and other logistics workers. I begin by examining how forms of time discipline associated with various public agencies and private enterprises operating in Los Angeles interpenetrate with the lives of Mongolian immigrants as they move between their apartments, public parks, offices, and nightclubs. In so doing I present not just the circumstances that produce Mongolian logistics workers, but the conditions truckers regard themselves as having escaped. Next, I discuss trucking as a form of labor, with specific reference to a ride-along that I made with a middle-aged Mongolian trucker. My goal here is to illustrate how the nature of trucking allows Mongolian men an abundance of time to pursue other ethical projects. Finally, I conclude by contrasting Mongolian truckers' work experiences to those of Mongolians engaged in other sorts of logistics industry labor. Here I draw on my engagement with two Mongolian men operating at different ends of the labor market. One of them owned a trucking company while the other worked in a shipping company. These comparisons shed further light on the distinctiveness of trucking labor. In examining the role of Mongolians in the American logistics sector, I am seeking not just to provide a case-study of logistics laborers but to highlight the necessity for Mongolian studies of attending to migrant populations and their implications for Mongolian life.

Time Discipline and Ethics in Los Angeles

Los Angeles's Mongolians were members of numerous communities of practice with distinct ethical goals and temporal concerns. LAMA, for example, was largely concerned with preserving Mongolian culture and identity and one method it employed was organizing festivals. At events like its New Year's celebration, certain members of the community were honored for their exemplary works. However, Mongolian-specific communities of practice were far from ascendant in Los Angeles. Indeed, the dominance of other non-Mongolian communities of practice were reflected not just in symbolic practices but also in material infrastructure and legal systems, like zoning law and nuisance legislation. Here I trace the various settings in which this temporal dominance was consequential for my Mongolian interlocutors, while additionally highlighting how Mongolians membership of communities of practice based around work

led to them frequently being torn between competing time disciplines and ethics. Finally, I illustrate how because of these circumstances my Mongolian interlocutors had to resort to time-tricking and trucking to try and create futures that fitted with their ethical positions.

One evening in late-September 2013 the auditorium of Koreatown's Young Oak Kim Academy was packed. Stakeholders from across the neighborhood and their children milled around. The event's purpose was to draw attention to various city and neighborhood sponsored projects and social enterprises. While Korean Americans, Bangladeshi Americans, and Latinos mingled, I searched for and spotted a group of smartly dressed Mongolian women at the back of the auditorium. From conversation it emerged that Amy – a Mongolian community organizer in her early 30s – suggested they attend. However, she was absent. "Where is she?", one asked. "She told us to come and now she is not here. It is embarrassing that she is always late!", another exclaimed.

Considerably later Amy, a single mother, arrived with her pre-teen daughter and adolescent brother in tow. Unlike the others she did not work in Koreatown, but in the coastal neighborhood of Venice. It was roughly twenty kilometers from her office to the middle school, but in the weekday evening traffic the journey could take hours. Historians and geographers of Los Angeles have argued that there were two principle reasons the area evolved as a sprawling, polynucleated region in the early 20th century: Angelenos were opposed to density and they were unwilling to commute substantial distances.²⁵ However, by the 21st century the redevelopment of Los Angeles' city center through urban renewal projects, like California Plaza, had led to soaring inner city rents. Similarly, appealing beach neighborhoods like Venice had been affected by a municipal focus on attracting technology firms, like Google.²⁶ These rising rents meant that during peak periods the average Angeleno spent 104 hours waiting in traffic a year.²⁷

Amy's work also affected her punctuality. E. P. Thompson's account of the rise of time discipline distinguishes between pre-modern task-orientated time where one worked to complete a task and modern clock time where one worked

²⁵ Sy Adler, "The Transformation of the Pacific Electric Railway: Bradford Snell, Roger Rabbit, and the Politics of Transportation in Los Angeles," *Urban Affairs Review* 27, no. 1 (September 1991): 82–83.

²⁶ Melissa Gregg, "FCJ-186 Hack for Good: Speculative Labour, App Development and the Burden of Austerity," *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 25 (2015): 189, <https://doi.org/10.15307/fcj.25.186.2015>; Deike Peters, "Density Wars in Silicon Beach: The Struggle to Mix New Spaces for Toil, Stay and Play in Santa Monica, California," in *Protest and Resistance in the Tourist City*, ed. Claire Colomb and Johannes Novy (London: Routledge, 2016), 93.

²⁷ Bob Pishue, "US Traffic Hotspots: Measuring the Impact of Congestion in the United States," Inrix Research, September 2017, <http://www2.inrix.com/us-traffic-hotspot-study-2017>.

by the hour.²⁸ However, Amy's problem was that her employer made no such distinction. Her position as the office administrator responsible for employees' pay meant her labor was task-like, but she had to complete it by a deadline. If Amy did not resolve matters then she endangered her job. Being disciplined about time in one setting rendered it impossible for her to be disciplined in others. Tardiness was a common problem for Mongolian community organizers. On numerous occasions at ad-hoc, meetings members would wander in late bringing snacks and beer as an apology. This lateness led to evening meetings often finishing after midnight and the institution of a system of petty fines to incentivize punctuality. These attempts were foiled by working commitments that extended well beyond 9 to 5. For Amy, and others like her, the nature of their employment meant that time had to be trucked between community group obligations and work, and in such circumstances, time was always traded to work.

Mongolians also had to truck with various time disciplines in Los Angeles that extended beyond work and into their leisure time. In the summer of 2014, I attended a Mongolian streetball tournament – streetball is an informal form of basketball played outdoors without referees. It took place at a small public park in well-heeled West Hollywood.²⁹ LAMA, the tournament's organizers, had not reserved the public park's single basketball court. Instead, the first Mongolian team that arrived challenged the teams occupying the court and defeated them. Their victory justified their initial occupation of half the court and the rest of the Mongolian teams asserted an informal streetball rule called 'got next'. Sociologist Jason Jimerson, who studied the norms employed by streetball players, observes that such practices are "ritualistic aspects of gaining access".³⁰ This invocation by all the teams involved signified that the Mongolians would be occupying half of the court until they decided otherwise whereas in normal circumstances non-Mongolian teams would be allowed an opportunity to claim 'got next' and potentially evict the dominant Mongolian team by defeating them.

'Got next' is task-related, not informed by clock time, as streetball games are decided not by the elapsing of a certain period of time but by reaching a pre-

²⁸ Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*, 44.

²⁹ West Hollywood's west side, where Plummer Park is located, has long been home to a large Russian community. At Plummer Park this presence was marked by the only memorial in the US to Soviet Second World War veterans. See Bob Bishop, "The Lengthy, Costly and Controversial Task of Memorializing Veterans," *WEHoville* (blog), August 15, 2016, <https://www.wehoville.com/2016/08/15/lengthy-costly-controversial-task-memorializing-veterans/>.

³⁰ Jason B. Jimerson, "'Who Has Next?' The Symbolic, Rational, and Methodical Use of Norms in Pickup Basketball," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (June 1999): 143, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695854>.

agreed number of points.³¹ After several hours, the Mongolian players drew the ire of community members, mainly Russians Americans and Eastern European Americans. They also wanted to use the court and were unhappy at the Mongolians subversion of 'got next' to assert an ongoing and seemingly unending claim to it. Initially, they stood on the sidelines and complained about the presence of the "Koreans", which was how they misidentified the Mongolian players and, in this context, signified a foreignness that rendered the Mongolians assertion of territorial claims to the courts dubious. Eventually feeling that the Mongolian community's continued usage of the court breached the ethics of streetball one went and complained to a park attendant. The attendant told LAMA that, in the future, if they wanted to host a tournament they would need to play at the city's other court. There they could pay and reserve exclusive access, whereas here they had to share. In effect he was asking the Mongolians to submit to the discipline of clock time as opposed to the tournament's task-based time.

To understand this incident it is necessary to accept that as Nathalie Boucher, an urban studies scholar, once observed "real public spaces are rare in Los Angeles. Those that exist are characteristically poorly maintained and equipped, or privately owned and over controlled [...]".³² This was particularly true of Koreatown, which numerous community activists had argued was park poor even by the standards of the city. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, in her study of how different ethnics groups used public parks in Los Angeles, suggested that "Hispanics, in contrast to other racial groups, were observed to actively appropriate the park space, changing it and adding to it in order to serve their needs".³³ While Loukaitou-Sideris is not alone in discussing the appropriative behavior of Latinos in Los Angeles with respect to parks my own fieldwork suggests that park poverty has meant that other communities in Los Angeles, like the Mongolians, have sought to occupy public space in other areas, intending to restrict access.³⁴

A month after the tournament LAMA lost their 4th-floor offices. The hunt for a replacement did not go well. One landlord said he would not rent space to

³¹ Francisco Vieyra, "Pickup Basketball in the Production of Black Community," *Qualitative Sociology* 39, no. 2 (June 2016): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-016-9324-9>.

³² Nathalie Boucher, "Going Down to the Place of Three Shadows: Journeys to and from Downtown Los Angeles' Public Spaces," *Urbanities* 2, no. 2 (2012): 46.

³³ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, "Urban Form and Social Context: Cultural Differentiation in the Uses of Urban Parks," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 14, no. 2 (January 1995): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X9501400202>.

³⁴ David Trouille, "Neighborhood Outsiders, Field Insiders: Latino Immigrant Men and the Control of Public Space," *Qualitative Sociology* 36, no. 1 (March 2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-012-9243-3>.

community groups, as they were too unpredictable: “You get people coming at unusual times of day!” This was certainly true of the LAMA offices, which had played host to parties, film screenings, anklebone shooting practices, a Mongolian school, and even healing ceremonies. For similar reasons a sympathetic Korean pastor refused to rent to LAMA. “I can only rent to you if you don’t smoke, drink, and create noise late at night,” he said. They had abused his generosity in the past, which had placed him in a difficult position with other tenants. In effect, both the pastor and the landlord were questioning LAMA’s ethics and their willingness to adhere to the moral codes associated with being good tenants, which required an attentiveness to clock time and an awareness of cultural standards concerning noise and revelry at particular times of the day. Parties were also a problem in the apartment complexes where many Mongolians lived. In the past late-night revels had resulted in noise complaints and the police being called to deal with this antisocial behavior. One consequence of this was that LAMA now rented clubs for parties. However, these often closed too early for people who did not get off work until 9 pm and did not arrive until 11pm. Thus, once again, problems arose due to the intersection of culturally specific ideas about time discipline and the fact that in Los Angeles Mongolians frequently had to truck time to communities of practice associated with work.

Escaping to Truck

Faced with the various forms of time discipline and surveillance that I have just described many of the Mongolian men I rode along with perceived becoming long-distance truckers as an escape. This position, while fitting well into the romanticized history of truckers in the United States as a community of practice who were heirs to the cowboy, would initially seem at odds with the contemporary realities of long-distance truck driving. The passage of the 1980 Motor Carrier Act is often regarded by labor historians and critical logistics scholars as a watershed moment, which led to a marked reduction in real income and resulted in truckers assuming an increased risk thus turning them into sweatshop workers.³⁵ As with many other types of 21st century logistics work this exploitation of truckers’ labor is presented as liberating them to be micro-entrepreneurs who make their own decisions, while omitting that they

³⁵ See Michael Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America’s Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), Kindle; Steve Viscelli, *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016), Kindle.

are now assuming all of the risks as well.³⁶ However, the Mongolian truckers with whom I discussed this were not romantics but pragmatists. While they recognized the harshness of the logistics system, they prized the freedom from unwanted time discipline and the opportunity for ethical development that trucking offered. Furthermore, the potential financial rewards far outstripped what they could earn from other available forms of precarious employment like valet parking, the construction industry, and furniture removal; these were jobs whose time discipline was even more constraining.

My introduction to Mongolian truck driving was initially innocuous; I was picked up one autumn morning in the parking lot of a Los Angeles strip mall. However, as Mönkhbat – an experienced trucker – and I drove an hour west from Fontana, a city whose entire landscape seemed shaped by trucking, things became more interesting.³⁷ Having picked up a load of wood, we drove more than 1,500 miles to an industrial park in Missouri. There we dropped our load, located another, picked it up, and then returned to California. From our start at the Koreatown strip mall to our return to the industrial LA County city of Commerce, with its innumerable warehouses, the journey lasted six days. In what follows I will discuss how the capitalist temporalities specifically associated with long-distance trucking allowed Mönkhbat and others to pursue their own ethical goals.

E. P. Thompson argued that it was a mistake to conceive of the relationship between capitalist time and work-discipline as purely concerned with the factory.³⁸ Moralists long wished to make the ethic of time-thrift a part of mundane existence. However, the home, as a private place, needed to be accessed indirectly through public infrastructure and moral suasion. Indeed, there is a debate as to whether these industrial attitudes toward time ever fully gained access to the home. Thompson has argued that “the rhythms of women’s work in the home are not wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock”.³⁹ In contrast, Emily Martin has suggested that over time there developed a “sense of how desirable it is to be ‘efficient’ and ‘productive’ at home, much as it is in the workplace”.⁴⁰ Martin’s position is supported by other scholars, like Arleen Hochschild, who suggest that it is not that the market has not entered the home

³⁶ Anna Tsing, “Supply Chains and the Human Condition,” *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 2 (April 2009): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935690902743088>.

³⁷ A working-class town located 75 kilometers away from the city of Los Angeles that is home to more than a hundred trucking companies, and associated businesses. See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2006), 375, Kindle.

³⁸ Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” 84.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁰ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 123.

rather than as its presence is gendered. As a consequence of this gendering men tend not to perceive its presence and women do.⁴¹

Mongolian truckers are not homemakers and their labor is valued, with some earning several thousand dollars a month. However, I would argue that given that they often spend several days in the cabins of their trucks these may also be sites ripe for the creation of communities of practice with different perspectives on time. This is possible because the truck can be “a platform for multitasking” allowing for one to truck with relatively minimal cost between different communities of practice to achieve a variety of ethical goals concurrently.⁴² Mobility scholars, like Featherstone, have argued that such multitasking is a byproduct of the minimal levels of effort required to drive, which allows for the completion of work. However, the uses of such time-thrift are specific, and Mongolians use multi-tasking to create opportunities to perform work on the self, such as learning English.

When Mönkhbat and I boarded his truck, and set off for the Midwest, he immediately donned a Bluetooth headset, plugged his phone into the dashboard charger, and called his wife. This assemblage of man and machine blurred the lines between such divergent roles as efficient worker, doting father, loving husband, and community activist through connections to the global telecommunication network. The constant possibility of communication with his family meant he was able to perform a vital role despite his absence, such as when he successfully counseled his older daughter through her uncertainties about her career choices. This assemblage was by no means exclusive to trucking, but because of the rhythms of production associated with this type of labor Mönkhbat had considerably more unsupervised time to engage in such activities than his co-ethnics who were, for example, laboring as construction workers.

The assemblage allowed for the continual performance of phatic communion – that is “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”.⁴³ Various scholars have documented the phone’s potential in this regard.⁴⁴ Vikki Bell, for example, argued that for absentee, divorcee fathers

⁴¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 2–3.

⁴² Mike Featherstone, “Automobilities: An Introduction,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4–5 (October 2004): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276404046058>.

⁴³ Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,” in *The Meaning of Meaning; a Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, ed. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, 8th Edition (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1946), 315.

⁴⁴ Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller, “Polymedia: Towards a New Theory of Digital Media in Interpersonal Communication,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (August 2012): 170.

in 1990s Britain, the phone was part of “a network as an extended hybrid”, which potentially aided in the creation and preservation of kinship.⁴⁵ Mönkhbat’s usage of the phone to achieve phatic communion, while driving, was evidenced in his regular calls to his wife, which established a reassuring sense of connection, however limited, even in absence.

However, for Mönkhbat, the phone’s role extended beyond the maintenance of kinship relations; it created the possibility of performing community work. I had first witnessed this practice when attending a LAMA planning meeting. Mönkhbat was driving in Arizona, but via speakerphone he organized and assigned tasks to everyone. This thoroughness was very impressive. It was a by-product of the lists composed while driving, as it gave him time to reflect on community matters. The phone allowed Mönkhbat to participate in certain community activities more fully than if he had been in Los Angeles. Of course, when it came to matters requiring a physical presence Mönkhbat was at a disadvantage, and his influence curtailed.

Mönkhbat used the freedom provided by trucking to participate, to the extent possible, in family and community life from afar. Other Mongolian truckers used the time differently to pursue their own ethical work: to learn English, to revise for their citizenship test, or to improve some other skill. Many, including Mönkhbat, used it to discuss both Mongolian and Mongolian diasporic politics. “No one knows more about politics than the truckers,” one boasted to me. This political knowledge has had tangible consequences in Los Angeles where the truckers were able to have a marked impact on LAMA because they operated as a political bloc.

On the road, a trucker also had to contend with the capitalist automobility system’s moral code, which demanded both acceptance of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s Hours of Service (HOS) for commercial vehicles and delivering one’s load within the desired time-frame.⁴⁶ The desired time-frame is crucial here because while capitalists own and control the instruments of production and the subjects of production they do not control labor’s effort. As Harry Braverman documented in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* American capitalists’ desire to control output led to the introduction of time and motion

⁴⁵ Vikki Bell, “The Phone, the Father and Other Becomings: On Households (and Theories) That No Longer Hold,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 5, no. 3 (July 2001): 383.

⁴⁶ The HOS were introduced by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and “Based on dozens of commissioned laboratory studies of driver fatigue and sleep, they set precise limits on the maximum number of hours drivers may work and the minimum number of hours they must sleep in order to prevent fatigue-related accidents”. See Benjamin H. Snyder, “Dignity and the Professionalized Body: Truck Driving in the Age of Instant Gratification,” *The Hedgehog Review* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 9.

studies into early 20th century American automotive factories.⁴⁷ On the basis of these and other management consultants' findings manufacturing activities were systematically deskilled through the introduction of the production line so as to create predictable rates of work. This desire to control communities of practices' rhythms of production was by no means limited to deskilling. Aihwa Ong noted in her ethnography of the proletarianization of young factory women from a rural Malaysian village that in order to control the labor-force "capitalist discipline operates through a variety of control mechanisms in social, political and work domains [...]".⁴⁸ Amongst these mechanisms were the media and the Islamic authorities who constantly acted to defame factory women by portraying them as spendthrift and licentious. Here moral authorities partnered with capitalist industry to endorse regimes of discipline and surveillance linked to clock time.⁴⁹ This partnership was not novel in a global sense. Since the late medieval period the Catholic Church was a supporter of these regimes, which included authorizing the creation of *Werkglocken* to better regulate behavior.⁵⁰ The contemporaneous emergence of the notion that time wasting was "a serious sin, a spiritual scandal" increased the sense of regulation and surveillance.⁵¹ It was this concern that led to various 14th century Italian scholars writing about the moral crisis provoked by wasting time. Amongst these was Domenico Calva who held that time wasting marked one out as an amoral animal rather than an immoral human.⁵²

Mongolian truckers were aware of the presence of the clock while driving, but their profession's nature meant they were rarely subjected to direct visual surveillance of their time usage. Instead, oversight was provided by an array of technological assemblages that indicated the complex set of authorities involved in trucking. They included checking stations at state borders with their boom barriers, weighing stations and human authorities, GPS applications used by their bosses and dispatchers to monitor the truck's progress, the

⁴⁷ Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 119–23.

⁴⁸ Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 4–5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 68.

⁵¹ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 50.

⁵² Domenico Calva of Pisa was a 14th century Dominican preacher who employed the language of the merchant when he criticized time wasting. See Gregory M. Sadleir, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 181.

trucker's logbook, speed cameras, and highway police with speed-guns.⁵³ Together, these systems were meant to ensure that truckers did not exceed the hours of work mandated by the HOS regulations, that they delivered their goods on time, that they did not tamper with the items in the truck, and were following state or federal laws while doing so.⁵⁴

For Mongolian truckers state border-checks were the most worrying of the systems explicitly concerned with time, because they had the greatest potential to significantly slow progress, which could in turn lead to missed deadlines. Not only could they lead to one's truck being pulled over and inspected at length, they could potentially lead to problems with the law, as not all the truckers possessed the appropriate documentation. It was here that their habit of operating as a community of practice and sharing of information became valuable. During my trip with Mönkhbat we were only stopped twice despite crossing several state borders. We largely avoided the border checks by opting for a series of backroads. These routes and technique had been developed by Mongolian truckers over the years and communicated to each other via phone.

By comparison with the state's spotty oversight, that of the boss was seemingly absolute. Once, as I accompanied him to his bank, a trucking boss showed me the mobile phone application that allowed him to track his fleet's progress. The app provided detailed information about his truckers' driving, but unlike more recent apps described by logistics scholars that track a trucker's real time bodily movements it did not make the boss a presence in the cabin.⁵⁵ Unless told, the boss was unaware that truckers would on occasion take their families with them on their jobs, thus further blurring the line between work and home when they did so. Moreover, the app did not tell him what they were talking about over their own phones, or about the communal lunches that truckers often shared as they drove together. It did record speed and distance, but it also revealed the truth about trucking labor as task-like. That is, it was concerned only that an item be delivered within a certain time frame, and not about the circumstances in which the delivery was made. It was this disinterest that made trucking such a popular site for ethical development.

⁵³ Karen E. C. Levy, "Digital Surveillance in the Hypermasculine Workplace," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 363, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1138607>.

⁵⁴ Benjamin H. Snyder, *The Disrupted Workplace: Time and the Moral Order of Flexible Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 4.

⁵⁵ Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, Conclusion.

Time and the Logistics Industry

My explanation of Mongolian men's attraction to long-distance trucking has focused on its relationship to time discipline. Specifically, it allowed them to trick and truck with time to achieve a variety of ethical goals that they regarded as central to their senses of self. In what follows I offer the contrasting experience of Mongolian men who are involved in other areas of the logistics sector. For them, I argue, time discipline had radically different consequences. I illustrate this point with reference to my experiences with Tom, a Mongolian owner-operator who owned two trucking companies, and Munkh-Erdene, an administrator working for a small Mongolian courier company in Los Angeles that regularly sent goods to Mongolia from Los Angeles via China. Superficially, this hews more closely to recent descriptions of the logistics industry, as dominated by precarious workers who face a wide variety of challenges due in part to declining working conditions and diminishing worker power.⁵⁶ However, for Mongolian men these challenges very much center on the same questions of time and ethics that I have discussed thus far.

The story of Munkh-Erdene, a young man in his mid-twenties who had studied graphic design in Kuala Lumpur and then worked in advertising in Ulaanbaatar, is illustrative of this point about logistics' negative characteristics. Although he was officially in Los Angeles to study theology at a local Korean American evangelical university, he mainly worked low wage jobs, including as a furniture mover. During my fieldwork he worked for a small shipping company in their Koreatown office. As two of the rooms were used to store customers' goods before shipping them it also acted as a warehouse and Munkh-Erdene was expected to pick packages as well as handling paperwork and liaising with clients. He did not complain about the nature of this labor, but what he found difficult was that his public life constantly intruded upon his private life. The anger in his voice was audible as he detailed the occasions on which he was summoned back to work to confirm the status of a package to a customer. These interruptions interfered with his attempts at achieving his ethical goal of being a good Mongolian, which, deriving from his Christian faith⁵⁷, he defined as spending time with his young wife and playing an active role in

⁵⁶ Jake Alimahomed-Wilson and Immanuel Ness, eds., *Choke Points: Logistics Workers Disrupting the Global Supply Chain* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), Introduction.

⁵⁷ Munkh-Erdene was part of a small Mongolian Evangelical Christian community of several hundred people. At the time of my fieldwork, there were at least three Mongolian Christian congregations in Southern California. These met for worship weekly and organized a variety of other events for their congregants.

raising his daughter, and on one occasion they had led to him missing a holiday celebration. Unfortunately, as he acknowledged, he was in a precarious position and his employment opportunities were limited. He had tried to apply for various jobs as a graphic designer only to discover that no one would hire a graphic designer lacking the correct visa documentation. "I don't want to be like those Mongolians who come over here and sacrifice themselves totally for their children. I want a life of my own!", he confided.⁵⁸ He described those who sacrificed themselves in this manner, by working all hours, as already dead having time-trucked their future for their children's.

Munkh-Erdene equated his plight as a logistics worker in Los Angeles's shadow economy with death. The connections he drew between death, capitalism, and labor are familiar to students of America's history. It was evident in late 18th century Russian merchants' accounts of life on California missions; desperate natives in desperate places devoted to producing goods for Spanish fathers to sell.⁵⁹ It was equally evident in a mid-19th century Southern medical doctor's justification of slavery as a bulwark against unwanted "negro liberty".⁶⁰ And in the early 20th century when American travelers appropriated the zombie to describe laborers on Haitian American Sugar Company plantations.⁶¹ And most recently in accounts of Latino laborers existing as permanently deportable labor toiling in penury.⁶² The connections that Munkh-Erdene made in his account contradict an American myth, 'the American Dream' that immigrants made their descendants Americans through sweat and sinew.⁶³

To continue with the terms I have employed throughout this article this American myth held that through migration and labor one could trick time. This was a myth central to Koreatown, a place that my Korean American community organizer acquaintances argued was partially produced through their

⁵⁸ Although I carried out no specific inquiry into the attitude of self-sacrifice that Munkh-Erdene discusses here it seemed more prevalent amongst older Mongolians who had come to California with the specific intention of staying.

⁵⁹ Kent G. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), chap. 4, Kindle.

⁶⁰ Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *The New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 7 (May 1851): 711.

⁶¹ Raphael Hoermann, "Figures of Terror: The 'Zombie' and the Haitian Revolution," *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 152–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2016.1240887>.

⁶² Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 1–2.

⁶³ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 256, Kindle.

forebears' sacrifices.⁶⁴ In 1976 in one of the first sociological works about Koreatown a trio of sociologists even gave the activity that underwrote this claim a name: "Korean Thrift." Thrift meant that "the immigrants may work so hard that their health suffers".⁶⁵ Here the immigrants knowingly trucked in time replacing care of their own bodies for care for their children's futures. For Asian immigrants, like the Koreans and Mongolians, such sacrifices were not always successful. Indeed, scholars in the interdisciplinary field of Asian American studies have consistently pointed to a history of Asians being specifically excluded, Orientalized, and othered, such that they are prevented from benefiting from their forebears' sacrifices.⁶⁶ In Los Angeles the most powerful example of this phenomena had been the internment of the Nisei (American-born Japanese American citizens) in concentration camps during World War II on the entirely unwarranted belief that they were disloyal to the United States.⁶⁷

Not all the Mongolians laboring in the logistics industry thought about the future in terms of life and death as Munkh-Erdene did. Tom, now in his mid-thirties, had come to the United States, specifically Washington State, as an exchange student to learn English. It had been a difficult experience at first, but he had regularized his status through winning the green-card lottery and had founded a third-party logistics business. Initially he had been an owner operator managing his own truck, but now he owned two trucking companies, a dozen trucks, and rented multiple yards in Fontana. Recently he had taken on the role of a community activist and thus had to combine his business interests with resolving whatever problems were occurring within the community.

While dealing with community problems via phone Tom travelled around Los Angeles County attending to various issues relating to his trucking business. On one occasion we drove for an hour down to the industrial area of South Los Angeles to pick up a second-hand truck that he had bought. We then drove the truck to a garage where it would be serviced and restored. While that labor was being undertaken Tom and I drove to a mall where he purchased a stencil

⁶⁴ As Korean American organizers felt the neighborhood's Koreanness was under threat from both white gentrification and Bangladeshi attempts to create a named neighborhood of their own in Koreatown this was a recurrent topic of conversation during my fieldwork.

⁶⁵ Edna Bonacich, Ivan H. Light, and Charles Choy Wong, "Koreans in Business," *Society* 14, no. 6 (September 1977): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02712519>.

⁶⁶ Keith Aoki, "Foreign-Ness' & Asian American Identities: Yellowface, World War II Propaganda, and Bifurcated Racial Stereotypes," *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (1996): 9–10; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 6–7.

⁶⁷ Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9.

with his trucking logo, a stallion, and the appropriate registration documentation. After that was done, we then returned and picked the truck up to take it to another garage. There he performed several minor repairs on other trucks in his fleet. Once the repairs were accomplished, we drove the new truck down to the port of Los Angeles where he discussed business matters with an associate who worked as a stevedore. By then the sun was setting and we drove back to Koreatown. However, before dropping me off a client called to confirm the delivery of his items. Tom talked to the client, called his driver to confirm the location, and then called the client back and debited their account using a payment app on his mobile phone. Having completed the transaction he dropped me off before driving the truck onwards to one of his yards in Fontana, so that it could be used the next day.

While clock time and time discipline were very much part of Tom's labor, as is evident from this description, much of what he had to do was task orientated. The hours that he worked extended well beyond 9 to 5. One consequence of this was that he had to engage in forms of time-trucking despite acknowledging the negative consequences that it had on his body. Thus, for example, Tom regularly consumed junk food. "I just do not have time to stop," he would say by way of explanation. There was, he felt, no time to prepare food himself or even have his sister prepare it for him. Tom undertook this sacrifice and trucked with time in this way because he sought to create a future for himself in which he could manage his business from Mongolia while establishing a new trucking empire there hauling from the country's various mines. Tom's sacrifice of his body to this endeavor is such a common practice amongst long-distance truckers in the US that it is referred to as "running hard". When a trucker runs hard, they purposefully time truck with their bio-rhythms desynchronizing them in order to maintain synch with other rhythms and achieve their ethical goals. Over the long-term this can have a marked effect upon their health.⁶⁸ Tom was already beginning to see evidence of this in the form of weight gain and joint pain. His performance as a basketball player, once celebrated throughout the Mongolian community, was also not what it had once been as his mobility was hampered.

Despite this Tom was wistful for his past as a trucker. One evening as we dined with some of his employees at a Korean barbecue buffet restaurant, he engaged in acts of fond reminiscences. Tom enthused being a trucker was the best as it freed one from all these unfortunate commitments and allowed one to live a simple life. "I miss it," he confessed. And on other occasions he

⁶⁸ Kevin Birth, "While the West Sleeps: Deglobed Globalization and Its Consequences," in *Time, Globalization and Human Experience*, ed. Paul Huebener, Susie O'Brien, Tony Porter, Liam Stockdale, and Yanqiu Rachel Zhou (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 122.

admitted that when the demands of his job or his position as community organizer seemed to overwhelm him he thought about either returning to simply being a trucker, with its far lighter burdens, or returning to Mongolia where he felt ideas of time in communities of practice were more congenial to his own. In this he was far from alone. Munkh-Erdene, faced with what he considered death, too expressed the view that if this was what life in Los Angeles was to be, he would rather return to life in Mongolia.

Judged purely by their material circumstances Tom and Munkh-Erdene could not be more different. However, they were similar in their attitudes to the time discipline that they faced in their respective spheres of the logistics industry and in their distaste for how the necessity of trucking time was shaping their sense of self. It is tempting, particularly in the case of Tom, to make a technologically determinist argument that it was their ability to be permanently contactable via their telephones that was the cause of their predicaments. However, as Judy Wajcman observes “the contemporary imperative of speed is as much a cultural artifact as it is a technological one [...] if we feel rushed time and pressed for time, it’s because of the priorities and parameters we ourselves set rather than the machines per se”.⁶⁹ As an alternative I suggest attending to time discipline’s origins in Christianity; these lie in the desire of monks to be vigilant in prayer. This was a single-minded focus on one task.⁷⁰ In contrast the current world of logistics requires that third-party logistics operators, like Tom, and employees, like Munkh-Erdene, balance a multitude of rhythms with very little margin for error. As at its heart logistics is a task-like activity when a problem occurs it takes precedence over everything else. Consequently, everything one is scheduled to do must then be rescheduled, and, as Chuck Darrah has argued, this continual rescheduling results in psychological and physiological fatigue from the feeling of being overwhelmingly busy.⁷¹ While those Mongolians who were working as long-distance truck drivers also had to contend with the need to accomplish a task within a set timeframe their labor allowed significant flexibility and multitasking, with minimal surveillance.

⁶⁹ Judy Wajcman, “The Digital Transformation of Everyday Life,” *Sociologisk Forskning* 53, no. 2 (2016): 194.

⁷⁰ Benjamin H. Snyder, “From Vigilance to Busyness,” *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 2 (2013): 252–54.

⁷¹ Charles Darrah, “The Anthropology of Busyness,” *Human Organization* 66, no. 3 (September 2007): 268, <https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.66.3.n0u0513p464n6046>.

Conclusion

The accounts I have presented in this article suggest that ideas about time and ethics are central to the constitution of labor regimes. Mongolians who moved to Los Angeles encountered and had to navigate a variety of different communities of practice with distinct perspectives on time, many of which were in direct conflict with their own ethical goals. For some men the response to such encounters was to seek opportunities in professions that conflicted less with their senses of self. Trucking was one such profession. Not only did trucking allow these men considerably more agency over their own work than other activities, they might engage in, it also allowed them a great deal of latitude as to what else they do whilst trucking. Specifically, the lack of direct surveillance allowed them to engage in time-trucking and time-tricking to shape their selfhoods in ways that they desired. This was in contradistinction to other areas of the logistics industry such as working in third-party logistics or stock administration where my Mongolian interlocutors found themselves harried by the various demands that they had to deal with on a regular basis.

While much of the critical logistics studies literature frames late modern capitalism as red of tooth and claw, with an overwhelming tendency to increase workers precariousness, in this instance I suggest things are perhaps more complex than such a grand meta-narrative would allow. In stressing the reasons why Mongolian men living in Los Angeles come to regard trucking as a desirable activity I have been greatly influenced by contemporary feminist analyses of capitalism, which emphasize that it is reliant on creating niches that are attractive to actors for specific reasons. In the case of Mongolian truckers this attractiveness derives, in part, from both oppressions experienced outside of work and an awareness that other potential jobs would not diminish these oppressions. However, this attractiveness is radically contingent, and when my interlocutors find circumstances that they adjudge even more congenial they are apt to abandon environments they now deem exploitative.

Just as universalizing narratives about the nature of capitalism are of limited value so too are teleological representations of clock time replacing task time with the emergence of capitalism and accounts of clock time that treat it as a singular phenomenon. In reality, clock time and task time are perhaps best understood as ideal types at extreme ends of a spectrum with various gradations in between. While hybridized forms of clock and task time are now present in most places, the values imputed to them vary considerably. This variation means that different communities of practice employ time differently and possess different rhythms hence the ability to truck between these. Time, even

when it is associated with capitalist labor, must thus be scrutinized more closely and treated more carefully than accounts of contemporary life often allow.

Finally, in offering this account of the working lives of Mongolian men in Los Angeles I have sought to contribute to a fast-growing literature within Mongolian studies on post-socialist Mongolian life. While I have focused on Mongolian diasporic life there are obvious connections with life in Mongolia that extend beyond the mere flow of goods. Mongolian studies could fruitfully benefit from greater consideration of how exposure to time discipline and labor practices outside of Mongolia is shaping practices in Mongolia itself.

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