



The Historical Origin And Current Condition of Camel Milk in Inner Mongolia

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Abstract: China has a long history of raising camels and drinking camel's milk. The available literature shows that camel's milk was spread among different social classes as late as the Yuan Dynasty, and was included in the "Eight Treasures of Mongolia" by the Mongolian Khan, which was regarded as a precious health medicine or used to make wine. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, court nobles, everyday people and border guards still kept the habit of drinking camel's milk as an important supplement to their food. To this day, this traditional production method and living customs have been passed down in many places. Among them, Alashan League, Inner Mongolia, which is known as the "Hometown of Camel in China", has preserved the custom of drinking camel's milk and the traditional technique of making camel's milk food most completely, and the related camel's milk industry has been vigorously developed and has become an important pillar of the region's economic industry.

Key words: China; camel milk; historical origin; inheritance

1. Introduction

Camel milk has long been consumed in the arid and semi-arid regions of northern China, yet its historical trajectory and cultural meanings have received limited systematic attention in Anglophone scholarship. Existing studies focus primarily on camel domestication or the nutritional and therapeutic properties of camel milk, leaving its historical social uses and cultural embeddedness underexplored.

The paper addresses the following research questions: (1) What is the earliest reliable historical evidence for camel milk consumption in China? (2) How did camel milk function within different social contexts—courtly, pastoral, and subsistence—during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties? (3) How does the contemporary camel-milk industry in Alxa relate to these historical practices and cultural traditions?

The study contributes to existing literature in three ways. First, it provides the first systematic textual survey of historical references to camel milk consumption in Chinese classical sources. Second, it connects historical food practices with contemporary debates on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and regional industrial development. Third, it offers a case study of how traditional pastoral knowledge is reconfigured under modern economic and policy frameworks.

Conceptually, the paper draws on approaches from food history and heritage studies, viewing food not merely as nutrition but as a cultural practice embedded in social structure, ritual, and political economy.

2. Methodology

The historical materials used in this study are primarily drawn from the Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books, with food-related terms such as camel milk (驼乳 / 驼奶 / 乳) serving as the core search anchors. A systematic search and screening were conducted on texts dating from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. To ensure the reproducibility of the retrieval process, searches were conducted mainly through full-text/content queries, supplemented where necessary by searches in the title, *juan* (volume), and chapter fields. The temporal scope was restricted to the Yuan–Ming–Qing period in accordance with the dynastic classifications provided by the database. The retrieval strategy combined synonym expansion with Boolean logic–based compound searches.

2.1 Search fields and parameters

Core keywords (object terms) included: camel milk (驼乳), camel's milk (驼奶), camel milk (骆驼乳), and camel dairy products (驼酪 / 酪). Contextual keywords related to consumption, production, and use included: drink (饮), eat (食), sip (啜), brew (酿), alcohol (酒), medicine (医), drug (药), tonic (补), therapy (疗), and prescription (方). Boolean operators (AND/OR) were employed to construct compound queries (e.g., “驼乳 AND (饮 OR 啜 OR 酿 OR 药)” or “驼奶 AND (方 OR 医 OR 补)”). Additional exclusion rules were applied to filter out noise generated by segmented searches for “camel” (驼) or “milk” (乳) when no dairy-related context was present.

2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria



To be included, a text had to contain an explicit and verifiable reference to camel milk (or its synonyms) and be clearly associated with at least one of the following categories: (1) drinking or dietary consumption; (2) processing or production (e.g., brewing or preparation of dairy foods); (3) medical or therapeutic use, including prescriptions; or (4) ritual, banquet, or institutional provisioning. Texts in which camels appeared solely as means of transport, military resources, tribute items, or livestock—without reference to dairy consumption or medicinal use—were excluded. References in which “milk” functioned only as metaphorical or rhetorical imagery, rather than denoting actual consumption or medical application, were also excluded.

The initial database search yielded a substantial number of noise entries containing the characters for “camel” or “milk” without constituting evidence of camel milk use. To address this issue, a two-stage screening process was adopted.

In the first stage (denoising and preliminary screening), entries describing camels exclusively in terms of transport or military use, or referring to “milk” only in generic or figurative senses, were removed. Records containing explicit references to camel milk (驼乳 / 驼奶 / 骆驼乳) together with key contextual terms such as drink, brew, medicine, prescription, tribute, or banquet were retained to form a pool of candidate texts.

In the second stage (evidence assessment and duplication control), candidate entries were subjected to close manual reading at the level of textual context. Only passages providing clear evidence of camel milk being consumed, processed, or used medicinally were retained. Repeated descriptions within the same text were consolidated, and cases of intertextual quotation or transmission across different works were identified and annotated. Through this process, 31 texts were ultimately selected as historical evidence, from which 36 textual excerpts directly related to the consumption, production, or medicinal use of camel milk were extracted for further analysis.

3. Finding

Based on the 31 historical texts and 36 extracted passages identified through the Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books, this section presents the main findings of the study. It first examines the historical circulation and uses of camel milk during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, and then turns to contemporary Alxa to illustrate the continuity and transformation of camel-milk practices in present-day pastoral and industrial contexts.

3.1 The History of Camel Milk Consumption

Ancient China has a long history of raising camels, which can be traced back to the Han Dynasty at the latest. According to historical documents, Emperor Zhao of Han ordered his minister Chang Hui and Wusun to fight the Xiongnu^[1]. Thus, it can be seen that during the Han Dynasty, the nomadic Xiongnu people living in the northern region had begun to raise camels in large numbers. Another example is the famous Battle of Fei River, where the Qin army was defeated, “The Qin king’s carriage, ceremonial garments, weapons, military equipment, treasures, and more than 100,000 oxen, horses, donkeys, mules, and camels were all seized^[2].” That is to say, the number of camel breeding in the former Qin Dynasty was also very large. Tang Dynasty, “cattle, donkeys, camels, sheep, pigs, dogs^[3]” has become one of the main livestock raised. This shows that the feeding of camels at this time has been extremely common. Through the above three historical materials can be sure that: the ancient China at the latest in the Han Dynasty has begun to raise camel and the number is very large. However, there is no clear record of if ancient people drinking camel’s milk or not, although there are reasons to believe that camel’s milk should have been consumed by ancient people at this time, but from the point of view of the study of history, the speculation can not become a definite history.

Based on the above, the researcher, through the collection and organization of the literature in the *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, found that many ancient people’s drinking of camel’s milk was recorded in the historical literature written in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, involving a total of 31 books, including 36 sentences.

As *History of the Yuan* written by Song Lian says: “The soldiers guarding along the river lack of food, Minister Zhong Wen taught the art of fishing to solve the problem of food shortage. The emperor was pleased the minister and said: I didn’t think of that. Drinking the camel’s milk, I will not forget your merits^[4].” It can be seen that, in the Yuan Dynasty, camel’s milk has been preferred by the Mongolian khan, which to a certain extent mainly has a direct relationship with the Mongolian dietary habits and livelihood. At the same time, because camel’s milk has the therapeutic efficacy of “warmth and sweetness, benefiting qi and bones, and keeping people from hunger^[5]”, the Mongol Khan not only included it in the “Mongolian eight treasures”(The so-called eight treasures are mainly “butter, lamb of the roebuck, Camel’s hooves, Deer’s lips, moose meat, Swan’s Roast, grape wine, and koumiss, which is also known as horse’s milk.”^[6]), and also regarded as a valuable health care medicine, as *Wu Wenzheng Collection* compiled by Wu Cheng shows: “today emperor Yisun-Temür came to the court, who just recovered from his illness. He had himself examined by a physician, who gave him a medicine for camel’s milk.”^[7]

In addition to camel’s milk was used as a court meal and health care medicine, but also often used to brew camel’s milk wine, as *Xiawai poetry* compiled by Ma Zhen described: “The people are as simple as they used to be. The market is bustling with activity. Some people collect camel’s milk to make wine, others collect rat skins to make fur coats.”^[8]

It can be inferred that the number of camel breeding and the production of camel’s milk in the Yuan Dynasty was very large, otherwise it would not have been such a precious thing used to make wine. To the Ming Dynasty, although camel’s

milk is still circulating, but because of its unique flavour and the differences in eating habits between the north and the south, it is mainly circulating in the northern region, just as *Zibai Elderly Collection* written by Shi Zhenke says: “The Wu people are fond of perch and *Brasenia schreberi*, and the Yan people are fond of camel’s milk and cow’s milk. *Brasenia schreberi*, perch, cow’s milk, camel’s milk flavour is different, it is just two different hobbies. The perch fish and *Brasenia schreberi* are considered by all to be fresh, and the camel’s milk and cow’s milk are considered by all to be stinky.”^[9] That is to say, at this time, the dietary habits of the northern nomads have not been changed by the influence of the dietary culture of the Han Chinese in the Central Plains, and dairy meat food is still the main food of their daily diet.

Qing Dynasty, camel’s milk in the court meals still occupy a considerable proportion, from the inclusion of camel’s milk in the official inventory of the total number of items can be sufficient to see the extent of its, As *Zuosi Note* written by Wu Jing records that there were 7,240 pounds of camel’s milk for court meal^[10]. In addition to the court nobles, camel’s milk is also widely spread in the daily diet of ordinary people and garrison people. As Qu Dajun, a poet of the Qing Dynasty, said in his poem: “Eating Camel Milk in the Morning, Drinking horse’s milk win in the Evening. The Hu women are so charming that their lutes never leave their hands.”^[11] Another example, Ding Shaoyi^[12], a poet of the Qing Dynasty, gave camel’s milk more humanistic feelings, which shows its important position in the minds of the people at that time. In addition, here also need to explain is: in the nomadic food scarcity period, camel’s milk is still an important food supplement. This is reflected in the poems of the Qing Dynasty poets Yao Xie^[13] and Yao Yuanzhi^[14]. All these show how important camel’s milk is to people’s daily diet.

In a nutshell, camel’s milk has become an important part of the daily diet of Mongolian people in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. In Yuan Dynasty, camel’s milk was not only listed as one of the “eight treasures of Mongolia”, but also regarded as a precious health care medicine by the Mongolian Khan. In the Ming Dynasty, although there was a change of dynasties, Mongolians still kept the habit of drinking camel's milk. During the Qing Dynasty, camel’s milk was not only widely spread in the diet of court nobles, common people and border guards, but also became an important supplement for the Mongolian people during the period of food scarcity.

3.2 Status of Camel Milk in Alxa

As mentioned above, camel’s milk has been in circulation among different social classes in China since the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. To this day, the herders living in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai still retain the habit of drinking camel’s milk and making camel’s milk food through the generations. Among them, Alxa, known as the “camel country of China” (Figure 1), is the most notable. The camel’s milk food production technology is not only listed in the list of “ICH” at the regional level, but also the camel's milk industry has developed rapidly with the deepening research on the therapeutic efficacy of camel's milk conducted by the local government and the community, and the camel’s milk industry has become an important pillar industry in the region. The camel milk industry has become an important pillar industry in the area.



Figure 1 Landmarks in the Camel Country

Source: [Alxa Wukong Film & TV Culture Media Co.](#)

“Camel’s milk is usually milky white, and under normal conditions it has a sweet taste and strong odour, but sometimes it has a salty taste, and sometimes camel’s milk tastes like water.”^[15] Most of the herders in Alashan, prefer to drink fresh camel's milk, but there are also those who drink fermented milk. “The Alashan bactrian camel has a lactation period of 14-16 months and produces an average of 5 kg per day, with some producing up to 15-20 kg per day and up to 1,254 kg for the entire lactation period.”^{[15] (P14-15)} Because of the large production, camel’s milk, in addition to being directly consumed by herdsman, is often used to make food such as crème, ghee, cheese, milk wine, milk tea and yoghurt. After a long time of drinking and making camel’s milk, the Alxa herders are very familiar with the art of making camel’s milk. “The production method of milk skin: fresh camel’s milk is filtered (filtering camel’s hair on the funnel), fresh milk into the iron pot to boil (can not use other products of the pot), and then add some water to prevent the bottom of the pot toasting. Boil the milk with firewood and stir, and use a spoon repeatedly, evenly, fully and constantly raise the milk until the camel’s milk froth, there is no need to simmer, remove the fire to cool naturally. After about 3-4h, a layer

of cream solidifies on top of the camel’s milk, which is the “camel’s milk skin”.

The brewing method of camel’s milk wine: it is to fill the fresh milk in the leather bag or wooden barrel container, and use the special wooden stick to stir it repeatedly, so that the temperature of the milk in the violent turbulence and impact continues to rise, and finally fermentation and separation, the dregs sink, and the pure whey floats on the top, and then it will become the fragrant and attractive milk wine. Camel yoghurt production method: is the production of milk skin off the cooked milk or raw milk poured into the ghee in the barrel, put 2-3d (in winter, put the hot place), can also add a little yellow rice (play a role in the fermentation), camel’s milk fermentation becomes sour, with a special pestle and mortar repeatedly pounded 2h or so, it will be the ghee separated out of the barrel to leave the diluted some of the yoghurt is called “Ai Ri Ge”. The thinner yoghurt left in the barrel is called “Ai Rig”. Camel’s milk tofu, divided into raw milk tofu and cooked milk tofu two kinds. Cooked milk tofu is made by boiling the leftover milk or extracting ghee and leaving it

for a few days to ferment. When the milk pulp curdles into lumps, the excess water is strained out with gauze. Then take the solid portion. Cook it in a pan over a warm fire, stirring it as it cooks, until there is a degree of adhesion, and then pack it into gauze to ooze out the yellow water. At this point it can be put into moulds and pressed into shape, or placed in barrels and cut into various shapes with a knife. Raw milk tofu is made by fermenting fresh milk, making it sour, pouring it into a pot and boiling it, turning the milk into old tofu, then squeezing it out of the gauze and moulding it. Milk tofu is the best when it is milky white in colour, and it is soft and delicate and very tasty when eaten now, and it can be stored for a long time when it is dried.” [16]

At the same time, with the herders’ long-term drinking (or eating) of camel’s milk and its related products, the herders have also developed a certain understanding of the therapeutic efficacy and medical value of camel’s milk, for example, “herders generally believe that drinking camel’s milk or camel’s milk in acid will make a person strong, agile and virile, and camel’s milk is used for the treatment of gastroenteritis, gastric ulcers, jaundice, asthma, pneumonia, tuberculosis, rickets, diabetes, oedema, kidney disease, cirrhosis of the liver, anaemia and other diseases.” [17] Although the herdsmen are not clear about the principles due to their cultural level, there is no doubt that the therapeutic effects of camel’s milk in pastoral areas where the level of health care is relatively backward are of great help to the herdsmen’s health. Nowadays, with the improvement of China’s food science and technology, the research on the therapeutic efficacy of camel’s milk from all walks of life is also getting deeper and deeper, and the research results related to it are also common, which makes people have a clearer understanding of the nutritional composition and therapeutic efficacy of camel’s milk. From the existing research results, “camel’s milk contains an average of 3.55% protein, 5.65% fat, 4.24% lactose, 0.87% ash, and 14.31% total dry matter.” [18], where “the content of protein, fat and ash in camel’s milk was higher than that of human, goat, horse and donkey milk; the lactose content was similar to that of cow and goat milk, but significantly lower than that of human, horse and donkey milk.” [19] The nutritional content of camel’s milk directly determines the therapeutic benefits of camel’s milk. According to the article *The Effectiveness of Camel’s Milk* written by Nur Guli and Rewan Kizil, “Long-term consumption of camel’s milk not only enhances physical strength and improves the body’s ability to defend itself against diseases, but also plays a role in slowing down aging, preventing and controlling anaemia, strengthening bones, preventing rickets among children, lowering cholesterol, improving lactose intolerance, and converting Hepatitis B to a negative state. At the same time, it is also effective in the treatment of gastric ulcers, gastric indigestion, and loss of appetite.” [20] And according to, Lu Donglin and other writers, *Camel’s Milk Health Effects and Auxiliary Therapeutic Effects* said, “camel’s milk also has an immunomodulatory effect, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effect, antioxidant effect, anti-stress effect, anti-fatigue effect, auxiliary treatment of the digestive system, auxiliary treatment of diabetes, auxiliary treatment of hepatitis, protection of respiratory damage, and anti-cancer and anti-tumour effects.” [21] According to Su Deqi’s article *Experimental Study on the Health Benefits of Fresh Camel’s Milk*, “It has been proved through animal experiments that camel’s milk has the effects of hematopoietic, blood activation, sedation and tranquillisation, enhancement of the functions of liver and spleen, improvement of the functions of the pancreas, tonicity of the liver and benefit to the kidneys, clearing of the lungs and elimination of the summer heat, nourishment of the yin, detoxification, and removal of the necrotic tissues.” [22] It can be seen that camel’s milk has many health effects and auxiliary therapeutic effects on human health.

As more and more people recognise the therapeutic benefits of camel’s milk, the demand for camel’s milk in the domestic market is increasing day by day. In order to meet the domestic market demand, the government of Alxa Youqi has introduced a series of camel industry support policies, and has achieved substantial results. At present, the number of



Figure 2 Double-humped

Source: Alashan Wukong Film & TV Culture Media Co.

bactrian camel (Fig. 2) in the whole flag reaches 53,100 peaks, of which 28,000 peaks are breeding females, accounting for 49% of the total number of camels in the whole flag, and the milking females in the whole flag are about 10,000 peaks, with the milk production reaching 7 tonnes per day. The whole flag has built 1 camel industry science and technology park (5 camel industry enterprises), 1 camel research institution, 20 camel breeding bases, 7 camel milk transfer stations, 164 standardised camel pens, and 39 camel breeding cooperatives. There are 3333 farming and herding households and 10,282 people in the whole flag. At the same time, in order to promote the rapid development of camel milk industry, Alxa Youqi has made efforts to build a number of

excellent leading enterprises, especially the Inner Mongolia Desert God Biotechnology Co. The company has developed 4 series and 8 types of camel milk products. 230 tonnes of camel milk will be purchased in 2019, achieving sales revenue of 12 million yuan; 1,356 tonnes of camel milk will be purchased in 2020, with an output value of 96 million yuan; and 379

tonnes of camel milk will be purchased in 2021 so far. In order to drive the economic development of camel milk industry in the whole flag, the company has also concluded a benefit linkage mechanism with 114 milk camel farmers and 10 milk camel farming cooperatives in the whole flag.

In conclusion, since the implementation of the transformation and development of the camel industry in Alxa League, not only has the number of bactrian camel population increased significantly, but also the population structure has become more and more reasonable, which has led to the number of female camels and camel's milk production can be greatly improved. At present, the Alxa League Bactrian camel stock amounted to 139,900 peaks, accounting for 1/3 of the national total, of which 57,200 breeding female camels, milking female camels 11,000 peaks. According to the *Alxa Bactrian Camel Industry Development Master Plan (2018-2022)*, the total investment in camel industry is 1.312 billion yuan, and by 2025, the stock of bactrian camels in the whole alliance will reach 180,000 peaks, the proportion of breeding females will reach 45%, and the annual output of camels will be 19,000 peaks. With an annual output of 640 tonnes of organic camel's wool, 11,000 tonnes of organic camel's milk and 4,000 tonnes of organic camel's meat, the camel industry is expected to achieve an output value of 1.8 billion yuan. The camel industry has become a pillar industry that promotes the high-quality development of the Alxa economy.

4. Cultural Practices Related to Camel's Milk in Alxa

At present, camels are raised on a certain scale in China's Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. The primary purpose for herders to raise camels is protection, while also taking economic considerations into account to a certain extent. This situation is closely related to national policies supporting camel husbandry as well as to the current state of development of the camel industry. Over the past decade or more, with the revival of camel husbandry in various regions, a number of cultural customs related to camel milk have gradually taken shape in different areas. In fact, these traditions do not differ markedly from one another and are largely consistent with existing pastoral customs surrounding cow's milk, sheep's milk, and mare's milk. When discussing camel-milk customs, milking is a particularly important practice. Under normal circumstances, camel milk is collected mainly in summer, twice daily, in the morning and evening. One point that must be emphasized is that, in order to ensure successful milking (Fig. 3), the camel calf must be tethered beside the mother camel. If the mother camel cannot see her calf, she becomes extremely restless, making it impossible to collect milk properly. At the same time, however, a certain distance must be maintained between the mother and the calf, and they must not be allowed to make contact, otherwise the calf will run over to compete for milk.

The camel milk obtained is not only used for daily consumption, but is also employed on important occasions such as weddings, festivals, and the reception of distinguished guests. In everyday contexts, camel milk is consumed mainly because herders widely believe that it has dietary therapeutic effects in lowering high blood pressure, hyperlipidemia, and high blood sugar—that is, it is consumed for reasons related to health. Consumption during festivals, however, is primarily intended to enhance the sense of ritual. For example, on such occasions, the host or a respected elder must use camel milk to pay homage to Heaven, Earth, and ancestors. These cultural customs are not subject to strict requirements in ordinary daily life and may be observed more casually. However, when elders are present in the household or when honored guests arrive, these practices must be treated with particular seriousness. The aim is to express the host's welcome and blessings more fully through a richly ritualized banquet setting.



Figure 3 Squeezing camel's milk

Source: Alashan Wukong Film & TV Culture Media Co.

Any camel milk that is not consumed immediately is partly stored in ice packs for later use, while the remainder is processed through heating or fermentation to produce solid or semi-solid camel-milk products such as milk skin, milk curds, cheese, butterfat, and yogurt. In recent years, although the number of herders raising camels has increased compared with the past, most of them are middle-aged or elderly, while younger people are relatively few. Even fewer among the younger generation possess a detailed understanding of camel-milk-related cultural traditions.

Camel-milk customs are reflected not only in the daily diet of herders, but are also embedded in a wide range of traditional cultural practices associated with camels. This can be seen, for example, in contemporary Alxa through traditional activities such as "camel worship" and "camel racing." Alxa has a long history of camel husbandry. Although existing historical records, archaeological remains, and rock art do not yet allow for a precise determination of the earliest period of camel domestication in the region, it can be affirmed that by the Qing dynasty camels had already become one of the principal livestock animals raised in Alxa.

According to Pingding Huijiang Jiaokan Niyi Fanglüe by Cao Zhenyong, "During the Jiaqing reign, the Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu, Eshan, memorialized for approval to purchase eight thousand camels from the two

provinces of Shanxi and Shaanxi; in addition, the Prince of Alxa presented one thousand camels and one hundred horses, among other items.” [23] And according to, Zhao Er compiled *Qing Historical Manuscripts* say: “Purchasing and transporting in Ningxia need to go through Alashan Ejina Mongolian pasture to reach Barkun. The Ejinar pastureland has been ravaged by bandits in recent years, and can only be transported by Alxa League’s camels.” [24] Passed down through the generations, to this day, Alxa League still retains the custom of raising camels, and because of the number of its breeding, it is known as “China’s camel country”.



Figure 4 Mongolian Camel Racing

Source: Alashan Wukong Film and Culture Media Co.

In the process of raising camels for generations, Alxa League herders have not only made camels an important part of people's daily life and production, but have also developed a strong sense of worship for camels through long-term mutual maintenance, which has led to the formation of a

number of diverse and rich traditional customs of camel worship. At present, the “Mongolian camel-raising customs” in Alxa have been selected as a national intangible cultural heritage, which mainly include the “Mongolian camel sacrifice” and the “Mongolian camel race” (Fig. 4). Important activities. Since the “Mongolian camel sacrifice” contains a lot of camel’s milk culture, the following section focuses on the “Mongolian camel sacrifice”. “The Mongolian camel sacrifice can be divided into three types: the “camel sacrifice to the god”, the “camel sacrifice to the mother” and the “camel sacrifice to the herd”. “Sacrifice god camel” is the people of Alax in many sacrificial camel activities in the most ceremonial and the most sacred traditional activities, “sacrifice god camel, also known as sacrificing child camel sacrifice, mainly in the town of Oulun Prague child camel temple. On the day of the sacrificial ceremony, herdsman will bring sacrificial offerings and drive selected camels from all directions.

The ceremony starts early in the morning. Firstly, the Ovoo sacred fire is lit and a fire ritual is held, followed by a lama chanting scriptures. Come to worship the crowd began around the Ao Bao three times, and in the Ao Bao offerings such as khat, food, but also the camel’s nose stick, stiff rope, etc. hung on the Ao Bao, during the period of time, but also white wine, camel’s milk, etc. sprinkled to the Ao Bao. Waiting for the end of the chanting, the crowd focused on the child camel temple, lighting ghee lamps, and will bring the sacrificial offerings, began to listen to the chanting of blessings, kneeling to worship the god camel statue. They prayed that the camel would bless their camels with good health and good breeding. Each camel brought in by the herdsman is tied with a khaddar that has been recited, and the nose and bridge of the camel are smeared with ghee (Fig. 5) and sprinkled with white wine and fresh milk, so that the camel breeders can bestow their hopes and blessings on the camels. At the end of the ceremony, camel races and camel judging are also held.” [25] “Sacrificing a sacred camel is a special custom of canonising a camel, and many large camel farmers have camels that have been canonised as sacred camels, which act as symbolic deities guarding the camel herds and the homes where the herders live. They are not idolised by the herders, and most of the time they are no different from the other camels in the herd. Whenever there is a holiday celebration, the sacred camels are invited out to participate in the camel sacrifice.” [26] “The time for sacrificing female camels begins after sacrificing male camels and before lambing. It is performed in the form of a sacrifice to the god of fire (Figure 6). In the *tulgari* in the centre of the yurt, a wood fire is lit, cypress incense is scattered, ghee lamps are lit, and plates containing offerings such as sweets, milk food, oil cakes, ghee, and brick tea, white wine, camel’s milk, khaddar, goat’s backs, baring (various shapes made of barley flour), and “*garinbudar*” (rice for the fire) are placed in front of the statue of the Buddha. The lama recites the sutra “*Gongjile Tame*”. Choose one or two male camels and a few pregnant female camels, around the incense burner clockwise, to participate in the camel sacrifice to the incense burner, one after another in the offering of white wine and freshly boiled milk tea, to the end of the chanting. All the participants pray to the God of Fire, wishing the camels a



Figure 5 Ritual Application of Ghee

Source: Alxa Wukong Film & Television Culture Media Co., Ltd.

breeding. Each camel brought in by the herdsman is tied with a khaddar that has been recited, and the nose and bridge of the camel are smeared with ghee (Fig. 5) and sprinkled with white wine and fresh milk, so that the camel breeders can bestow their hopes and blessings on the camels. At the end of the ceremony, camel races and camel judging are also held.” [25] “Sacrificing a sacred camel is a special custom of canonising a camel, and many large camel farmers have camels that have been canonised as sacred camels, which act as symbolic deities guarding the camel herds and the homes where the herders live. They are not idolised by the herders, and most of the time they are no different from the other camels in the herd. Whenever there is a holiday celebration, the sacred camels are invited out to participate in the camel sacrifice.” [26] “The time for sacrificing female camels begins after sacrificing male camels and before lambing. It is performed in the form of a sacrifice to the god of fire (Figure 6). In the *tulgari* in the centre of the yurt, a wood fire is lit, cypress incense is scattered, ghee lamps are lit, and plates containing offerings such as sweets, milk food, oil cakes, ghee, and brick tea, white wine, camel’s milk, khaddar, goat’s backs, baring (various shapes made of barley flour), and “*garinbudar*” (rice for the fire) are placed in front of the statue of the Buddha. The lama recites the sutra “*Gongjile Tame*”. Choose one or two male camels and a few pregnant female camels, around the incense burner clockwise, to participate in the camel sacrifice to the incense burner, one after another in the offering of white wine and freshly boiled milk tea, to the end of the chanting. All the participants pray to the God of Fire, wishing the camels a

hundred mothers and a hundred children, fat and strong, and resistant to disease and disaster. Most of the camel sacrifices are made in the autumn when the camels are fat and strong, in the form of inviting wealth and asking the lama to recite the invocation of wealth. The master of the house holds an arrow in his hand, the mistress of the house carries a milk bucket with camels in it, and the other main members of the house carry plates in their hands, and together they face the air and circle around to invoke wealth. When sacrificing camel herds, try to get all the camels back, so that they can bathe in the immortal energy and receive blessings. In particular, the male camels, “Ongan Temo”, “Setel Temo”, “Dalhantemo”, etc., must be found, and recite to them the blessing, singing hymns. “Ongentmo” is the best camel in the herd of camels dedicated to the gods of mountains and trees before shamanism entered the nomadic regions of the North. The “Sertertmo” is the camel that was dedicated to Buddha after the introduction of Buddhism. The “Dalhantemo” is the camel that is in good shape, has a good coat, produces a lot of lambs, carries a lot of loads steadily, walks smoothly, and makes a great contribution to the herd and the family. After all the ceremonies are over, the presiding officer sets up the back of the goat and congratulates the guests.”^[27]

In a nutshell, camel’s milk-related customs have been integrated into every aspect of herders’ lives and production. The existing camel’s milk culture not only expresses the camel breeder’s camel worship and gratitude, but also greatly enriches the spiritual and cultural life of the herdsman. At the same time, the camel’s quality of perseverance and tenacity, fearlessness and hard-working, not only breeds the Mongolian herders’ excellent qualities of perseverance, hard work, loyalty and kindness, but also makes the Mongolian herders pass on the philosophy of harmonious coexistence of man and nature from generation to generation.

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