

❖ CUSTOM OF MAKING FELT

After those at one household complete the beating of the fleece, the families move to a space with well grown grass and plenty of water to prepare for the making of the felt. Felt making is usually practiced at the end of summer and the beginning of the first month of autumn. Each family announces the day to make the felt to their neighbours, relatives and friends in their vicinity. The families in turn manage their work and prepare to assist in the making of felt. If needed, the other families bring animals to assist in rolling the wool (usually stallions are used for felt making, but in the Gobi region camels are used and in northern regions oxen are used as well).

The family who is going to make felt can prepare fermented mare's milk and other dairy products, and butcher a sheep for those who are going to help. This butchering is called 'shigus'. The family lays out sample-felt on which the beaten wools are lain down. This sample must be clean and good felt which was made in the previous year. If it is not clean or if it is worn-out felt, the family will bring the sample from the respected family.

In the morning of the chosen day those are to make felt gather from various directions. They are treated with dairy products. Then they start laying out the woolens on the sample felt. Men, girls and boys bring woolens near and go to fetch water. The lady of the household, the eldest or most honourable lady starts laying out new woolens as an example and then other women follow in turn. It demands



great care to adjust the thickness and thinness of the wool. If the head of the family has no experience, he can invite an expert in making felt. The expert can direct all kinds of felt making. The first layer of lain woolens is evenly sprinkled with water. The second layer is put on the first. This layer is evenly sprinkled with water. The final layer (*zulkhai*) should be from a fleece-wool or lamb's-wool. After the third layer, men wind a wooden pole with irises and other grass as insu-



lation between the pole and woolens. The layers of wool are wrapped around the pole. This roll of wool is then covered with soaked hide and tightly bound together with rope. As the rope is tightened the herders say “*numbai tumbai*” (both are closed). Water is then poured over the entire roll. Those gathered say a benediction words:

May the swan-white felt be without any cracks
Or chinks here and there;

*May the felt be whiter than fresh snow
And harder than bone;
And smoother than the surface of ice
And more valuable than silver;
May the felt be without holes
And durable without wear;
May the felt be as white as a conch shell*

These recitations inspire those who participated to make the good felt.

Two men attach parallel ropes to the two rings of horn through which the two ends of the wooden pole pass. Each end of the rope is tied with a firm knot and then placed under the stirrups of each man on horse-back. Before their pulling the roll they say:

*May the felt for public consumption be of a good quality
May the human body be in good health
May the felt be stronger than bone
And whiter than fresh snow*

They drop milk or fermented mare’s milk on the roller. They then start pulling the roller slowly, gradually speeding up the pulling. If possible, they reach a gallop. Mostly young men ride the horses drawing the roller. As the first roller is pulled, the second is prepared for pulling. Several felts can be made in a day. If the distance of pulling the roller reaches 15-20 kilometers we stop drawing, unbind the roller and drop milk on the roller and on the polls of the two horses and on their croups as a blessing. The first felt is an expression of common efforts. On this occasion we traditionally say a benediction. Before reciting the benediction, a tankard of tea and plate of dairy products are brought and then the first felt is blessed with milk. It says:

*The fleece of tegs
Is lain with span-thick wool*

*The fleece of lambs
Are lain with finger-thick hair
Let’s bless this felt*

And

*White fleece with lanolin of a hundred thousand sheep
Are lain and spliced
Every layer of woolens
Are sprinkled with hundreds of streams
And rolled adroitly
And bound promptly
And drawn with the force of geldings
And rolled again and again
May this be a durable thing
As it is called felt*

In such a manner, labour is eulogized poetically. After reciting the benediction, men only can stretch new felt when moistened. The new felt is folded. We jerk the folded felt on which a boy or girl sits. It is called *esgii jishikh* and its quality is tested. After completing felt-making, there is a small feast (the feast of mutton or the feast of dairy products). The felt makers are hosted by the family who made the felt.

Every attendant can receive his or her own share from the products. These products are distributed among the attendants. The two men who drew the roller can take confections and dairy products. The expert of felt making can take one from new felts which he likes if the family has made many felts. If the family made few new felts, he may take the previous year’s felt or a sheep as a reward. This is called *zakh ögökh* (to give a reward). If the family borrows the sample felt, it is given back with a piece of mutton, plate of dairy product, or piece of confection.

After a few days, after the felt becomes dry, the new felt is cut into shapes that can be used as roof-covers, wall-covers, crown-covers, door-covers and as felt rugs. They are laced and stitched. This is called as *ger* covering.

The women who are adept at sewing can bring scissors, needles, thimbles and camel wool threads, and help with sewing the felt, but this can only be done on an auspicious day. After the completion of the work, the host family treats everyone who participated with dairy products and gives them felt for stockings, cushions, sweat-cloths, or mattresses as a gift. Mongolians process the wool and hair of animals in this manner and make felt and various felt articles.

