

Editorial Introduction

Gantulga Munkherdene

*Department of Anthropology and Archeaology and the Centre for Development Studies, National University of Mongolia
School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford
munkherdene.g@num.edu.mn*

The Mongolian Anthropological Association, in collaboration with the Centre for Development Studies at the National University of Mongolia (NUM) and NUM Press, will publish the Mongolian Anthropological Review. The journal aims to publish peer-reviewed sociocultural anthropological studies on Mongolia and the Inner Asian region, in both English and Mongolian, in print and online formats. Its core sections will include research articles, translated articles, book reviews, and fieldwork notes. All submissions will undergo external peer review and will be published after appropriate revisions and improvements.

Richard D.G. Irvine's article challenges long-standing sedentary assumptions that treat unenclosed landscapes as "waste" and time as a uniform, "empty" container. Drawing on Locke's labour theory of property, colonial doctrines of *terra nullius*, and contemporary debates on geontopower, Irvine shows how these ideas erase the lived presence and rhythms of mobile peoples. Instead, he asks what happens if anthropology begins from mobility and movement, highlighting how nomadic civilizations offer crucial insights for rethinking both land and time. By situating pastoralist and nomadic perspectives within broader comparative debates, the paper argues that these traditions can make a vital contribution to resisting misrepresentations and enriching anthropological theory.

Professor L. Munkh-Erdene argues that the nationality policies implemented in both the People's Republic of China and Mongolia are systematically denying and aiming to "eliminate" the Mongol nation. He criticizes the PRC for, since 2020, especially in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, removing Mongolian language and script from educational institutions and pressuring their replacement with Chinese, which he says effectively assimilates Mongols into the Han nation and deprives them of the ability to use their own identity. Strikingly, he adds, a similar process persists in Mongolia itself: on official documents one cannot write "Mongol person" or "Mongol nationality," and instead the state continues a Soviet-influenced, socialist-era policy that treats groups such as Khalkha, Dörvöd, Bayad, and Zakhchin as separate "nationalities." In his view, this amounts to denying the existence of a single Mongol nation and "erasing" it through administrative registration.

Bogumil, Zolzaya and Byambabatar's joint article traces how Russia's 2022 partial mobilization reshaped life for Buryats and reverberated across Mongolia through a biopolitical lens. Drawing on migrant interviews and policy responses, the authors show how Moscow's tightening control disproportionately targeted minority bodies, driving a Buryat exodus to Mongolia. The influx tested Mongolia's state capacity and civil society - visa rules, welfare and work access, NGO coordination, and debates like the proposed "Mongol Card" - while stirring difficult questions of kinship, belonging, and sovereignty. Set against Mongolia's careful geopolitical balancing and a polarized public sphere, the piece illuminates how war remakes Buryat-Mongol relations and recasts identities under simultaneous biopolitical and geopolitical pressure.

Professor David Sneath's article critiques the nineteenth-century social evolutionist view that non-Western societies were organized on kinship and therefore incapable of creating advanced political formations such as the state. Although Mongolians may not know this theory by name, its influence entered via Soviet-style Marxism and remains strong; we see it in everyday speech and even in scholarship - for example, the familiar line that "Chinggis Khaan unified scattered clans and tribes." Sneath, however, first rejects the premise that clans combine into tribes and tribes into states. Drawing on many Inner Asian cases, he argues instead that the state comes first and in fact creates clans. If so, the foundational idea still used in our history textbooks that "clans and tribes united" is a fundamentally 'mistaken' hypothesis. In its place, Sneath urges us to recognize that among nomads and Mongols there have been many forms of polity both "headed" and "headless," and to remember that the state need not resemble its Western counterpart.

Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo interrogates the ethical tension between cultural relativism and universalism through the lens of Mongolian "civilizational" discourse. Moving from Western evolutionist narratives to Herder/Boas-inspired relativism and debates on national character, the article reframes Mongolian civilization as a symbolic-ritual culture anchored in *jos judag* (honor/integrity) and respect. It shows how these moral grammars interact with Buddhist ethics and international human rights, and how "nomadic civilization" has been reimagined in scholarship and policy. Through cases such as UNESCO's intangible heritage regime and the World Nomadic Culture Festival, the paper reveals both openings for global ethical alignment and frictions—bureaucratic gatekeeping, identity politics, and representation. The result is a nuanced argument that ethical norms must be translated across traditions: neither reducible to a single universal formula nor sealed within cultural particularism, but negotiated in practice within Mongolia's historical and socio-political context.