Mongolian Journal of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnology, 2026, Vol. 15 (1): 72-79

Staged Nomadism: Heritagisation and Commodification of Intangible Culture in Mongolia

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Abstract: This research paper explores the processes of heritagisation and the politicisation of "nomadic culture" in contemporary Mongolia based on our anthropological fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2025. We analysed how intangible cultural practices are constructed, institutionalised, and performed, tracing the transition from *oyuny/utga soyol* (intellectual culture) to the internationally recognised category of *soylyn biyet bus öv* (intangible cultural heritage) as legitimised by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation). Everyday practices such as epic singing, folk dance (*Mongol biyelgee*), shamanic ritual, and pastoral knowledge are reframed through international institutions, festivals, and state certification schemes. From the critical perspective of heritagisation, we approach heritage not as a fixed set of tangible and intangible entities but as a complex process through which practices and narratives are continually reinterpreted in changing political contexts.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; UNESCO; nomadic culture; commodification

Introduction

In recent years, Mongolia has witnessed a remarkable boom in heritagisation. From national to local museums and from national policy to international diplomacy, the country's contemporary cultural discourse increasingly centres on nomadism. Historically, nomadic culture has been regarded as a pastoral lifeway; however, in recent years, it has also been reframed as both an economic and political resource to strengthen national pride and gain global recognition. Mongolia describes its pastoral lifeway as a nomadic heritage and positions it within international heritage discourse to strengthen its position on the international stage. This social phenomenon can be situated within broader theoretical discourses on the heritagisation of culture. As Harvey (2001) argues, heritage is a complex and dynamic process in which customs, symbols, stories, and traditions are continuously reinterpreted in response to changing historical, societal, and political contexts, rather than static entities. Harvey's theoretical argument is important in post-socialist Mongolia, where the collapse of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) in the early 1990s (Ginsburg 1995) led to socio-cultural changes and new opportunities for the revival and reconstruction of Mongolian cultural heritage. The nomadic culture that had been partially suppressed, marginalised as "backward" and/or "feudalistic" under socialist "modernist" ideology, became central to the nation's cultural and identity reconstruction. In this context, heritage functions simultaneously as a site of recovery and reinvention, providing both a sense of continuity with the past and a vivid platform for negotiating modern national identity in Mongolia after the 1990s democratic revolution.

However, the processes of deciding what constitutes "cultural heritage" are inherently political (Lowenthal 1998; Wright 1985; Frick 2010). Frick (2010) notes that the logic of cultural heritage has traditionally worked to reify and strengthen ties to a particular level of authority and power. Therefore, decisions about what to remember, preserve, or celebrate raise fundamental questions of power, authority, and representation. As a result, heritage laws or political frameworks often determine which pasts become visible and protected, and which are excluded or forgotten (de Clippele 2021). While laws, frameworks, and policies can expand the formal scope of what qualifies as "heritage," they also broaden the state's discretionary power to select, interpret, and privilege particular narratives of collective memory (de Clippele, 2021). Actors and communities with greater institutional or informational resources are more likely to have their practices recognised and promoted, while less powerful groups risk remaining "muffled" or "misrepresented" within official narratives (Smith 2022; Chan 2023). Moreover, the politics of recognition and misrecognition mean that heritage practices are not neutral cultural spaces, but emotionally charged places where struggles over status, justice, and redistribution are played out (Smith 2022). In this context, categories such as "tangible" and "intangible" are technical or administrative constructs created by institutions, making heritage a normative,

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performative, and strategic object that can be described; thus, so-called "intangible heritage" should be understood not as an inherent form but as an outcome of classificatory and discursive practices.

This becomes even more complex when heritage operates across national and international scales. In this article's context, UNESCO is the primary global institution for defining, categorising, and safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Its aim is to safeguard cultural values and promote global solidarity through education, science, and culture (UNESCO, n.d.). However, UNESCO's heritage-related convention (World Heritage Convention, 1972) and frameworks for registration, evaluation, and protection do not exist on a neutral aspect. Since UNESCO's first aim was to rebuild educational systems, libraries, and museums destroyed across Europe after World War II, UNESCO's World Heritage Convention (1972) is also originally designed for European monument-based (tangible) heritage. Lenzerini (2011) argues that UNESCO's heritage framework is inadequate for intangible heritage as it does not fully understand the living traditions of non-European cultures. This can be explained in several ways: through the procedural demands of inscription, the linguistic and conceptual categories employed (for example, the distinction between "tangible" and "intangible" heritage), and the educational and bureaucratic infrastructures required to transform living practices into registered practices, denying the fact that culture cannot be framed as tangible products (or commodity), as it is continuously living and evolving (Williams 1960). These mechanisms often advantage better-resourced or institutionally connected actors and states, while marginalising those lacking access to the expertise and networks needed to navigate UNESCO's technocratic and bureaucratic frameworks (Van Doorsselaere 2021). Furthermore, UNESCO's 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) introduced additional challenges. The convention emphasises community participation and autonomy, yet simultaneously legitimises international control (UNESCO-led). For example, Article 2(1) from the Convention states that intangible cultural heritage belongs to the people and community:

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003, Art. 2.1).

It also highlights the Intergovernmental Committee and its function within the State Parties of the Convention:

An Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, hereinafter referred to as "the Committee", is hereby established within UNESCO. It shall be composed of representatives of 18 States Parties, elected by the States Parties meeting in the General Assembly, once this Convention enters into force in accordance with Article 34 (UNESCO 2003, Art. 5.1).

With a view to taking appropriate safeguarding measures, the Committee shall establish, keep up to date and publish a List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, and shall inscribe such heritage on the List at the request of the State Party concerned (UNESCO 2003, Art. 17.1).

As a result, this often leads to an inherent tension or misunderstanding between local agency (community) and centralised control (governments or UNESCO's committee), often resulting in the inefficient management of complex or politically sensitive forms of living heritage within standardised bureaucratic processes, and reinforcing one-size-fits-all global frameworks for all heritages around worldwide. While listing of intangible cultural heritage can boost the visibility of practices and strengthen efforts at protection, it can also subject those same practices to bureaucratic categories and political narratives that reframe local meanings, enforce complexity, and sometimes reproduce global inequalities.

Furthermore, Mongolia's participation in UNESCO's heritage convention[1] and listings has profoundly shaped how culture is categorised, valued, and promoted in Mongolia. UNESCO's frameworks can empower states to safeguard and promote their culture and heritage, yet they also pressure governments to redefine or categorise what counts as "authentic" or "traditional" within local contexts. This became evident through fieldwork conducted by the second author while she was working at the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations under the auspices of UNESCO (IISNC). IISNC was established in 1998 through a multilateral agreement between Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. It aims to promote research, dialogue, and cooperation on/about nomadic cultures and societies (UNESCO-Iisnc, n.d.). Although the Institute is formally linked to UNESCO and operates within UNESCO's frameworks, it is primarily funded by the Ministry of Culture of Mongolia, with its annual budget determined at the national level. The reason for that is, IISNC is considered as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, and Category 2 Centre is created and funded by Member State(s) of UNESCO, but operate under a formal agreement with UNESCO (UNESCO-Iisnc, n.d.). The agreement allows these Centres to serve as hubs of expertise that help advance UNESCO's mission in areas such as culture, education, science, and social development. Therefore, every year, the annual funding of IISNC was promised only when there was consistent emphasis on "nomadic heritage" as a central

[1] *Mongolia ratified UNESCO's Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 29 June 2005.*

and promotable theme. As a result, to get enough funding, researchers at the Institute need to align their work with the dominant theme of nomadic intangible cultural heritage, such as intangible cultural practices, intangible interpersonal communication (*nüüdelchdiin khariltsaa, khem khemjee*) etc. At times, researchers were expected to participate in and promote the nomadic intangible cultural heritage awareness-raising initiatives, such as promoting *Bitüü shölnii ödör* (Nomadic Soup Day) in November 2024, even though it is not officially listed as intangible cultural heritage of Mongolia. This case shows that the international research institute on nomadic culture does not work based on intellectual orientation, but a subtle form of institutional pressure (both government and UNESCO) that shaped the direction, framing, and even the legitimacy of research itself. It was evident that IISNC and the Ministry of Culture incorporated and operationalised the "UNESCO-style" idea of intangible cultural heritage in their everyday work practices. Furthermore, these experiences go back to Lenzerini's (2011) and Eichler's (2020) arguments that highlight understanding of "heritage" remains deeply embedded within Western institutional and epistemological contexts.

These dynamics show that Mongolia's nomadic cultural heritage boom is not only a domestic process of nation-building after the democratic revolution but also deeply entangled with global structures of cultural recognition. As heritage practices become formalised and institutionalised, both nationally and internationally, they are increasingly mediated by transnational frameworks such as UNESCO's conventions and frameworks.

The Conceptual Transformation of Cultural Heritage in Mongolia

The conceptualisation of culture and cultural heritage in Mongolia has evolved under the continuous influence of political, social, and economic transformations. During the socialist period, cultural policy was guided primarily by Soviet-style ideologies that framed culture as a key instrument of social development and modernisation. Culture was perceived as a main tool of socialist progress, encompassing values such as public hygiene, morality, formal education, and urbanisation (Tsetsentsolmon, 2014). During this period, culture was classified into material and intellectual domains as *ediin bolon utga soyol* (Nyambuu 1992), a direct translation of the Russian terms *materialnaya i duhovnaya kultura* (material and intellectual culture). Material culture referred to physical, everyday life and production-related objects, while intellectual culture encompassed ideology, art, literature, and intellectual achievements (Nyambuu 1992). This academically constructed classification was influenced by a Soviet-style methodology in which culture was assessed in relation to the state's vision of social and economic advancement, rather than being rooted in traditional Mongolian values or practices.

Efforts to formalise heritage under socialist governance were exemplified by the 1956 MPP's resolution "On the Protection of Cultural Heritage" (*Soyolyn öviig khamgaalakh tukhai MAKhN-yn togtool*), which defined "rare historical manuscripts, sutras, and books" as cultural heritage worthy of preservation (Zagdsüren, 1967). Similarly, Tsendyn Damdinsüren, in his 1958 article "Let Us Protect Cultural Heritage" (*Soyolyn öviig khamgaalay*), emphasised pre-1921 literary and historical artefacts as "national cultural heritage," advocating classification into "feudal" and "folk" heritage categories (Damdinsüren, 1958). That same year, Byambyn Rinchen's book (1959) "From Our Cultural Heritage" (*Iz nashevo kulturnovo naslediya*) documented historical monuments, folklore, literature, performing arts, and handicrafts, reflecting early scholarly attempts to identify and preserve heritage (Rinchen, 1958). These initiatives, while preserving pre-revolutionary culture, were framed within the socialist paradigm: heritage was defined through bureaucratic, state-centric lenses, emphasising material progress, ideological conformity, and the didactic role of culture in shaping socialist citizens (Tsetsentsolmon, 2024).

The democratic transition in the early 1990s brought significant conceptual and terminological shifts, coinciding with broader political, economic, and social transformations. Post-socialist Mongolia re-oriented its understanding of cultural heritage from the socialist, Soviet-influenced model toward national and global frameworks, emphasising Mongolia's historical distinctiveness and the preservation of traditional practices. The Law on Culture (1996) introduced terms such as cultural activity, cultural value, and cultural knowledge, distinguishing between historical and cultural monuments and broader cultural values. The Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage (2014) further institutionalised heritage within state systems, regulating processes such as identification, registration, classification, preservation, restoration, and transmission. This law categorised heritage into *tüüh soyolyn dursgal* (historical/cultural monuments), *utga soyol* (intellectual or spiritual culture), maintaining continuity with the Soviet-era material/intellectual distinction while embedding heritage within a more formal administrative and economic logic.

Consequently, Mongolia's involvement at the global stage as a democratic country, specifically with UNESCO, leads international conventional norms to begin directly influencing Mongolian policies. For example, Mongolia's ratification of UNESCO's Convention, such as the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) in 2005, and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) in 2007,

replaced previously used categories such as intellectual or material culture into *biyet* (intangible) and *biyet bus* (tangible) heritages, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, craftsmanship, and traditional knowledge and technologies. At the same time, the adoption of UNESCO's framework in Mongolia proves DeSoucey et al.'s (2019) criticism of "rationalised authenticity". As DeSoucey et al. explain, "rationalised authenticity encourages the adoption of alternative definitions of cultural heritage and facilitates the transnational spread and transformation of select masterpieces of intangible heritage" (2019: 2). UNESCO legitimises diversity by demanding that each tradition demonstrates both local authenticity and universal human value. This paradox means that practices must be translated into globally legible, rationalised forms to be qualified as heritage. As a result, art forms such as *urtyn duu* (long song), *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle), *tuuli* (epic), *biyelgee* (folk dance), and *khöömei* (throat singing) are now recognised primarily as intangible cultural heritage in Mongolia.

Furthermore, the Mongolian Government registers individuals who practise various intangible cultural heritage as *övlön ulamjlagch* (cultural heritage bearers). As of the latest records, 102 individuals are officially listed as certified heritage bearers in the National List of Cultural Heritage Bearers (Government of Mongolia, 2019), and over 10,924 people continue to practice these cultural traditions without an official certificate because they are registered as suraltsagch (learners)[2]. Moreover, Government Resolution No. 354 (2018) further institutionalised the connection between heritage and monetary reward through the regulations on awarding cash prizes to bearers who have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage at national and global levels. Nominees must demonstrate national and international success, active participation in promoting intangible cultural heritage, and initiative in organising or participating in heritage events. Local governors of the city or province submit nominations to the *Soylyn öviin undesnii töv* (National Centre for Cultural Heritage), which forwards them to the *Soylyn biyet bus öviin mergejliin zövlöl* (Professional Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage) for evaluation, and finally, they send the decision to the government member responsible for culture for the final approval of the reward (Altangerel *et al*. 2024).

This transition towards UNESCO-style heritage frameworks signifies more than terminological modifications; it indicates a substantial transformation in the nature of heritage policy. Whereas socialist-era heritage emphasised ideological conformity and state-directed preservation, post-democratic heritage aligns with internationalised frameworks that foreground community participation, global recognition, and the protection of intangible cultural expressions within bureaucratic systems. Registration under UNESCO conventions has become a symbolic and practical objective of state cultural policy, offering legitimacy, funding, and international visibility while also exposing local heritage to standardisation.

The evolution of cultural heritage in Mongolia can be understood as from state-socialist Soviet-influenced definitions to democratic, internationally mediated frameworks. The "real" style of Mongolian heritage is therefore neither purely traditional nor international; it is a negotiated construct, shaped by local traditions, historical contingencies, state agendas, and global governance regimes. From socialist-era material and intellectual culture to UNESCO-defined intangible heritage, the conceptualisation of Mongolian heritage reflects the interplay between ideology, nationhood, globalisation, and politics, demonstrating how culture is both preserved and continually reinterpreted across temporal and spatial scales.

The Nomadic Mongolia Festival as a Commodified Stage Performance

The contemporary boom of heritagisation in Mongolia, as explained in the introduction, is prominently manifested in the Nomadic Mongolia Festival, which has been organised since 2021. This festival is an example of how political authority mobilises heritage discourse to assert both symbolic and material power. By framing nomadic culture as a central component of national development, the state actively shapes which traditions are effectively made visible. Mongolia´s long-term development plan, "Vision-2050", explicitly situates nomadic culture at the heart of the nation's strategic project:

Become a leading country with preserved nomadic civilisation, based on the national mentality, heritage, culture, and mindset, and centred on the creative Mongolian citizen (Vision 2050, Objective 1.2).

Furthermore, in alignment with the Vision-2050 objective, the Ministry of Culture (now as the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Tourism, and Youth of Mongolia) has prioritised the annual organisation of the Nomadic Mongolia Festival as a main cultural initiative funded by the state. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2025 while working within IISNC, one of the Ministry's

[2] *Retrieved November 2025 from the official website of Soylyn üviin undersnii tüv (National Centre for Cultural Heritage of Mongolia), https://ncch.gov.mn/ich?ItemID=1*

Figure 1. Festival participants are attending the Nomadic Mongolia opening ceremony in 2022.08.12. From right to left, Arkhangai and Bayan-Ölgii provinces' participants.
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affiliated institutes[3], it became evident that the festival's planning process begins at the start of each calendar year. All institutions under the Ministry's administrative or financial umbrella are expected to contribute to the event, either through logistical organisation, programme development, or performer coordination. Once the festival starts, the political framing becomes explicit. Former Prime Minister Luvsannamsrain Oyun-Erdene's opening speech during 2022's Nomadic Mongolia Festival[4] showed the symbolic function of the festival, stating:

You are not only heritage bearers but also bearers of Mongolia's sovereignty. The festival is a celebration of intangible nomadic heritage and national unity (Prime Minister's speech at the Nomadic Festival, field work notes, 2022).

Similarly, the former Minister of Culture Chinbatyn Nomin framed the festival as part of a strategic long-term cultural policy:

Mongolia aims to become the centre of nomadic civilisation, continuously researching, preserving, and disseminating intangible cultural heritage… The festival gathers over 1,400 heritage bearers from the capital and 21 aimags (provinces), showcasing local knowledge, customs, and performances across three days (Minister's speech at the Nomadic Festival, 2022)[5].

By linking cultural performance to national sovereignty, the state turns heritage bearers into symbolic representatives of the nation and frames participation as an act of loyalty and pride. In this way, the festival becomes a stage where political authority is performed through the language of cultural preservation. However, behind the celebratory image of unity and "safeguarding", there is another reality. Many cultural workers and organisers – especially those working behind the scenes – receive very low pay or no pay at all. Their long hours and effort remain largely invisible in the public narrative of success. This contrast reveals the unequal distribution of recognition and reward within Mongolia's broader cultural heritage system. While the state utilises heritage to showcase its cultural richness and national strength, the people who actually make this possible often experience exploitation and neglect.

In 2022, the Nomadic Mongolia festival gathered over 1,283 bearers from the capital city and all 21 aimags, featuring large exhibition zones and 22 stations where participants present local traditions, rituals, craftsmanship, foods, and performing arts (Ministry of Culture, n.d.). However, field work observations from the 2022 festival revealed that the festival functions less as a mechanism for safeguarding living traditions but more as a highly orchestrated and commodified spectacle. Performances were tightly scheduled, competitive, and state-mediated, with certified pre-selected "heritage bearers" to represent their respective *aimags*. Over 30 traditional *gers* (yurts) were built, including 21 representing each aimag, and heritage bearers performed outside of their gers according to strict timetables. A panel of *shüügchid* (judges) – including representatives from the Ministry of Culture and UNESCO – visited each ger to score performances (field work notes, 2022). Furthermore, when judges visited their gers, heritage bearers were presenting small "concert-like" performances, offering *süütei tsai* (milk tea), *airag* (fermented mare's milk), or *tsagaan idee* (dairy products),

[3] *The International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations under the auspices of UNESCO is considered officially as one of the Ministry of Culture affiliated institutes in Mongolia as it is funded by the Ministry of Culture of Mongolia.*

[4] *In 2022, Nomadic Mongolia Festival took place from August 12-14.*

[5] *Retrieved November 2025 from the official site of the Former Minister of Culture of Mongolia Chinbatyn Nomin, https://nominch.mn/*

while local visitors or tourists sometimes missed this opportunity to witness such performances (field work notes, 2022).

As one organiser explained, "*participants are told to introduce their heritage in 20–30 minutes. Yet some traditions, like tuuli (*Mongolian epic*), require hours or even days to perform fully*" (interview, August 2022). One of the performers from Arkhangai aimag also highlighted logistical pressures, "…*we had to find someone who could sing urtyn duu (long song) from the soum,* (or sub-district) (interview, August 2022)". Furthermore, the above-mentioned judges were there to award 100,000,000 MNT to the winning aimag. Khövsgöl *aimag* won the grand prize of 2022. Khövsgöl aimag prepared performers, whose presentation was based on the spirituality of *böö* (shamans) and *Tsaatan* (reindeer-herder) community. These examples highlight both the symbolic valorisation of certain traditions and the mediating role of the state and international heritage frameworks in determining cultural value in Mongolian context. The presence of a judging committee, including representatives from the Ministry of Culture and UNESCO, illustrates how the process of heritagisation transforms lived cultural practices into measurable, comparable, and monetisable forms of value. The allocation of such a large monetary prize not only rewards performance but also converts what Bourdieu (1986) terms cultural capital, embodied knowledge, skill, and symbolic authority, into economic capital. Through this process, heritage bearers enter a structured hierarchy of legitimacy, where recognition and authenticity are distributed according to state-defined evaluation and criteria.

From a Marxist and post-Marxist perspective (Žižek 2009; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Harvey 2005), these mechanisms exemplify how cultural production becomes subsumed under the logic of capitalist accumulation. When traditional knowledge is rewarded through cash prizes, communal heritage is transformed into private value, converting collective memory into marketable performance. This process reflects the broader commodification of culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Shepherd 2002), where heritage becomes a product circulating within national and global markets. The festival's evaluative structure – its scoring systems and competition – mirrors capitalist forms of labour exchange in which cultural labour (performance) is exchanged for capital (money, prestige). Such commodification not only redefines heritage as a form of economic resource but also disciplines cultural expression into forms compatible with neoliberal ideals of efficiency, competitiveness, and productivity (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009).

Consequently, the festival exemplifies self-orientalism, where local actors shape and perform their cultural expressions in conformity with stereotypes of the "Orient". Traditions are compressed, curated, and staged, granting legitimacy to some practices while marginalising or rendering others invisible. Thus, these discourses on heritage broaden the critique of Orientalism beyond the traditional notion of a lack of representation from the Orient (Hall 1997; Macfie 2000; Said 1978; Young 1995; Kobayashi *et al.* 2019). Unlike classical Orientalism, self-orientalism occurs when the subject position of the "Oriental" actively (re-)presents itself as the "Other" to Western eyes, as imagined by the West (Figal 2002). In practice, this is clearly visible in the Nomadic Mongolia Festival. The Global West continues to dominate global economics and political discourse, and regions like Mongolia frame their heritage within globally legible and valorised categories to gain acceptance and visibility. Furthermore, national politicians, often characterised

Figure 2. Performers of Selenge province performing in front of the judges, field work on 2022.08.12. © Bayarbat Tugsbuyan

Figure 3. Khövsgöl aimag performers with their 100,000,000 MNT prize certificate in 2022[6]

[6] *Retrieved from the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Culture. https://www.facebook.com/Moc.gov.mn/*

by corruption, play a crucial role in furthering the self-orientalisation and commodification of nomadism. This strategy aims to secure not only global recognition and foreign investment but also to exert control over these processes. Consequently, festival organisers and performers adapt, sometimes compressing multi-day traditions into brief competitive presentations to fit the expectations of evaluators and international audiences, as our field work illustrates.

Conclusion

The heritagisation and commodification of Mongolian nomadic culture reveal the complex entanglements between preservation, performance, and power in contemporary Mongolia. As this study demonstrates, the transformation of lived traditions to state-managed and globally recognised heritage is not a neutral act of cultural safeguarding. It is a political process that redefines both the meaning and value of cultural practices. The Nomadic Mongolia Festival exemplifies how state and global institutions mediate these transformations, translating intangible practices into measurable, competitive, monetisable, and therefore controllable forms of culture. This research situates Mongolian heritage within the broader neoliberal economy of culture, one that privileges visibility, performance, and recognition over ritual, community, and continuity. At the same time, the festival's self-Orientalist dynamics highlight how local actors navigate global expectations, strategically performing identity to secure both national legitimacy and international validation. These discussions reveal that Mongolian heritage is not simply being preserved, but actively re-authored within new regimes of cultural governance.

In conclusion, the making of "nomadic heritage" in Mongolia exemplifies the complexities inherent in contemporary heritage politics: it simultaneously preserves and transforms, empowers and exploits, as well as celebrates and commodifies. Heritagisation serves not only as a means of remembering the past but also as a strategy for constructing modern national identity and asserting sovereignty in an increasingly globalised cultural order. Recognising these tensions invites a more critical and reflexive approach to heritage policy, one that values the lived realities and labour of heritage bearers, resists the reduction of tradition to spectacle, and reconsiders the ethical implications of turning collective memory into cultural capital.

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