British Embassy Ulaanbaatar

THE INSTITUTE FOR MONGOLIAN STUDIES

INTERROGATING

THE COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE OF WATER IN INNER ASIA

You are cordially invited to attend this conference.

Your insights and contributions to the discussion would be greatly valued.

TUESDAY, 02 July 2024

09.30-18.00 | NUM Library 502
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

More Information :

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THE INSTITUTE FOR MONGOLIAN STUDIES

ДОТООД АЗИЙН

УСНЫ ХАМТЫН ЗАСАГЛАЛЫГ СУДЛАН ТОДРУУЛАХ НЬ

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Нэмэлт мэдээллийг:

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Interrogating the cooperative governance of water in Inner Asia

02 July 2024

Room 502, Library Building, National University of Mongolia

From academic publications to policy making fora, cooperation is a major theme of contemporary water governance. Suggesting the benefits of working together over pursuing self-interested goals, it is often presented as both a method for achieving the optimal management of water resources and a description of positive collaboration between interested parties (individuals, corporations, and states). Hosted by the National University of Mongolia, this international conference presents research by the University of Cambridge's Resource Frontiers project members as well as scholars and practitioners from across Inner Asia. In doing so we critically interrogate what cooperation means in everyday life in the Inner Asian region. We ask: what, in practice, is cooperation as a type of social relation? What kind of entities, including non-human ones, does it take place between? And, critically, what are its limitations for describing fraught relations over scarce resources?

PROGRAMME

09:30 **Arrival and coffee**

10:00 **Welcome and opening remarks**

- H.E. Fiona Blyth (British Ambassador to Mongolia)
- Professor David Sneath (Director of MIASU, University of Cambridge)
- Professor Zayabaatar Dalai (Dean of School of Arts and Sciences, National University of Mongolia)

10:30 PANEL 1: TRANS-BORDER CONCERNS

Chair: Professor Bair Gomboev (Baikal Institute)

10:35 **Heritage safeguarded and electricity guaranteed: reactions and actions towards the Erdenburen Hydropower Plant** by Dr Tsetsentsolmon Baatarnaran, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia

The construction of the Erdeneburen Hydroelectric Power Plant is one of the most promising infrastructure projects under realisation in Mongolia. It covers an area of 28,000 hectares of the Erdeneburen and Myangad sub-districts of Khovd province, Bayannuur sub-district of Bayan-Ulgii province, and Umnugobi sub-district of Uvs province. Before land allocation and exploitation are done, archaeological and ethnographic 'safeguarding research' (avran khamgaalakh) is compulsory due to Mongolia's Cultural Heritage Protection Law. In becoming a crucial resource to be safeguarded and commodified, cultural heritage is utilised for the legitimacy of power exercised between parties. It has become a tool to get votes from local people and funding from investors. Based on interactions and actions towards the Erdeneburen project, this paper argues that cultural heritage has become a token with multifaceted political, economic and social implications.

10:55 **Fraternal relations: idioms of kinship and modes of cooperation in Mongolian-Soviet transborder resource governance** by Dr Joseph Bristley, Research Associate, MIASU, University of Cambridge

From environmental activism to international law, cooperation between states is widely seen as key to protecting the environment from anthropogenic harm. But how cooperation is imagined and practiced in everyday life is not anthropologically well explored. This paper draws on historical and ethnographic material from Mongolia to examine how practices of joint water management were historically enacted between this country and the Soviet Union. Focussing on ideas of 'fraternal relations' between these two socialist countries during the second half of the twentieth century, it examines how kin relations were appropriated to frame the enaction of inter-state cooperation in environmental management. The material on which this paper is based relates to the Selenge river, a major Asian transboundary river which rises in Mongolia's western highlands before crossing the Russian border and flowing into lake Baikal.

11:15 **Living with fire, water, and snow at resource frontiers: beyond the politics of the transborder Khalkh river and lake Buir** by Dr Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo, Academic Secretary, Institute for Mongolian Studies & Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia

In this paper we examine the everyday life of people at one of Mongolia's resource frontiers – the Khalkh river area - in an eastern region neighbouring China. Water, soil, oil, and biodiversity are the main natural resources in the Khalkh river and lake Buir area which marks the state border for hundreds of kilometres. Due to its complicated recent history the area has become a hotspot of resource competition for different players, especially in relation to land grabbing, oil extraction, and water access. Pastoralists have historically crossed borders and withdrawn back deep inside Mongolia due to the second world war and state-led modernization projects. This makes the Khalkh river area a unique place for power struggles, while at the same time allowing people to make a livelihood in the region. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and research conducted since 2023 we argue to reconceptualise resource frontiers.

11:35 **Can humans and more-than-humans cooperate? Ezen and Ius approaches in discussing the environmental and legal personhood of Mongolian rivers and mountains** by Dr Sayana Namsaraeva, Senior Research Associate, MIASU, University of Cambridge

Over the last decade legal scholars, legal practitioners, and anthropologists have been collaborating in discussing multi-species assemblages of all sorts and various practices of recognizing the agency of more-than-humans, which, in its turn, can lead to recognizing their legal personhood. Drawing on insights from recent legal cases recognizing environmental rights of mountains and rivers elsewhere, and from scholars working on conceptions of human-nature relations across Inner Asia, my presentation discusses what relevance these cases can have for Mongolia and in challenging the 'legal anthropocentrism' of modern law.Taking into account that human-nature relations have been traditionally viewed through the agencies of more-than-humans such as ezed (masters of the solid earth) and lusad (masters of water sources), it will be argued that such cosmo-visions have already been reflected in the legal traditions of Mongols and in local practices of recognizing the personhood of rivers and mountains (for example, the phenomenon of the töriin uuls). So, another question to ask: if, historically, Mongolian customary law norms demonstrated an embracive approach to the personhood of ezed and lusad, furthering this tradition can present-day national legislation consider the environmental personhood of the rivers and mountains of Mongolia?

11:55 **Urban life of transboundary river water: the case of Erdenet** by Dr Tsetsegjargal Tsenden, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia and Mr Munkhtamir Damdinsuren, Research Affiliate, International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations

12:15 **Discussion**

12:30 **Lunch (Terrace)**

13:30 PANEL 2: ENVIRONMENTAL CRITIQUES

Chair: Professor David Sneath (University of Cambridge)

13:35 Assessment of urban water management. A case study of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia by Professor Ochir Altansukh, Department of Environment and Forest Engineering, National University of Mongolia

Urbanization is a major global development. At present, more than half of the world population lives in urban areas, i.e., cities. One of the fundamental requirements of citizens is safe and sufficient drinking water. The premises for water security are adequate water management and governance. In this study, we determine priorities for urban water management (UWM) and assess the governance capacities of different organizations to address UWM in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of the landlocked Asian country Mongolia. We apply the City Blueprint Approach (CBA), a diagnosis tool, to assess UWM. The overall score, the Blue City Index (BCI), is 2.3 points for Ulaanbaatar, which categorizes the city as wasteful. Flood risk and economic pressure have a great impact on the water sector in Ulaanbaatar city. In particular, Ulaanbaatar's waste water treatment (WWT) can be improved. Often, only primary and a small portion of secondary WWT is applied, leading to large-scale pollution. Water consumption and infrastructure leakages are high due to the lack of environmental awareness and infrastructure maintenance. Operation cost recovery is not sufficient to sustain urban water services in Ulaanbaatar. Water governance and more specifically monitoring, evaluation, and statutory compliance are among the factors that need to be addressed.

13:55 Traditional knowledge of spring and water preservation among the local community of Adaatsag sum, Dundgobi province, Mongolia by

Mrs Dolgorsuren Dogsom Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia and

Dr Zoljargal Dembereldorj, Associate Professor, Department of Education

In Mongolia, many rivers and springs disappear every year. In particular, there is a limited amount of surface water resources in Gobi areas. In this study, we are interested in exploring traditional knowledge of spring and water preservation among the local community of Adaatsag sum in Dundgobi province which is considered to have the most rivers, streams and springs in the area. According to the tradition of Mongolia people believe that all mountains, water, and land have their own spiritual lords. If people pollute spring waters or rivers, it is believed that the lord will become furious and can harm them. In the context of such fear, the local community performs many kinds of rituals dedicated to the lords of the water and land. This involves paying tribute and expressing gratitude to them for their protection as well as ensuring the water supply of the area. This has allowed local people to learn about nature and have a special relationship with it. Eventually the knowledge they gained through such actions has become a method to preserve water and conserve nature in the area. The ways of nature preservation of Mongolian people are related to culture and traditions as well as state laws and policies. The Adaatsag sum community has been managing their water problems aligning with the policies of the local government by applying a variety of methods for protecting, restoring, and using water from springs.

14:15 Potential risks of competition for scarce water resources in Mongolia by Mrs Sukhgerel Dugersuren, Rivers without Boundaries

Mongolia, a new raw materials resource frontier since the early 2000s, has its largest extraction projects as well as foreign investments in South Gobi province. Oyu Tolgoi (a globally important copper and gold mine) and Tavan Tolgoi (claimed to be the largest untapped coal deposit) are both operating in the Gobi desert. Water naturally is the key and unfortunately the scarcest resource necessary for their operation. Numerous studies on underground water resource availability, potential impacts on the environment, and future mining and infrastructure needs have led to developing yet more water transfer projects from the rivers in the north. The strategic and cumulative impacts of all these so-called 'strategic development projects' on the environment and society have never been assessed. I would like to touch upon just a few of the more obvious potential risks articulated by local communities who have been, and potentially will be, affected by current extractive projects, as well as by plans for water transfer projects.

14:35 Selenge– a river without borders? (Natural, socio-economic, institutional, and regulatory foundations for balanced development in the transboundary Selenge river basin) by Professor Bair Gomboev, Senior Research Fellow, Baikal Institute for Nature Management, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences

The Selenge river is the main tributary of lake Baikal, a World Natural Heritage site, providing about 50% of its inflow. Average long-term trends in temperature and precipitation in the river basin show a clear increase in temperature and a decrease in precipitation, more pronounced compared to global data. This situation also has effects on the dynamics of water flow in this basin. The territory under consideration is the most economically developed both in Mongolia and in Russia within the Republic of Buryatia. In this regard, there is a significant transboundary transfer of pollutants generated at economic and infrastructure facilities. Moreover, the contribution of the Russian part of the basin is much more significant than in the Mongolian part. Plans for the socio-economic development of Mongolia and the Republic of Buryatia are associated with an increase in water consumption, primarily in Mongolia. This is compounded by the fact that currently in Mongolia there is a significant deficit in electrical energy, and in drinking and domestic water supplies, which have a very high spatial differentiation. This deficit in Mongolia is planned to be eliminated through the construction of a number of hydroelectric power stations and the transfer of part of the river flow to water-scarce areas. In addition to solving the issues of shortcomings in electrical energy and water consumption in Mongolia, these projects carry high natural and socio-economic risks in their implementation, associated primarily with the water regime of both water bodies in the Selenge river basin and lake Baikal. In this regard, it is necessary to calculate these risks and make efforts to develop and implement a coordinated policy for the use and protection of water in the transboundary Selenge river basin.

14:55 Direct and indirect factors of impact on water bodies of the transbounda Selenge river basin by Dr Irina Ulzetueva, Senior Research Fellow, Baikal Institute for Nature Management, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences

The main tributary of lake Baikal is the transboundary Selenge river. The Selenge river basin is located within two states, Russia and Mongolia. The Selenge plays a very important role in the socio-economic development of these territories, where industrial, agricultural, municipal, and recreational water uses are developed. The progressive development of these territories increases the anthropogenic load on the water bodies of the region under study and worsens their ecological condition. Analysis of factors of direct and indirect impacts on water bodies was used to assess the ecological state of the river basin. Factors of direct impact are based on indicators of water intake for the needs of a number of water users (housing and communal services, industry, agriculture, etc.), as well as wastewater discharge into water bodies. Indirect impact factors are assessed based on indicators of a real impact on the catchment area. Such indicators are the number and density of the population, the structure of agricultural production, the volume of industrial and agricultural production, etc. The indicators used for indirect impact assessment were grouped by type of anthropogenic impact. The results of the analysis of factors of direct impact on water bodies showed that water bodies of the most economically developed water management area experience a high anthropogenic load. This is also confirmed by the analysis of indirect impact factors. Based on the results obtained, the following was an assessment of the carcinogenic and toxic risk of the impact of drinking surface water on the health of the population of the transboundary river basin. It has been established that the risk of developing chronic diseases and neoplasms from the effects of toxic microelements on the health of the population associated with the quality of drinking water is high in the study area.

15:15 Discussion

15:30 Coffee break

15:50 PANEL 3: NON-HUMAN BORDER NEGOTIATIONS
Chair: Professor Bum-Ochir Dulam
(National University of Mongolia)

15:55 Relationships between human and lus (water-deities) worlds with regards to human reproduction and birth by The Venerable Natsagdorj Damdinsuren, Rector of Otoch Manramba University

Humans have developed diverse knowledge systems about the surrounding natural world that are often summarized in religious practices. As the modern world speeds up its development, humans innumerate their unconscious actions by mistreating nature, which in turn enlarges natural calamities. Sadly enough, present generations of Mongols have been detached from their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge about how to treat nature. Buddhist canonical texts and literature by Buddhist scholars contain much knowledge about how different aspects of nature – mountains, waters, rivers, flowers and plants, lus and savdag, and other living organisms - can cause good and bad effects on human beings. For example, according to Buddhist medicine, eighteen types of diseases and illness are caused by various lus deities. There are five major classes of lus: kings, nobility (noyons), baramsai (brahmanas?), commoners, and fierce (dogshin) spirits. Reading these texts provides us with a better understanding about cause-and-effect relations between humans and lus-savdag worlds. Humans suffer from many new diseases, and it is only a part of a bigger picture of destruction and growing conflict between humans and nature with its cosmic elements: sun, moon, and stars. Now is the time for humans to change their attitude and to be more conscious in their actions to become kind and caring to nature.

16:15 Bukhe Baatar, master spirit (ezen) of the Selenge river as one of the '13 Aryn Noyed' (rulers of northern Mongolia): the past and present of Buryat shamanism by Mrs Maria Dogbaeva-Rinchino, Khaan-Tengeri shamanic organization, Ulan-Ude

My contribution introduces the origin of worshiping Bukhe Baatar Noyon – master (ezen) of the Selenge river - and why he became one of the '13 Aryn Noyed' spirit rulers of northern Mongolia. I will discuss in particular how we, shamans, see the influence of Bukhe Baatar Noyon on the ecology of the Selenge (the iron river) and of lake Baikal, which receives the waters of the Selenge. I will refer to some historical facts, when disastrous natural calamities which took place around the region were received as a punishment to people for neglecting the '13 Aryn Noyed'.

16:35 Water sharing and water purity: past and present by Mr Byambadorj Sandagdorj and Mr Zulbaatar Gangaa, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia; PhD student in Anthropology & Programme Coordinator, International Institute, Centre for Study of Nomadic Civilizations

Mongolia, due to its geographical location, sits at the convergence of three major watersheds: the Arctic ocean, the Pacific ocean, and the Central Asian basin. It boasts a relatively high altitude, the lowest rainfall, and the driest conditions. However, water resources are unevenly distributed across its territory, with some regions facing water quality issues that do not meet sanitary requirements. Additionally, river water often flows beyond the country's borders. These factors contribute to the perception that Mongolians possess limited traditional knowledge about water. This paper aims to elucidate the traditional knowledge of Mongolians concerning water and water conservation methods encompassing customs, rituals, and usage practices. The research draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tsagaan nuur, Mandal sum of Mongolia's Selenge province, Jargalant sum of Khuvsgul province, Ikh Uul sum of Zavkhan province, and Zuunmod sum of Central province. Field research involved observation and interviews with local inhabitants.

16:55 **Lus and their role in Buddhism**
by The Venerable Zhargal Sanzhiev, Head of the Baikal Datsan

Buddhist rituals have developed a rich practice of worshiping water deities called lus (plural lusad), who can also be called 'masters of the water'. Buddhist practitioners usually consult canonical texts, which describe the lus world and the ways they influence nature, the human body, and even mental conditions of humans. Worshiping lus has become an integral part of Buryat culture. Nowadays, worshiping lus aside religious rituals is developing more towards environmental concerns on a global scale. That is why, as I will argue, learning more about water-deities is important not only from a Buddhist religious perspective, but is also beneficial to all leaving creatures.

17:15 **Discussion**

17:25 **Tea Break**

17:30 **ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION**

Chairs:
Professor Vera Kuklina (Research Professor, George Washington University);
Dr Mariia Kuklina (Postdoctoral Scholar, University of Northern Iowa)

18:00 **END OF EVENT**