

BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE

Mongolia and the Eurasian Order

3rd Biennial Cambridge Mongolia Forum

Marking the 40th Anniversary of MIASU

Venue

Seminar Room, Alison Richard Building

Date

Thursday–Friday, 24–25 September 2026

Sponsored by

Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU), Cambridge

Chinggis Khaan Grant, MIASU, Cambridge

Mongolian Embassy, London

UK Research and Innovation

The Cambridge Mongolia Forum is a platform developed by MIASU and the Mongolian Embassy in London to bring Mongolian policymakers and Cambridge-based scholars into sustained dialogue on pressing regional issues. Our aim is not only to discuss policy but to strengthen it through scholarship by developing concepts, historical depth, and comparative analysis that can clarify choices, trade-offs, and unintended consequences. The Forum seeks to generate impact by bridging immediate policy concerns with rigorous academic interpretation.

This third Forum focuses on an expanding zone between war and peace — defined not by the absence of conflict but by prolonged hostilities, intensified securitisation, fragile diplomatic pathways, and the constant possibility of escalation. As the Russia–Ukraine war continues and the risk of spillover across Eurasia remains real, Mongolia faces an increasingly constrained geopolitical environment, caught between a deepening Sino–Russian alignment and its own democratic commitments and "third neighbour" partnerships. At the same time, Inner Asian peoples — across Russia, Mongolia, and China — bear disproportionate burdens in militarised times: as soldiers drawn into conflicts not of their making, as targets of ethnic stereotyping, as objects of state securitisation, and as communities whose futures are shaped by decisions taken far from home.

In marking MIASU's 40th anniversary, the Forum revisits long-term Eurasian debates on order-making — including the political and institutional legacies of Chinggisid Eurasia — while engaging contemporary questions of peace diplomacy, military culture, and minority governance. The five panels are organised to move from historical frameworks of conquest and peace, through Mongolia's contemporary diplomatic positioning, to the cultural reproduction of martial identities, and finally to the material and discursive consequences of war and securitisation for minority populations in Russia and China. Throughout, the Forum asks one shared question:

How are war and peace made, governed, and narrated across Eurasia today — and what can Mongolia and Inner Asian histories contribute to preventing the spread of conflict and strengthening the conditions for peace?

DAY ONE

Empire, Diplomacy, and Mongolia's Place in the Eurasian Order

Time	Session
11:00–11:30	Welcome & Opening Remarks Caroline Humphrey <i>Founder of MIASU</i> David Sneath <i>Director of MIASU</i> H.E. Munkhjain Batsumber <i>Mongolian Ambassador to the UK</i> Uradyn E. Bulag <i>Organiser, Cambridge Mongolia Forum</i>
11:30–13:00	Panel 1: Conquests and Peace in Chinggisid Eurasia <i>Chair: Caroline Humphrey, MIASU, Cambridge</i> This panel revisits "conquest" and "peace" not as opposites but as linked dimensions of Eurasian order-making. Chinggisid institutions — law, diplomacy, infrastructures of mobility, tributary and fiscal systems, religious governance — produced distinctive forms of security and connectivity across vast territories. The concept of <i>pax Mongolica</i> captures something real about these achievements, yet it has also been romanticised in ways that obscure the coercive foundations of imperial order and the experiences of those who lived under it. The panel examines how these and adjacent concepts — Chinggis exchange, Eastern World Orders, conquest dynasties — have been constructed, debated, and deployed in scholarship, and what analytical purchase they retain. The aim is not to treat history as a blueprint for contemporary peace-building, but to ask what historically grounded thinking about the management of diversity, long-distance exchange, and multi-ethnic governance can offer to present debates on regional cooperation and conflict prevention. What did Chinggisid polities understand about sustaining order across difference — and where did those orders fail? David Sneath <i>University of Cambridge</i> <i>A Peasantry in the Guise of an Army: The Mongol Empire and the Political Economy of Warfare on the Steppe</i> Ata-Malik Juvaini's 1253 description of the Mongol Imperial army as 'a peasantry in the guise of an army' points to the inseparability of military structure and political economy in the Chinggisid period. This paper explores how the political structure of the Mongol state was conditioned by the requirements of warfare, through a comparison with other political orders in Eurasia, both on the steppe and beyond. The minority warrior classes of the classical Hellenistic city-states and their successors stand in stark contrast to political orders that supported high levels of military participation, such as those typically found on the steppe. This paper argues that the intertwined requirements of political order and military capability are critical to understanding the history of the Mongolian Empire and its successor states. Ayşe Zarakol <i>University of Cambridge</i> L. Munkh-Erdene <i>National University of Mongolia</i> <i>War and Peace in the Chinggisid Tradition: Insights from Conquest Theory</i>
13:00–14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00–15:30	Panel 2: Mongolia's Peace Diplomacy in an Age of War: Religion, Survival and Cyber Sovereignty

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	<i>Chair: Uradyn Bulag, MIASU, Cambridge</i> Mongolia has long pursued a distinctive diplomatic posture shaped by geopolitical vulnerability: balancing relations with Russia and China, supporting multilateralism, contributing to UN peacekeeping, and cultivating "third neighbour" partnerships with the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan and others. In the context of the Russia–Ukraine War, intensifying great-power rivalry, and uncertainty over the future of global governance, Mongolia's language of peace has acquired renewed strategic significance. This panel examines how Mongolia operationalises "peace" not simply as an ethical ideal, but as a diplomatic repertoire, security doctrine, and practice of sovereignty. It brings together three perspectives: Buddhist peace diplomacy and Mongolia's effort to mobilise religious networks in a changing international order; early twentieth-century diplomacy, when Mongolia received displaced Mongols while avoiding actions that might provoke Russia, China or the Soviet Union; and contemporary cybersecurity, where data sovereignty and digital resilience have become central to national security. The papers ask how Mongolia has used peace, restraint, moral authority, and institutional adaptation to navigate conditions of geopolitical pressure. Rather than treating peace diplomacy as either idealism or neutrality, the panel approaches it as a historically layered strategy for preserving sovereignty, managing dependency, and maintaining room for manoeuvre. Munkhnaran Bayarlkhagva <i>MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society</i> <i>Mongolia's Buddhist Peace in the International Order</i> What is the role of religion in modern peace governance, and how is the resurgence of Buddhism in Mongolia informing decision-makers and the wider ideological elite in their efforts to promote peace abroad at a time of eroding liberal international order? This paper examines how Mongolia is reinvigorating the Cold War-era platform of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, together with transnational networks of Vajrayana Buddhist reincarnations, in order to institutionalise emotional and moral norms for peace. By tracing affective communities connected through institutional platforms and rituals such as the Kalachakra initiation and Janlavtsogzol prayer, the paper explores how Mongolia's version of Vajrayana Buddhism — often described as "Northern Buddhism" — enables ties with religious communities across geopolitically sensitive regions. The paper shows how Mongolia's quest for a moral international order negotiates space within the global affective infrastructure of peace actors. Zolboo Sandag <i>University of Bern</i> <i>Between Pan-Mongolism and Survival: Peace Diplomacy in Mongolia, 1911–1930</i> Following its declaration of independence from the Qing Empire in 1911 under the leadership of the 8th Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Mongolia became a destination for Mongols displaced by imperial collapse, revolution, and state violence across Inner Asia. This movement strengthened pan-Mongol imaginaries, but it also deepened the suspicions of neighbouring powers. Positioned between the Russian Empire — later the Soviet Union — and the Republic of China, Mongolian leaders pursued restraint because they understood that pan-Mongol aspiration could provoke intervention or violence. This presentation argues that Mongolia's role as a refuge for displaced Mongols generated a distinctive form of early twentieth-century peace diplomacy: a strategic repertoire characterised by calibrated negotiation, restraint, selective cooperation, recognition-seeking, limited third-party engagement, and the deliberate avoidance of actions that might trigger punitive intervention by Russia or China. The paper interprets Mongolian foreign policy

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	between 1911 and the 1930s as a continual negotiation between pan-Mongol ideals and state survival. Javzandorj Byambatseveen <i>Ember Cyber Service Mongolia LLC</i> <i>Cybersecurity as Sovereignty Governance: Data Security and National Resilience in Mongolia</i> This paper argues that cybersecurity in Mongolia should be understood as a national security issue and, more specifically, as a problem of sovereignty governance. In an age when war, coercion, disinformation, and infrastructural vulnerability increasingly extend into digital space, the protection of data and digital infrastructure has become integral to state stability. For Mongolia, a small state situated between powerful neighbours and dependent on external technological systems, cybersecurity is not merely a technical matter but a condition of sovereign resilience. The paper focuses on data security and data sovereignty, defined as the state's capacity to regulate, protect, and control data within its jurisdiction. Recent assessments point to a widening gap between formal cybersecurity frameworks and actual practice, revealing not only technical shortcomings but also institutional and governance challenges. By combining empirical insights with conceptual analysis, the paper proposes a multi-layered approach to digital governance, including restructuring the administration of digital processes, establishing widely recognised norms and protocols for data management, and developing AI-assisted tools for cybersecurity analysis and decision-making.
15:30–16:00	<i>Break</i>
16:00–17:00	Onon Prize Lecture followed by Q&A Nicola Di Cosmo <i>Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton</i>
17:00–20:00	Onon Prize Ceremony MIASU–Tohoku University MoU Signing Ceremony 40th Anniversary Reception Venue: Alison Richard Building

DAY TWO

Minorities, Wars, and the Struggle for Peace in Eurasia

Time	Session
09:15–09:30	Welcome & Day 2 Introduction
09:30–11:00	Panel 3: Reinventing Inner Asian Military Cultures in the Twenty-First Century <i>Chair: Kristina Jonutytė, MIASU, Cambridge</i> From Gesar narratives to Chinggisid imaginaries, Inner Asia carries powerful repertoires of martial history intertwined with moral and political virtue. Yet these are not static inheritances. This panel examines how "military culture" is being reimagined today — through education, media, heritage industries, state rituals, recruitment narratives, and diaspora circulations — across Mongolian, Tibetan, and Turkic and other Inner Asian communities. Case studies include the role of Chinggis Khaan imagery in contemporary Mongolian national identity and military branding, the politicisation of the Gesar epic in Tibet and Qinghai, and the selective revival of warrior heritage among Siberian communities. Rather than assuming timeless traditions, the panel asks how specific actors — states, cultural entrepreneurs, diaspora networks — selectively curate martial pasts to shape citizenship, masculinity, national legitimacy, or regional solidarity. The policy-facing dimension is direct: how do reinvented military cultures shape public attitudes toward conflict, support for recruitment, and, crucially, the prospects for restraint and peace? Sayana Namsaraeva <i>MIASU, Cambridge</i> "Awakening the Sleeping Genes of Chinggis Khan": Buryat Soldiers and Post-Mongol Empire Ressentiment in Wartime Russia This presentation examines a resurgence of post-Mongol Empire ressentiment in contemporary Buryatia and situates it within a broader constellation of competing post-imperial nostalgias circulating in wartime Russia — most notably those attached to the late Russian Empire and the Soviet past. The revitalisation of local warrior traditions centres on the veneration of heavily mythologised figures of Buryat ancestral warriorhood, as well as Chinggis Khan, all of whom are understood as protective figures. Sites of worship visited by men only — such as Bökh Baatar on the Selenge River, Bukh Noyon in the Tunka Mountains, and Chinggis Khanii oboo in Eravna — are regularly visited by conscripts prior to their deployment to the Ukrainian front. Five years into the war, interviews and social media narratives suggest that initial militarised bravado has increasingly given way to idioms of sacrifice, loss, and victimhood. Claims that the "war made the sleeping genes of Chinggis Khan awaken in the body of each Buryat man" are better understood not as expressions of restorative imperial ambition, but as articulations of vulnerability and ressentiment — standing in contrast to Russian and Soviet imperial nostalgias, which remain largely oriented towards imperial restoration. Hildegard Diemberger <i>University of Cambridge</i> Defending the Land in the Twenty-First Century: More-than-Human Perspectives from the Himalayan Borderlands Across the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, more-than-human beings inhabiting the landscape have played a remarkable role in shaping not only senses of place but also notions

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	of territory, boundaries, and defence. Early Tibetan historical records offer abundant evidence, ranging from military ritual practices of the imperial period (sixth to ninth centuries), through the Gesar epic, to the interventions of local <i>sadak</i> and <i>zhibdak</i> in political and military affairs. Against the backdrop of rapid transformations across the region in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this paper asks whether this cosmopolitical dimension is gradually being consigned to the past or whether it endures, and if so, in what form. The paper concludes that rituals continue to matter, especially for borderland communities in times of crisis. Stephan Dudeck <i>Lithuanian Institute of History</i> <i>Militarised Masculinities on the Periphery: Economic Precarity, Inequality, and Indigenous Recruitment in Russia's War</i> This paper examines the conditions under which Indigenous men from the Russian North and Siberia become disproportionately involved in the war against Ukraine. It focuses on communities officially recognized as “numerically small Indigenous peoples” and relates present recruitment practices to longer histories of colonial resource extraction, paternalistic state governance, and Indigenous concepts of responsibility toward land and community. In wartime, these different moral and political frameworks shape how men understand duty, sacrifice, and belonging. Based on ongoing monitoring and long-term collaborative anthropological research in Siberia and the Russian North, I argue that military mobilization is particularly effective in communities marked by economic insecurity, inequality, infrastructural violence, and dense local dependency networks. In many northern settlements characterized by limited employment opportunities and pronounced gendered mobility patterns, military service appears to young men as a risky but viable path to income, social recognition, and affirmed masculine status. References to historical warrior imagery should therefore be read not as a revival of tradition, but as an ideological reframing of male role models within a broader process of societal militarization. Central to this analysis is the concept of “voluntary coercion.” Although enlistment formally relies on voluntary contracts, people’s choices are often narrowed by indebtedness, shrinking life chances, the decline of traditional economies, and by threats or arbitrariness on the part of state representatives. The official rhetoric of voluntariness and patriotic sacrifice shifts responsibility onto individuals while obscuring structural inequality and coercive conditions. The war has profound consequences for affected communities: it disrupts social relations, reinforces existing inequalities, and disproportionately impacts Indigenous populations of the North and Siberia. This form of “voluntary coercion” has consequences that extend beyond demographic loss. Alongside the death of young men and widening gender asymmetries, it reshapes communal relations through tensions surrounding loyalty, social status, and collective grief in regions long marked by economic and political dispossession.
11:00–11:15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11:15–12:45	Panel 4: Remilitarisation of Minorities in the Russia–Ukraine War <i>Chair: Sayana Namsaraeva, MIASU, Cambridge</i> The Russia–Ukraine war has intensified militarised governance within the Russian Federation, with sharply uneven consequences across regions and populations. This panel examines how minoritised communities — including Buryats, Tuvans, Bashkirs, and others — experience differential exposure to recruitment, disproportionate casualty rates, economic extraction, and wartime stigma. It asks whether the war has merely exposed the hollowness of post-Soviet frameworks of interethnic solidarity — “people’s friendship” — or whether it is actively producing new structures of racialised subordination through military mobilisation.

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	Topics include centre–periphery dynamics of conscription, compensation regimes and their inequities, migration and exit strategies, and the reshaping of wartime narratives that stereotype minority soldiers. The panel also addresses the methodological and ethical challenges of researching vulnerable populations under conditions of restricted access and state censorship. Kristina Jonutytė <i>University of Cambridge</i> <i>"We're not very dramatic": Agency, Victimhood and Belonging among Inner Asian Wartime Migrants from Russia</i> The Russia–Ukraine war has had profound effects on minoritised populations in the Russian Federation. There are substantial claims of disproportionate wartime losses as well as disproportionate conscription in many ethnic minority regions. These factors have contributed to a large wave of migration out of Russia since 2022, especially since "partial mobilisation" took off in September 2022. Yet even in this dire situation, migrants of minority background tend to resist victimisation. This paper explores such negotiations of agency and victimhood among wartime migrants, based on ethnographic fieldwork with Indigenous migrants from the Inner Asian regions of Russia in Mongolia and South Korea between 2022–2025 as well as online research. Hiroki Takakura <i>Tohoku University</i> <i>War multiculturalism in Russia and Siberian Indigenous Peoples</i> How to integrate and govern minority populations within the military is a critical challenge for contemporary states. This issue applies directly to the war triggered by Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In response to this challenge, the Russian government has adopted what can be termed a policy of "war multiculturalism" (Bulag 2023). From the perspective of cultural relativism, this presentation ethnographically demonstrates how the Russian government's discourse is received within indigenous societies. Specifically, it examines media representations of indigenous individuals honored as "war heroes" and analyzes their social impact. Furthermore, drawing on the author's own interview-based fieldwork with war migrants in Mongolia, it seeks to clarify the underlying nature of the multiculturalism envisioned by the Russian state. Maria Vyushkova <i>University of Cambridge</i> <i>2022 Partial Mobilisation Campaign in Russia and Its Impact on Russia's Ethnic Minorities: What We Know as of 2026</i> The so-called "partial mobilisation", declared on September 21, 2022, in response to successful Ukrainian counter-offensive operations in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions, was the first mobilisation in Russia since World War II. It is often viewed as a pivotal event which had a very significant and long-lasting impact on Russia's population, especially on Russia's ethnic minorities. Media reports and scholarly discussions have suggested that ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected by the mobilisation; however, little systematic analysis has been conducted on this topic. This paper addresses this gap and investigates the issue of ethnic inequalities of the 2022 partial mobilisation through a comprehensive analysis of indirect data (obituaries of mobilised soldiers, financial data, and reports by local officials) that have become available over the past 3 years. Though data on the ethnic and regional composition of the mobilised is still extremely scarce due to wartime censorship in Russia, the analysis of indirect data suggests that Russia's ethnic minorities, especially Indigenous minorities of Siberia, the Volga region, the Far East and the North, were indeed disproportionately affected by the 2022 partial mobilisation. The paper further discusses its societal impact (such as an ethnically biased death toll) and possible administrative mechanisms behind it, both at the regional and district levels.

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12:45–14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00–14:45	Keynote Address Gulnaz Sharafutdinova <i>King's College London</i> <i>Holding On to Who We Are: Land, Memory, and Minority Belonging in Russia</i> This presentation draws on the edited volume <i>Soil and Soul: How Russia's Minority Communities Create Meaning and Identity</i> to rethink minority belonging in Russia beyond familiar frameworks of state policy, language, culture, identity, and recognition. Beginning with personal reflections on my childhood in Tatarstan I will ask how people hold on to who they are when the world around them changes. It develops the concept of <i>ecosocial selfhood</i> to show how minority communities reproduce collective life not only through institutions, memory, and ritual, but also through soil, animals, sacred sites, burial grounds, rivers, forests, and everyday practices of dwelling and care. Rather than treating environment as a passive backdrop, the lecture presents it as an archive and a participant in the making of belonging. In a digitalized world increasingly mediated by screens and artificial intelligence, such embodied knowledge becomes newly significant. The lecture concludes that the study of minorities is central to rethinking empire, hegemony, memory, and political belonging in Russia.
14:45–15:00	<i>Coffee Break</i>
15:00–16:30	Panel 5: Civilisational Peace and Minority Violence in China <i>Chair: Hildegard Diemberger, MIASU, Cambridge</i> This panel examines how "peace" is claimed, narrated, and operationalised in Chinese political discourse, and how assertions of Chinese civilisational peacefulness coexist with securitising narratives of frontier disorder. It asks how distinctions between order and rebellion, violence and pacification, mediation and coercion shape the governance of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Manchus, and other groups. Rather than treating peace as a benign ideal, the panel analyses it as a political language through which the Chinese state classifies populations, legitimises intervention, and redefines minority histories and institutions. The papers examine Tibetan pacifist claims set against Chinese rhetoric of "struggle"; Uyghur craft guilds as local institutions of mediation recast through revolutionary narratives of class violence; and Mongol and Manchu conquest histories converted, through the historiography of ethnic fusion (<i>minzu ronghe</i>), from foreign rule into contributions to a unified, multi-ethnic "peaceful" Chinese nation. Together, the papers ask how narratives of peace and violence translate into the everyday machinery of minority governance — administrative classification, surveillance, policing, and historical revision. By placing state rhetoric, minority histories, and traditions of mediation in conversation, the panel asks how scholarly analysis might resist securitising frameworks and contribute to the protection of dignity, rights, and regional stability. Robert Barnett <i>King's College London</i> <i>A "Life-and-death Struggle": Pacifist versus Militarist Claims in Tibetan and Chinese Rhetoric</i> The Tibetan–China dispute is rooted in military conflict in the 1950s and early 1960s, with skirmishes by guerrilla units continuing until 1974. Since that time, however, the exile Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, and his government have pursued a negotiated settlement, and there

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	has been no indication of military activity by exiles or their supporters for 50 years. Yet China's officials stationed in Tibet still define the dispute as a "life-and-death struggle" (<i>ni si wo huo de douzheng</i>) and accuse the Dalai Lama of instigating violence. In this talk, I look at explanations that have been offered for these two opposing strategies, where each side presents itself as peaceful and the other as warlike, and explore what might be the purposes and effects of these forms of rhetoric. Mukaddes Muhtar Palacky University Olomouc, Czechia <i>The Craft Guilds as Mediators between the State and Local Craft-Makers in Rural Southern Xinjiang</i> If violence is defined as an absence of spaces where resolution of conflicts can be reached without violence, then civil society — following Habermas's understanding — represents a "peacemaking" or "intermediate" space. In this paper, I analyse the original roles of such a local institution in Xinjiang, specifically Uyghur craft guilds, as "peacemakers" during the Republican era, and the subsequent removal and replacement of these institutions during the early years of the People's Republic of China. By critically examining the Xinjiang <i>wenshi ziliao</i> (Xinjiang Cultural and Historical Materials), I examine how craft guilds were perceived by the socialist Chinese government as themselves a form of violence, and how this shift created a new social hierarchy and sanctioned a new type of violence directed against former guild members. Uradyn E. Bulag University of Cambridge <i>Conquest for Peace: The Cunning of China's Peace Gene</i> Recent Chinese discourse claims that the nation lacks a "gene for invasion" and possesses instead an innate "peace gene" — a claim deployed to rebut accusations that China's global expansion resembles Western colonialism. Yet this rhetoric contains a contradiction: the China endowed with this peace gene is often implicitly Han-coded, while the China of Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" is officially a unified multi-ethnic nation incorporating the Yuan and Qing, empires founded through Mongol and Manchu conquest. I read the Chinese "peace gene" not as mere rhetoric but as a biologised discourse of order-making violence: it deflects accusations of imperialism externally, absorbs conquest historiographically, and domesticates minority martiality internally. Peace here means not the absence of violence but the achievement of morally justified order: <i>tianxia taiping</i> (peace under heaven), national unity, and ethnic solidarity. Through concepts such as <i>duoyuan yiti</i> (plural unity) and <i>minzu ronghe</i> (ethnic amalgamation), Mongol and Manchu conquests are absorbed into narratives of integration, while their martial traditions are repurposed as patriotic resources. Adapting Hegel, I call this the cunning of the peace gene: the operation by which conquest is converted into peace and violence into the condition of the order it appears to violate.
16:30–18:00	Roundtable: What Role Can Minorities Play in Building Eurasian Peace?
18:30–20:30	Conference Dinner <i>Speakers & invited guests</i>