

« IT IS FORBIDDEN TO NOMADIZE WITHOUT CLEANING THE CAMP OF ITS WASTE, OR IT WILL ANGER THE SPIRITS OF THE PLACE »:

Vernacular Environmentalism or Ecological Reinterpretations in Contemporary Mongolia?

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«It is forbidden to nomadize without cleaning the camp of its waste, or it will anger the spirits of the place», states the *Dictionary of Mongol Prohibition Customs*, published in 1993. This statement appears to align with the «discreet» mode in which Mongolian herders inhabit the steppe without leaving traces (Delaplace, 2023). However, while Mongolian herders burn their garbage before departing, some waste remains without arousing concern.

To understand this apparent contradiction, this talk will examine the diverse perceptions of waste and the environment coexisting in Mongolia and their reinterpretations. It will explore how the vernacular view of the steppe as a composition of undifferentiated valleys and anchored points, each associated with specific uses, values, and relationships to both humans and spirits – where waste does not have the same impact – has been reinterpreted by elites to produce a new Mongolian spiritual landscape in line with the recent understanding of waste as pollution within a homogenized nature.