

The Exploitation of the Landscape of Central and Inner Asia: Past, Present, and Future

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Foreword

The land and waters above the Central Asian bedrock have long been inhabited by living things, while below lie the natural resources which humankind has exploited for its development and to its detriment. In a world divided into nations, there is little of the landscape that is now claimed by one of them. With colonization comes human history and, with that, every aspect of human society, including law, government, religion, and custom. Colonization presupposes the conquest of natural phenomena or of indigenous populations, and conquest demands security by the conqueror over what has been conquered. Ancient custom, arising from early colonization, places burdens on those who control the landscape.

In human terms, Central and Inner Asia represents ancient landscapes controlled by the triple forces of custom, conquest and colonization. Peoples vie to possess that control, yet are controlled by what they possess. At every turn, they exploit their own landscape insofar as custom, politics and the economy permit. The resultant diversity renders some regions far sounder than others, while at the same time common social bonds are expressed through lifestyle in general, and local custom in particular. Contemporary approaches to "modernization" are applying enormous pressures to the landscape and its resources, and sometimes placing heavy burdens on the inhabitants. In the long term, however, it is the landscape that determines the success or failure of human endeavour in the region. The papers collected in this volume discuss the ever-changing relationship between the physical territory and the condition of those who derive their existence from it.

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