Editorial Introduction

This, the 50th issue of the journal, completes Volume 25 of *Inner Asia*. Since its launch in 1999, *Inner Asia* has published over 250 papers on topics ranging from Chinese ghosts in Mongolia (Gregory Delaplace Vol. 12 Issue 1) to the otter fur trade in Tibet (Lobsang Yongdan Vol. 20 Issue 2). The series has included 14 special issues: *Tibet Mongolia Interface* (4:2), *Perspectivism* (9:2), *Cadres, Discourse and Late Socialism* (10:1), *Buryats* (11:1), *Oral Histories of Socialist Modernities* (12:1), *Xinjiang & Southwest China* (13:1), *The Youngusband Mission to Tibet* (14:1), *China-Russia North Asian Border History* (16:1), *Geopolitics and Geo-Economics in Mongolia* (16:2), *Spatial Transformations in Northwest China* (18:1), *Distance & Speed in Inner Asia* (22:1), *Multi-species Co-existence in Inner Asia* (22:2), *Kinship & the State in Tibet and its Borderlands* (23:1), and *Keywords & Voices* (25:1) which contained two special sections (a) *Keywords: A Window into China’s Governance of its Inner Asian Borderlands* and (b) *Voices: The Voices of Russia’s Minorities on the Invasion of Ukraine*. This list gives some sense of the range and diversity of subject matter that the journal has presented to its readership over the last quarter century.

This wide geographical, historical and thematic scope is also apparent in the papers included in this issue, starting with Richard Taupier’s excavation of the history of the Baroun Tala Khoshoud (Khoshut) Khanate that ruled much of Tibet and what is now Qinghai in the 17th–18th century. This is one of the lesser-known chapters of Inner Asian history, falling as it does, between the various stools of conventional national history. An Oirat Mongolian conquest dynasty ruling the Tibetan Plateau, the Khoshoud Khanate seems too far from the boundaries of the contemporary Mongolian state to be part of its history, and too distinct from ethno-national notions of the Tibetan or Chinese ‘peoples’ to be easily fitted into those national histories either. But, as Taupier shows, the Baroun Tala (‘Right Side/Wing’) Khanate was a powerful imperial state, on a par with the better known Zunghar (‘Left Arm/Wing’) Khanate to its north. Indeed, as their names indicated, both states emerged from seventeenth century Oirat conquests in which, notionally at least, the right wing of the army was commanded by Güüshi Khan and the left by Erdeni Baatur Khung Tayiji, ruler of the Zunghar. Persuaded to invade Tibet in support of the zealous Gelug (‘virtuous’) school of monastic Buddhism, Güüshi Khan not only installed the Fifth Dalai Lama as supreme Buddhist authority in 1642, but was recognised by
him as the secular king of Tibet. The dynasty he founded ruled the region until they were ousted by the Zunghar prince Tseren Dondup in 1717.

The Baroun Tala Khanate played a central role in the rise of the Gelug monastic establishment, which by the mid-seventeenth century had become the favoured school of Buddhism in all the major imperial projects of Inner Asia; the Oirat, Chinggisid Mongol, and Qing dynasties. But as Nianshen Song’s paper shows, Tibeto-Mongolian monastic Buddhism failed to impress the courtly elite of 18th century Chosŏn Korea, then a tributary of the Qing. Through an examination of the records left by Korean envoys, who often visited the Buddhist temples and monasteries en-route to Beijing, Song builds a picture of how the Confucian literati of Korea viewed the monasteries and lamas they encountered. Interestingly, Song argues that the Chosŏn court largely failed to appreciate the importance of monastic Buddhism as a critical component of Qing politics, partly because of dismissive attitudes on the part of the envoys towards those they described as ‘ridiculous monks.’ This work helps enrich and complicate our understandings of the flows of ideas in global history. Song’s paper points to the misunderstandings, omissions and mis-representations that were possible in processes of exchange and communication in pre-revolutionary Inner Asia. Here we see dismissive attitudes shaping Chosŏn elite understandings of Qing Buddhism, and we are reminded that receptivity and attitudes of openness cannot be taken for granted. It provides a salutary lesson against overlooking the potential of arrogance and a sense of superiority to colour judgement and reminds us that communication, even a level of understanding, does not always engender respect.

Dismissive attitudes play a very different role in Yonten Nyima and Emily Yeh’s examination of recent trends among pastoralists in the Nagchu Municipality of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. In this case it is the longstanding official disparagement of ‘traditional nomadic pastoralism’ on the part of Chinese policy-makers that provides the backdrop for an apparently curious outcome: whereas state policies designed to promote sedentarisation by building houses for people had been relatively ineffectual, a government scheme that built shelters for goats was so popular that it has been far more effective at reducing pastoral mobility. By viewing policy as an ‘assemblage’ of varied elements, actors and processes, the authors show how earlier policies had failed to successfully combine the requirements of pastoralists, livestock, infrastructure and environment to make for viable sedentary lifestyles; whereas the construction of goat-shelters gave rise to new patterns of pastoralism with significantly reduced mobility for many rural residents.

A positive, rather than a negative, valuation of ‘nomadic tradition’ is central to Chimiza Lamazhaa’s article on the Tuvan yurt. Celebrated since Soviet
times as an emblematic part of Tuvan national tradition and cultural heritage, the yurt (ög) is far more than the functional mobile dwelling of rural residents and herding families, but has become a symbol of a more authentic, ancestral lifestyle. Many urban Tuvans are devoted owners or seasonal users of yurts, alongside their urban apartments. Yurt-themed structures have become commonplace in the urban landscape of Tuva, and stylings drawn from the yurt are found in interior décor, souvenirs and clothing. This forms part of what Lamazhaa terms the nostalgia of nomadism, the ongoing valuation of a certain vision of the past and a material instantiation of a distinctive historic identity.

If Tuvian ‘yurtomania’ has made ‘tradition’ into a site of innovation, the use of digital technologies by shamans in Southern Siberia described by Michelangelo Chini shows how claims of tradition are disputed and contested. The growing online presence of Buryat shamans has coincided with attempts to institutionalise and organise them, Chini argues, and widened their audience enormously. Here we see the internet as an arena for self-promotion and contestation between shamanic associations and individuals in which claims made on the basis of shamanic knowledge are challenged and their meanings disputed. This is particularly marked in the case of high-profile cases like that of the Yakut ‘warrior-shaman’ Aleksandr Gabyshev who, in the summer of 2019, set out to walk to Moscow to ‘exorcise’ President Vladimir Putin. Confronted by members of a prominent Buryat shamanic centre, who accused him of violating shamanic tradition, he was later detained in Buryatia and sent back to compulsory psychiatric treatment in Yakutia. Here the very notion of an authoritative tradition, by which actions may be judged valid or inauthentic, emerges as an instrument for regulation and control.

The notion of tradition plays a very different role in Wan De Jia’s study of a pre-revolutionary text among a Tibetan-language speaking group living in Sichuan. This work, the Funeral Genealogy of the Ldong Paternal Lineage, provides an account of the political landscape of the pre-revolutionary era as well as the genealogical descent of the prominent Ldong patrilineage, in terms that reflect the influence of Bon religious teachings in this region. For Wan De Jia, this text is a material embodiment of a wider oral tradition of history-making, and an important expression of a unique cultural heritage. A similar perspective informs Patrick Hällzon and Tenha Seher’s1 examination of the Muslim shrine (mazar) – a site of festivals and pilgrimage – near the ancient Uyghur oasis town of Khotan in modern-day Xinjiang. The history of such sacred sites provides an index of Chinese state policy on religious practice in the troubled

1 Tenha Seher is a Uyghur anthropologist writing under a pseudonym to protect their family and sources.
region. Many mazar shrines which, with their fluttering flags bear a certain superficial resemblance to Buddhist shrines like the Mongolian ovoo and Tibetan la rtse, were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution era, only to be rebuilt and revived in the Deng Xiaoping–Hu Yaobang era. From the late 1990s the policy climate cooled again with many of the festivals held at shrines banned, and an increasing number of mazar bought by private companies and turned into tourist attractions. Since 2017 state policy has become even harsher, with bans on pilgrimage and the demolition of certain sites. Having carried out fieldwork there in 2009, 2015 and 2016, and drawing on historical materials, Hällzon and Seher provide a detailed account of the Kuhmarim mazar and its associated festival, before the tightening of policy banned the festival and forbade pilgrimages. As the authors show, the personal reasons for visiting the mazar were often diverse, but this only added to the importance of the site in the social landscape and, we must assume, the loss of their removal. As the authors note, the fate and future of the Kuhmarim mazar, like so many other sacred sites in Xinjiang, remains unclear.

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