

Inland Empires in Modern World History

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From the Americas to Zomia, interior spaces and inland regions have presented fresh challenges and opportunities for the writing of global history. As scholars have sought to develop what Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have termed ‘a new historiography of large areas’ – from the world’s oceans and deserts to its forests, grasslands and mountains – historians, anthropologists, geographers and political scientists have recovered the pasts and demonstrated the importance of neglected inland spaces. A new body of work has developed to challenge assumptions about ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’; to examine the changing relationships between the diverse peoples of inland regions; to rethink how we measure their boundaries and extent; to map shifting perceptions of the ‘inland’ between actors and across time; and to consider the relationship between inland and maritime polities and societies. Empires and globalizing powers often approached and defined interior spaces from the outside looking in (and across). Yet, for others, these same regions and zones were long-standing centers. In flipping the perspective—from the inland outward—how might interior spaces and regions shape the global?

This symposium seeks to build on this work by interrogating those features of inland regions that are of wider national, imperial and global historical importance. Recognising the viability of different inland regions as units of historical analysis, it will focus on their contributions to wider polities, networks and historical processes that far exceed the conventional boundaries of the regions in question. While our contributors are specialists on a wide range of inland regions, we envisage a conversation around a number of shared concerns, including:

- What role have inland regions played in advancing (or contesting) processes of global connection and disconnection?
- How did the new communications technologies of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries not merely transform regional dynamics, but the place of these inland empires within wider political and economic structures?
- In what ways have inland spaces informed the construction of wider regional, national or imperial identities?
- How might Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty and space challenge and shape imperial and global narratives?
- How might scholars, in looking to interiors and inlands, Indigenize modern world history?
- And how far does a comparative perspective on the modern history of inland regions make us question established chronologies and geographies?

Featuring work on a variety of different inland regions from across the globe, this symposium considers how inland regions have contributed to modern world history, and how such ties re-made inland regions themselves.

Rob Fletcher Al Zuercher Reichardt

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The Teeth of the Wind: the Desert Locust, inland Arabia and Ethiopia, and the late British Empire

Rob Fletcher (University of Missouri)

Outbreaks of the Desert Locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) have long plagued agricultural societies. The locust's "recession area", or habitat, covers a great arid and semi-arid arc of the world, from eastern Africa to Rajasthan. How states have dealt with this potential disaster to cropland and grazing alike has played an important part in the making and unmaking of their legitimacy.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, and the advance of British influence into the Arab East, much of the Desert Locust's recession area now fell within the bounds – and along the communications routes – of the British Empire. Across East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, British colonial officials became increasingly concerned about the frequency, origins, and potential consequences of locust swarms. As colonial knowledge of the locusts' own migratory routes grew – swarms could range thousands of miles and span multiple jurisdictions – so hitherto discrete colonial officialdoms were drawn together in their wake.

A central tenet behind the new science of locust behaviour, and one firmly associated with the head of London's 'Anti-Locust Research Centre', was the concept of "permanent breeding grounds": the idea, later modified, that the desert locust burst forth from permanent and identifiable (but 'remote' and hitherto-'inaccessible') inland areas. Often these were regions that had long resisted formal incorporation into the European empires, or where British influence or power was in some form attenuated. During the Second World War, when a new locust plague coincided with an engaged military presence across this region, both diplomatic pressure and economic resources were applied to the task of establishing a system for monitoring and controlling "permanent breeding grounds" once and for all.

This paper examines how inland Arabia and Ethiopia became central to Britain's anti-locust campaigns in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and to the wider power, influence and claims to authority that flowed from them. It explores how, in the 1940s, they witnessed the arrival of thousands of British troops, and the development of new infrastructures and legal landscapes of 'food security', as entomologists, toxicologists, military officers and colonial administrators built new routes, established supply depots, and deepened relationships with local populations. It considers the effect of these campaigns upon the capacity of the colonial state to project power into arid hinterlands and across frontiers; and the tensions between imperial 'experts', national administrations, and the inhabitants of these areas. In the process, this paper makes an argument about how these inland regions became critical sites in a new round of political conflict over imperial influence (even as formal power was retreating elsewhere); central locations to both a new science and to new claims to expertise; and key to wider British efforts to leverage their reputation and uphold their influence in the era of decolonization.

The inland empire of the Huizhou merchants: Tea and porcelain traders from the hinterland in a globalizing world

Anne Gerritsen, University of Warwick

In 1827, a Huizhou merchant by the name of Jiang Youke travelled the route from She county, located in the south of the landlocked province of Anhui in East China, to the port of Guangzhou (Canton) on the south coast. The distance from She county in Anhui to Canton is ca. 550 miles as the crow flies, and significantly longer via the combined overland and riverine route that Jiang Youke would have travelled. Jiang carried with him a large number of boxes filled with tea grown in the hills around his Anhui home to sell via the licensed Hong merchants in Canton to the overseas traders who came to the port to purchase goods.

Jiang made copious notes along the way and included details on everything that those who might travel the same route after him might find useful. This included the names of all the towns and villages along the land- and water routes he travelled, the distances between them, the places where barges could be hired, the permits and passes that would need to be purchased, suggestions on how much tip to give to the carriers, and the above suggestion on how much money to give to the different kinds of beggars one would encounter in specific places. He also included a small glossary of English terms. Most studies of the early forms of English in circulation in nineteenth-century China focus on the urban and coastal areas of contact, and on the scholarly and elite circles within which English language began to circulate from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Instead, Jiang Youke was a merchant rather than a member of the scholarly elite, and hailed not from an urban region but from the Chinese hinterland.

Merchants from the Chinese hinterland such as Anhui are not generally placed in the context of Sino-foreign interactions. The assumption is that the interactions between the Chinese and British empires occurred only after the first (1839-1842) and second (1857-1860) Opium Wars, and even then, only in the coastal regions where there was a strong British presence. Jiang Youke's vocabulary suggests we need to rethink that. It would seem that even in the first decades of the nineteenth century, well before the treaties signed at the end of the first Opium War forced the opening of the countryside to foreign missionaries, small-scale tea-traders from the backwaters of Anhui recognised the commercial advantages of acquiring linguistic skills.

My paper will use this case as a starting point for an exploration of the role of the Huizhou merchants in the transformation of the Chinese empire. It will focus on three issues: the involvement of Huizhou merchants in the commercial activities of the late imperial Chinese empire; the socio-political and cultural world of the port of Canton, and specifically the so-called 'Canton system', in place from 1757 to 1842; and, finally, the impact of the global economic connections created by the trade in Chinese commodities such as tea and porcelain on the inland world of the Huizhou merchants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Labour relations on British managed “estancias” in Tierra del Fuego: isolated inlands, or sites of imperial capitalism?

Nicolás Gómez Baeza, University of Warwick

In 1915, the General Manager of the sheep farming company *Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego*, a New Zealander with Scottish roots called Alexander Allan Cameron, was struggling to control daily tasks on the *estancias* (ranches or stations) on the Chilean side of Tierra del Fuego. In a dispute over how to observe the 1st of May, overseers and station-managers sought to deny workers permission to commemorate it, ignoring the agreements between the local labour federation and Cameron itself. Workers complained in their newspaper “*El Trabajo*” of being obligated to work on that day without exception by the high-ranked employees, violating the signature of their own General Manager.

The *estancias* of Tierra del Fuego were particular interior production spaces, located in pasture lands. At the same time, they were connected to maritime networks and to global imperial capitalism through seasonal transhumant migration and routes. This paper examines the functioning of the *estancias*, considering their daily labour disciplines, and explores the question of their interconnection, or else their isolation, from the perspective of their formations and everyday tasks. Is it possible to consider the *estancias* of Tierra del Fuego as isolated or rather connected interior spaces? What consequences did their connection or disconnection have for the development of particular capitalist and pastoralist labour regimes here?

To explore these questions, this paper focuses on labour disputes within the *Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego*, popularly known as the *Explotadora*. Founded in 1893, it was the biggest sheep farming company in Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost region of Argentina and Chile. Most of its managers were from the British World, like the aforementioned Cameron. It has been argued that they controlled the territory and its workspaces through the creation of effective and coordinated ways of communication and authority in alliance with the nation-states. Instructions from the general management flowed along networks out from the port city of Punta Arenas, to the inland *estancias*. In this respect, British-capitalist sovereignties and concepts of labour discipline may have been projected into the *estancias* of Tierra del Fuego. However, the above-mentioned example showed a disconnection or disparities on the disciplining of labour times and in the agreements, showing how informal practices and ideas emanated from the privacy of inland workspaces too. It merits, therefore, to explore similar cases, and to ask to what extent the *estancias* in Tierra del Fuego were under the effective control of the “*Explotadora*”, and were part of regional or even British-imperial networks of communication and labour discipline.

The US Midwest as a Crossroads of Empire

Kristin Hoganson (University of Illinois)

As scholarship on the Atlantic World, Pacific Rim, Caribbean basin, and maritime networks suggests, histories of linkages between the United States and the world have long focused on oceans, coasts, port cities, and islands as important thoroughfares, places of encounter, nodes of connection, and colonial sites. In the U.S. context, scholarship on the U.S./Mexican and, more recently, U.S./Canadian borderlands has also highlighted cross-border connections. The tendency to ocean-fronting areas and borderlands as particular spaces of connection from the mid-nineteenth century onward has contributed to the heartland myth, which casts the interior of the United States as a quintessentially national place, comparatively buffered from the rest of the world, with rural areas (as opposed to global cities such as Chicago) as the ultimate bastions of Americanness. Although the term “heartland” emerged in reference to a seat of global power, in the U.S. context, it came to refer more to a threatened white ethnonationalist core than to a networked imperial center.

In opposition to the idea that the rural Midwest has been more local than coastal areas and borderlands and more national than imperial, my paper will review recent scholarship on inland Indigenous empires in North America, colonial encounters in the middle of the continent, and ongoing circuits of empire through the rural Midwest after its incorporation into the United States. Time permitting, I will also reflect on the U.S./Mexican and U.S./Canadian borderlands as interior spaces (not only because of the actual location of the U.S./Mexican and U.S./Canadian borders but also because borderlands have spilled out far from actual borders, including into the U.S. Midwest) and inland waterways such as the Mississippi and Great Lakes as conduits to oceanic histories. I may also survey the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (1914-1964) to flesh out older understandings of the place of the Mississippi Valley in global and imperial histories. Although I will draw on my recent book, *The Heartland: An American History*, in this paper, my hope is to step back from my own research to reflect more generally on the imperial backstories to the modern Midwest.

Broken Hill – inland dreaming, frontier thinking

Katie Holmes (La Trobe)

The Wilyakali country on which the town of Broken Hill is sited is arid land, colloquially known as desert. Prior to European settlement this ancient flat landscape on the western edge of central NSW nurtured a fragile ecosystem of mulga scrub, saltbush and grasses and the reptiles and birds well adapted to desert temperatures and absence of any permanent water supply. When Europeans came with their sheep and rabbits, this fragile land began, at an alarming rate, to turn to dust. Mining compounded the desecration.

Broken Hill is the home of Broken Hill Propriety Limited, a parent company of the international mining conglomerate, BHP-Billiton. In Australia BHP markets itself as ‘The Big Australian’, a company which boasts humble origins mining lead, silver and zinc in the Australian desert and which credits itself as the heart of Australia’s economic success and identity. A less positive narrative connects the inland of Australia and the global mining empire BHP built – including oil and gas – to a fossil fuel industry that has shaped our Anthropocene world and the climate crisis it exemplifies.

Broken Hill is also a town where water politics in Australia get very heated. The town relies on water from the Murray Darling Basin, a large natural water system of interconnected rivers and lakes which is now heavily controlled and utilised via irrigation for agriculture, especially cotton, vegetable, tree and vine crops sold for both domestic and export consumption. The nearby town of Menindee was the supply point for Broken Hill’s water but in the summer of 2018/19 the Menindee lakes experienced a dramatic and tragic ‘fish kill’ when hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of fish died when a lack of water in the system led to insufficient oxygen in the water. Early in 2019 a new pipeline brought Broken Hill water from further downstream, bypassing Menindee. Many believe the need for the pipeline was created because of ‘water theft’ by cotton irrigators upstream.

This paper will consider Broken Hill as a case study of an inland region which brings together threads of many inland Empire narratives: a story of colonial dispossession and complex racial encounters; of mineral exploitation and an environmental legacy of degradation, scarred earth and toxic waste; a story of capital and power, where the appetites of global networks of mining and agriculture leave local communities fractured; a story of cultural adaptation and endeavour, where the ‘inland’ becomes a source of pride and creative inspiration, as well as an evocative setting for many a movie; a story of climate change where rising temperatures and concerns about water security test the limits of community and ecological resilience. Like many inland regions, the future of Broken Hill is uncertain.

Muslim Merchants, Inland Empires, and the Integration of the Eurasian Interior, c. 1750-c. 1850

Jagjeet Lally (University College London)

From about 1750, Muslims with limited or no commercial experience established new business ventures in various locales across the Eurasian interior - namely, the fringes of the expanding Russian, Chinese, and Afghan empires. This process seems to have been connected to imperial expansion and the liquidity it brought into the continental interior, as well as the patronage of certain groups by local political elites, with some of these arriviste entrepreneurs and their business networks even overtaking those of more established rivals. The outcomes - seemingly contradictory or paradoxical at first glance - were noteworthy in two further respects. In the first place, the emergence of new merchants and firms was linked to particular empires, yet the latter were far less durable than the trade networks whose rise they spurred or even nurtured, at least in some cases. Second, the integration of the economies of the continental interior was intrinsically linked to the deepening globalisation of the world economy along the maritime rimlands of continents, and yet had created a sort of economic periphery by c. 1850. This paper will examine these processes and outcomes, focussing especially on Afghan networks, and endeavour to broach the implications for the history of continental interiors, (inland) empires, and globalisation.

Global Processes and the Formation of the Central African Copperbelt, c.1890-1970

Duncan Money (Leiden University)

This paper examines the history of the Central African Copperbelt – a copper mining region strung out across the border between DR Congo and Zambia – in regional and global perspective from the late nineteenth century. Extractive industries in Africa, and many other parts of the world, have often been regarded as enclave economies, i.e. economies integrated into the world economy but with few substantive linkages to the nation or region in which they were situated. This paper argues that this perspective is incorrect. Using an analogy borrowed from physics, I see the establishment of large-scale copper mines in the 1900s as acting like a bowling ball placed on a stretched rubber sheet, bending and stretching the rest of the region towards them.

The mines and urban centres that developed around them were situated at the centre of complex networks of labour, energy, and food that criss-crossed the boundaries that divided the region between the British and Belgian empires. Hundreds of miles away from the mines, trees were denuded to create fuel, rivers dammed to generate electric power, new lands tilled to feed the burgeoning workforce, subsidiary mines sunk to provide coal, and tens of thousands of people coerced into becoming labour migrants.

This region in Central Africa became a vast economic and social unit because of global processes of European imperial expansion and the greatly increased importance of copper to the world economy from the late nineteenth century. Copper brought light and power and was required for processes of global connection – for instance, for undersea cables. Industrial economies required copper in ever-increasing quantities and the Copperbelt was soon one of the world's primary sources of copper. This was reflected in how contemporary residents of the Copperbelt saw themselves. As Fig. 1 suggests, rather than being situated in some out-of-the-way imperial outpost, contemporaries regarded themselves as forming an important centre in a web of imperial and transnational connections, with cords of light emanating from the mine across the world.



Fig. 1: Roan Antelope Mine connecting the world. Front cover of *Roan Antelope Magazine*, December 1952.

Opening up the interior: railways and creation of inland empire in 19th century colonial India

Aparajita Mukhopadhyay (University of Kent)

The proposed paper explores how new technologies transformed regional dynamics and incorporated inland empires within wider political and economic structures.

This broader point will be examined by underlining the role of railways in changing fortunes (economic and otherwise) of inland regions in nineteenth-century colonial India (modern South Asia).

Railways were introduced in the colonial India in the mid-nineteenth century (1853) with the explicit aim to integrate India and India's diverse natural resources to Britain's expanding empire. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that the famous Railway Minute of April 1853 penned by then Governor-General Lord Dalhousie provided a road map of future railway development in India by focusing on trunk lines that will 'open up inland' regions and connect far-flung areas to one another and to the wider global market. Interestingly, Dalhousie's Minutes remained the document that influenced the shaping of India's railway network (the fourth largest in the world) for next fifty years (i.e., till the turn of the twentieth century).

Broadly speaking, in context of colonial India, role of railways in integrating inland regions and to a wider global (imperial) marketplace have always received scholarly attention (Hurd, Bogart and Choudhury). However, these analyses have focused on larger geographical units (for instance British India), without adding crucial regional dimensions.

The proposed paper challenges the widely held historiographical assumption of railway network as having played a crucial part in selectively changing the character and well-being of some inland regions more than others. By focussing on economic fortunes of two fairly close towns in north India (*a*) Mirzapur and (*b*) Kanpur – both of which received railway connection roughly at the same time, the paper aims to interrogate role of new technologies of transit on hierarchies, relations and functions of inland regions.

The choice of regions has been influenced by two factors: (*i*) these places were significant even before railways and can therefore offer a pre/post railway comparison, bringing the role of technology in changing morphologies of regions in sharper focus; and (*ii*) the hubs also offer different variables, viz., proximity to river (the Ganges) or not; different kinds (broad and narrow gauge) of railway presence and so forth. The comparison therefore aims to offer preliminary answers to the question of role of technology in transforming regional dynamics in a colonial context.

The paper intends to explore how real is the assumption that railways played a very important role creating inland empires in colonies by bringing them at the intersection (both literally and metaphorically) of various changes.

What Did it Mean to Live in a "City of Refuge"?: From the Inland, North America's Great Dismal Swamp, Outward to the late Atlantic World

Marcus P. Nevius (University of Rhode Island)

Marronage - the most pervasive form of fugitive slave community formation, resistance, negotiation, and enslaver accommodation in the history of the Atlantic world - has recently attracted wide ranging scholarly interest. Historian Vincent Brown (2020) has framed the subject as central to the importance of the Jamaican insurrections of 1760-1, in which several of the island's inland maroon towns featured. Historian Johnhenry Gonzalez (2019) has drawn focus to Haiti's several early nineteenth century polities, in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, as a metaphorical "maroon nation" whose sovereignty depended, in part, upon inland zones. Historians Matthew J. Clavin (2019) and Nathaniel Millett (2013) have highlighted the strategic import, to agents of the British military, of the inland maroon community at Prospect Bluff in early nineteenth century West Florida; historian Larry Eugene Rivers (2012), the strategic importance of inland geographies, more broadly, during the maroon wars in nineteenth century Florida.

Historian Sylviane Diouf (2014) has provided a comparative framing of maroon activities in several North American inland zones from the lower Mississippi River valley to the Great Dismal Swamp of the lower Chesapeake. Indeed, the Great Dismal Swamp has recently attracted scholarly interest as a center of slave resistance, of marronage, and of a regional mercantile economy that supplied Atlantic markets with a variety of forest products and naval stores in the Age of Revolutions. Synthesizing this recent scholarship, this essay features my recent study, in primary sources and recent scholarship, of the Great Dismal as a "city of refuge" for enslaved laborers and *maroons* - freedom seekers who utilized inland landscapes to provide cover long term flight. It turns on new questions inspired by the opportunity to more closely consider the Dismal as an inland zone in the context of this symposium. This work promises to add to the emergent consensus that historical complexity matters, particularly in the study of tenuous imperial and early republican claims to inland landscapes in the Atlantic world.

French Imperial Ambitions & Infrastructure Rivalry in the Era of the Chickasaw Wars

Al Zuercher Reichardt, University of Missouri

State infrastructural development is often cast as an internal process. In the case of eighteenth-century France and its colonies, the institutions and practices of the modernizing state have largely been studied through a national lens as expressions of the state's capacity (or lack thereof) to enforce policy within its defined territory. Turning to the eighteenth-century inland region of the greater Ohio Valley, however, my paper pushes us to take a more outward and entangled perspective on French imperial state formation. First, I argue that the expansion of the eighteenth-century French infrastructure state was both part and consequence of broader imperial rivalries, most notably with Britain. Second, I argue that French infrastructural development and territorial ambitions were not simply subject to but were also profoundly shaped by long-standing Indigenous systems of "path diplomacy."

Over the 1730s, 1740s, and early 1750s, French ministers of the *Marine*, colonial officials, and military personnel envisioned transportation development and improved communications as necessary tools of expansive colonialism. By constructing and improving pathways across the heart of the continent—construction largely carried out by military bodies in a region of legally ambiguous and overlapping sovereignties—these officials hoped to wield infrastructural power not simply to control colonial and slave populations, native allies, and French soldiers. They also boldly aimed to wield that power in contested territory, with the specific goals of countering British settlement, subduing Indigenous enemy nations, and augmenting the empire's land claims by establishing a regular communication between Louisiana and Canada.

To do so, however, required more than just the widening of pathways and the construction of forts. French officials also had to confront the landscape of politics—a landscape still dominated by Indigenous practices and understandings of geopolitics. In this long-standing system, roads, waterways, and paths were as much physical as symbolic expressions of power. Rather than delineated by hard boundary lines of sovereign space and land, the continent was marked and crisscrossed by roads and paths that carved spheres of influence and range, and that (via treaty and tradition) structured relationships of subordination and alliance.

The rash of French reconnoitering expeditions and military fortification during and after the Chickasaw Wars were thus not simply an attempt to remake the North American physical landscape—as military supply roads and correspondence channels reshaped waterways and carved out buffalo traces and historic Indian trails—but were also part of a conscious effort by French officials to remake alliances and the rules of diplomacy. Unsurprisingly, then, these developments were also quickly met with violent confrontation and contestation, both by a rival European power—the British Empire, which by the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, looked to remake the transportation landscape in its own vision—and by Indigenous nations—Chickasaw, Cherokee, Haudenosaunee, and more, who sought to not only counter European expansion, but to protect and maintain the existing geopolitical system.

Inner Asian Origins of the Soviet Informal Empire: Mongolia and the Communist International, 1920s–1940s

Ivan Sablin, Heidelberg University

This paper traces the origins of the Soviet imperial project in Inner Asia and discusses Mongolia as the starting point of the informal Soviet empire. As a polity built and governed through diversity, the Soviet empire consisted of the inner (formal) and outer (informal) parts, that is the state of the USSR and its dependencies in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, respectively. In the 1920s–1940s, Mongolia functioned as a nominally independent polity, which was governed through the Communist International (Comintern, 1919–1943) and bilateral relations with Moscow. Relying on and further developing the concept of the imperialism of “free nations,” first proposed by Prasenjit Duara, the paper investigates the structural adjustments in Mongolian state-building, with the focus on the party bodies, representative institutions, and legal developments. The Soviet informal empire as a heterogeneous yet coherent polity had attracted some scholarly attention since Charles Wolf proposed the concept, but its origins had been largely overlooked. Most research on Soviet dependencies concentrated on the post-WWII developments in Eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, in East Asia, while the first two non-socialist people’s republics, Tannu-Tuva and Mongolia remained understudied. Whereas Tuva was annexed to the USSR in 1944, Mongolia was formally recognized as independent by the USSR and China in 1945–1946, reaffirming its status as a model satellite state. The paradox between the theoretical development of the idea of the World Revolution with its focus on Western Europe and its practical implementation only in Mongolia and Tannu-Tuva owed much to the post-WWI dynamics in Europe, where radical socialists did not come to power, and the politics in the Inner Asian borderlands, where the Bolsheviks became successful for a number of reasons. The Russian imperial experience allowed them to quickly shift from the initial plan of an egalitarian World Revolution to one of building a hierarchical, heterogeneous governance structure. Regional politicians, most notably Elbek-Dorzhi Rinchino and other Buryat-Mongols of southern Siberia, became the key co-authors of the Soviet imperial project, conceptualizing the idea of establishing dependencies in Inner and East Asia and ensuring the success of the military operation turned the Mongolian Revolution in 1921. Finally, the idea of external patronage or suzerainty was important for Mongolian politics and exemplified in the relations with Beijing in the Qing Empire and the search for a new patron after its collapse. The case of Mongolia sheds light on “informal” empire-building in the twentieth century and foregrounds indigenous agency in it.