

# THE HYDROGRAPHY OF MONGOLIA

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Mongolia is situated on a highly elevated plateau surrounded by mountains. In general, Mongolia is a mountainous country with an average elevation of 1,580masl. The mountains are largely concentrated in the western part of the country, where the highest peaks reach 4,362masl.

The principle orographic elements of the country are the Mongolian Altai and Gobi Altai to the west, and Khangai and Khentey to the north. The Gerat Lakes lie between the Mongolian Altai and Khangai. To the south, the Khangai formations are separated from the Gobi Altai by the valley, which is dotted with lakes.

There are more than 3,800 rivers and streams with regular runoff and 8,000 riverlets in the country. Most of them are mountain rivers. There are 187 glaciers of total volume  $63\text{km}^3$ . There are 3,500 lakes, each with a surface area exceeding  $0.1\text{km}^2$ , and with a total surface area of  $15,600\text{km}^2$  and total volume of  $500\text{km}^3$ .

Three large catchment basins meet in Mongolia, which influence the water resources of the whole world. These are the catchment basins of the Pacific Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, and Central Asia. From a hydrographical viewpoint, the meeting of these catchment basins is an interesting phenomenon because it rarely occurs on the mainland.

All of western Mongolia, approximately 35% of the total area of the country, is part of the catchment basin of Central Asia. Because this is a self-contained hydrological system, where the rivers do not flow out of their catchment area but mostly end in lakes, it is specially suited for investigating the water cycle. In such a system, a variety of eco-regions can be found close together - glaciers, tundra, forest, steppe, and desert, all situated alongside rivers.