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Chapter 1: Profile

Introduction

Perhaps best known for its famous 13th century ruler, Genghis Khan, Mongolia is a young democracy previously under the stewardship of the former Soviet Union. In recent decades, Mongolia has witnessed rapid urbanization and boasts three highly developed, modern cities: Ulaanbaatar (the capital of Mongolia and its most populous city), Darhan, and Erdenet. Much of the country is unspoiled and populated by nomadic and semi-nomadic herders. The population of Mongolia is around 2.7 million people, nearly 44% of whom live in the three principal cities.¹ Mongolia consists of two major ethnic groups: Mongol (94.9%) and Turkic (5%). Ethnic Chinese and Russians are negligible at a combined 0.1% of the population.² Traditionally, Mongolians were a nomadic herding people whose livelihood depended on livestock. They grew wheat, barley, and oats in regions where the climate was suitable. Rapid large-scale urbanization beginning in the 1980s has forced people into manufacturing, industrial, and service positions.³



© Zbigniew Kulak
Mongolian woman

Geography

Area

Mongolia is a landlocked country slightly smaller than Alaska, located in north-central Asia, and shares borders with Russia and China. Its northern border with Russia extends 3,543 km (2202 mi) from the Altai Mountains in the northwest to the vast steppe in the northeast. Mongolia also shares a 4,677 km (2906 mi) border with China to the west, south, and east.⁴



© Karina Moreton
Altai Mountains, Western Mongolia

¹ City Population, "Mongolia," 1 April 2010, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Mongolia.html>

² Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 13 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

³ BBC News, "Mongolia Country Profile," 18 October 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1235560.stm#media

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 13 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

Climate

Mongolia has an extreme continental climate. However, because of contrasts in geographic features, conditions vary throughout the country. Precipitation ranges from as high as 600mm (23.62in) annually in the Altai, Hentiy, and Hovsgol Mountains to less than 100mm (3.94in) annually in southern Mongolia's Gobi Desert. Some areas of the Gobi see no rainfall for years at a time.⁵



© Karina Moreton
Bayanzag, Gobi Desert, Mongolia

Mongolia is uniformly cold, but temperatures vary based on the region. Temperatures can fluctuate by as much as 30°C (86°F) in a single day.⁶ In winter, the mountainous regions of northern and western Mongolia average -35°C; the Gobi Desert in the south averages -15°C; and the remainder of the country averages -20°C to -25°C. During the winter months, from November through February, all rivers, lakes, and streams freeze.⁷ Permafrost covers approximately 60% of Mongolia.⁸

Summer generally lasts from May to September, when the country receives its highest precipitation. Glacial runoff and snowmelt feed the rivers and lakes. Temperatures rise to 15°C–20°C (59°F–68°F) in the mountainous regions, 20°C–25°C (68°F–77°F) in the steppes, and may exceed 40°C (104°F) in the Gobi.⁹ The extremes of climate and topographic features in Mongolia give rise to devastating windstorms that usually begin in the spring. Known locally as *Ugalz*, these winds primarily occur in the desert and steppe zones, and can delay or block nomadic herders from reaching their grazing lands.¹⁰

⁵ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., “Land and People,” n.d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/land_and_people

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Mongolia: The Land: Climate,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/389335/Mongolia>

⁷ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., “Land and People,” n.d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/land_and_people

⁸ Robert L. Worden and Andrea Matles Savada, eds., “Climate,” in *Mongolia: A Country Study*,” Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1989, <http://countrystudies.us/mongolia/34.htm>

⁹ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., “Land and People,” n.d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/land_and_people

¹⁰ L. Natsagdorj, et al., “Analysis of Dust Storms Observed in Mongolia During 1937–1999,” in *Atmospheric Environment*, vol. 37 (issues 1401–1411), March 2003, <http://karws.gso.uri.edu/DustClub/Articles/Natsagdorj%202003%20Dust%20in%20Mongolia.pdf>

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

Mongolia has six separate geographic divisions: alpine, taiga, forest steppe, steppe, desert steppe, and desert. The alpine zone of Mongolia is characterized by lichen-covered boulders and rocks making up less than 5% of the country. This zone is found only above the tree line in the high areas of the Altai Mountains to the northwest, the Hangay Mountains in central Mongolia, and the extreme north of the country surrounding Hovsgol



© Maria B.
Mongolia landscape

Nuur. The winter climate is extremely cold and the growing season is short.¹¹ The taiga, located primarily in northern Mongolia, receives high precipitation in the summer and very low temperatures in the winter. Part of the vast Russian taiga forest, this relatively undisturbed coniferous forest dominates the landscape.

The forest steppe of Mongolia extends across the north-central region of the country and slopes downward from the taiga of the Altai Mountains in the west. Covering approximately 25% of the country, this biologically diverse zone contains both forest and pastureland important for the subsistence of herders and their livestock.¹² The steppe of Mongolia extends from the far east of the country in a band that reaches the great lakes basin of the west. This zone is the traditional pastureland of the semi-nomadic herders and contains the world's largest unspoiled grassland.¹³ The desert steppe of Mongolia covers approximately 20% of the country and encompasses the great lakes basin between the Altai and Hangay mountain ranges, extending south and east to lie between the steppe and the desert zones. Receiving little precipitation, the landscape is covered by parched grass that suffers from destructive storms caused by the *Ugalz* winds.

The desert zone is the home of the Gobi Desert. This inhospitable region sees little precipitation and suffers high temperatures in the summer. The landscape consists of rocky mountains, desert flats of stone and rock, and small areas of sand dunes. Still, the area is home to endangered species, such as the wild camel, wild ass, and the Gobi bear.¹⁴

¹¹ Legend Tour, "Information for Travelers: Geographical Features," 2000, http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/informations/geographical_features.shtml

¹² Legend Tour, "Information for Travelers: Geographical Features," , 2000, http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/informations/geographical_features.shtml

¹³ Discover Mongolia, "Natural Zones of Mongolia," 2010, http://www.discovermongolia.mn/country/Natural_zone.html

¹⁴ Legend Tour, "Information for Travelers: Geographical Features," 2000, http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/informations/geographical_features.shtml

Rivers and Lakes

Mongolia's abundant rivers originate from small, isolated watersheds in the three main mountain ranges: Altai, Hangay, and Hentiy.¹⁵ Many rivers and streams are formed by runoff from the lakes and their volume is relatively low. They freeze for up to 6 months of every year. The two most important rivers in Mongolia are the Selenge and the Orhon. Located in central Mongolia and only sometimes used as transportation routes, they flow northward to feed Lake Baikal in Russia. Many of Mongolia's numerous rivers—especially in the south-central and southeastern parts of the country—dry up in the vast expanses of the desert steppe and desert.¹⁶



© flickr.Marcus / flickr.com
Orkhon River

Mongolia's lakes (*nuur*) are of special significance. Rivers flowing from the mountains form a series of fresh and saltwater lakes in the great lakes basin between the Altai and Hangay mountain ranges. Mongolia's largest lake with an area of approximately 5000 sq km (1930 sq mi) is the Uvs Nuur, a saltwater lake in the extreme northwest of the country.¹⁷ Hovsgol Nuur, located in the extreme north of Mongolia, is Mongolia's largest freshwater lake.¹⁸ Called both "The Blue Pearl of Mongolia" and "The Mother Sea," Hovsgol Nuur has been an important grazing and migration site for nomadic herders for approximately 4000 years. Many believe that Hovsgol Nuur kindled the development of shamanism, Mongolia's ancient, traditional form of religion.¹⁹

The lower area of the great lakes basin is important to Mongolian culture as the cradle of settlement; the ruins of ancient communities found in the area include rock drawings,

¹⁵ Batima Punsalma, , and Bolormaa Buyndalai, "Trends in River and Lake Ice in Mongolia," (AIACC Working Paper, May 2004), http://www.aiaccproject.org/working_papers/Working%20Papers/AIACC_WP_No004.pdf

¹⁶ Welcome 2 Mongolia, "Rivers and Water," 2011, <http://www.welcome2mongolia.com/tourism-destination/western-mongolia-camps/rivers>

¹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme, World Conservation Monitoring Centre, "Uvs Nuur Basin: Mongolia and Tuva, Russian Federation," 2003, <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/medialibrary/2010/09/29/40b1e569/UvsNuur.pdf>

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Hovsgol Lake," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/273367/Hovsgol-Lake>

¹⁹ Mongol Environmental Conservation, "Lake Hovsgol Management," 2011, <http://mongolec.org/programs/lake-hovsgol-management>

burial mounds, military artifacts, and the more recent remains of Buddhist settlements.²⁰ Currently, small numbers of nomadic and semi-nomadic herders occupy the basin.

Major Cities

Ulaanbaatar

Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia's capital and most populous city with a population of approximately 1.1 million.²¹ Once home to nomadic princes, Ulaanbaatar was founded in 1639 with the construction of the Da Khure monastery. The city has always had a religious significance for the Mongolian people. It sits along the Tuul River surrounded by the Four Holy Peaks, which are major pilgrimage sites for the Buddhist population.



© tutam / flickr.com
Ulaanbaatar

Since its establishment, Ulaanbaatar has occupied a strategic position in north-central Mongolia, situated on the caravan route between Russia and China.

Today, Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia's transportation hub. It has the country's only international airport and connects to both the Chinese and Trans-Siberian railways.²² The city has a developed infrastructure of paved roads, modern buildings, internet use, and modern communications. From 1990 to 2011, Ulaanbaatar experienced a population increase of almost 70%. Such rapid urbanization has resulted in the growth of "ger districts," which refer to traditional Mongolian tents used by urban migrants who cannot find housing in the city.²³ High unemployment also plagues Ulaanbaatar, the nation's center of industrial and textile production and its service and administrative center.

²⁰ United Nations Environment Programme, World Conservation Monitoring Centre, "Uvs Nuur Basin: Mongolia and Tuva, Russian Federation," 1999, <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/medialibrary/2010/09/29/40b1e569/UvsNuur.pdf>

²¹ Denver Sister Cities International, "Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia," 2011, <http://denversistercities.org/ulaanbaatar/>

²² Talk Talk, "Ulaanbaatar," 2011, <http://www.talktalk.co.uk/reference/encyclopaedia/hutchinson/m0014708.html>

²³ Pearly Jacob, "Mongolia: The Land of Steppes Searches for Urban Planning Solution," Eurasianet, 7 January 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62619>

Erdenet

Located in the valley between the Selenge and Orhon rivers in northern Mongolia, Erdenet is a major industrial center that was built as a joint venture with the Soviet Union in the 1970s. The primary purpose for the development of this city was to exploit the rich natural resources of the area, specifically copper and molybdenum ore.²⁴ These are two of Mongolia's principal exports and are crucial to the country's economy. Erdenet is responsible for 43% of total exports and 40% of the total industrial production of Mongolia.²⁵



© harunire / flickr.com
Main street, Erdenet

Darhan

Darhan is another industrial city, situated northwest of the capital Ulaanbaatar. Darhan was built by the Soviets in the 1960s as a model of strict urban planning.²⁶ Today, it has a highly developed infrastructure of paved roads, railways, satellite TV, and cell phone services. Darhan's main output is construction materials, such as cement and bricks, but it also possesses rich deposits of coal, copper, and iron. Food processing, livestock, and textiles play significant roles in the city's economy.

Choybalsan

Located in easternmost Dornod *aymag* (the Mongolian term for provincial-level administration), Choybalsan was a monastic settlement that grew into a trade town along the China–Siberia route. Despite having the highest unemployment rate in the nation, Choybalsan is the economic center of eastern Mongolia. It supports a branch of the Trans-Siberian Railway and a truck route connecting to Ulaanbaatar in northern Mongolia and Hovd in the far west.²⁷ The city lies entirely in the steppe and is

²⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mongolia: The Economy: Mining and Industry," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/389335/Mongolia/27447/Mining-and-industry>

²⁵ Business Mongolia, "Erdenet Provides 512 Billion MNT Annually to the State Budget," 2008, <http://www.business-mongolia.com/mongolia/2008/12/01/erdenet-provides-512-billion-mnt-annually-to-the-state-budget/>

²⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Darhan," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/389335/Mongolia/27447/Mining-and-industry>

²⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Choybalsan," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/114790/Choybalsan>

surrounded by vast pastures and land for cultivating wheat. Light industry, mining, food processing, and construction contribute to the local economy.²⁸

Olgiy

Located in the Bayan-Olgiy *aymag* in the far northwest of the country, approximately 90% of Olgiy's population is Kazakh; the remaining 10% are Mongolians of different ethnic groups. Unlike the rest of Mongolia, Olgiy is a Muslim city, and the Kazakhs enjoy strong ties with Russia and Kazakhstan. Olgiy lies 1645 km west of the capital Ulaanbaatar. Because it is far from the Mongolia's cultural center, Olgiy has retained strong Kazakh traditions into the 21st century.²⁹

History

Early History and Genghis Khan

Humans have inhabited the region of modern Mongolia for thousands of years but it was not until the third century B.C.E. that they began to form tribes. A pastoral-nomadic people called the Xiong-nu occupied the Mongolian steppe and established a social system of warriors, herders, artisans, and slaves. Around 552 C.E. the Turks rose to power and ruled the steppe area until 744 when they were displaced by a group known as the Uighur who were later dispelled in 840 by the Kirgiz. The Turks and Uighur both advocated Buddhism, laying the foundation for faith-based tolerance that remains an integral feature of Mongolian culture today. When the Kirgiz drove the Uighur from their capital in 840, they ushered in an age of anarchy with loosely organized tribes engaging in almost constant warfare until they were unified by Genghis Khan in the beginning of the 13th century.³⁰



DoD image
Genghis Khan

Born Temujin in either 1162 or 1167 Genghis Khan led his army to unite the disparate tribes of Mongolia by 1206. He established a military feudal system that included aspects of the earlier pastoral feudal system. However, unlike the pastoral system in which

²⁸ Legend Tour, "The Regions of Mongolia: Dornod Aimag," 2011, <http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/regions/dornod-aimag.shtml>

²⁹ Legend Tour, "The Regions of Mongolia: Bayan-Ulgii Aimag," 2011, <http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/regions/bayan-ulgii-aimag.shtml>

³⁰ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149 (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

loyalty was to the tribe and based on blood, Genghis Khan's military system shifted loyalty to military lords, culminating in loyalty to the great khan himself. Genghis Khan not only boosted loyalty to himself but also managed to create a homogenous Mongolian people rather than a fractured, loosely organized confederation of tribes. Modern Mongolia remains largely homogenous.³¹

After unifying the Mongolian people, Genghis Khan launched a campaign to conquer neighboring lands. Archery and horsemanship were the keys to Mongol success in warfare and remain an integral part of Mongolian culture today.³² By 1222 Genghis Khan's empire extended from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east.

From Conquest to Empire

In 1227, while on a military campaign in China, Genghis Khan suddenly died, and the expansion of his empire fell to his four sons and later his grandsons. Batu, one of Genghis Khan's grandsons, led a campaign from 1236-1242 that became known as the Golden Horde. Batu brought Russia under Mongolian control in 1238 and later defeated Poland, Serbia, and Hungary.

Hulegu, another grandson, had a goal of extending the Mongolian empire to the Mediterranean. He conquered Alamut in Iran in 1256 and later sacked Baghdad and captured Syria. Hulegu was eventually repelled by Egyptian forces and returned to settle in the region of Azerbaijan.^{33, 34, 35}



© Michael Foley
Ghengis Khan monument

Perhaps the best known of Genghis Khan's grandsons is Khubilai (or Kublai) Khan who created China's Yuan dynasty. Khubilai Khan began his campaign to conquer China in

³¹ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149 (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

³² Morris Rossabi, "All the Khan's Horses," *Natural History*, October 1994, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/conquests/khans_horses.pdf

³³ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149 (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

³⁴ Columbia County Board of Education, "Mongol Eurasia and Its Aftermath, 1200–1500," n.d., <http://www.ccboe.net/Teachers/.../5F276CF24A594A228212F7AE7F29D080.doc>

³⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Iran: The Seljuks and the Mongols: The Mongol Invasion," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran/32174/The-II-Khans>

1257. He defeated his brother in 1263 to become Khan, thus becoming ruler of the entire eastern empire. Khubilai Khan established his capital at Daidu (Beijing), and in 1268 began expanding his territory. It soon included lands from northern India to the Pacific Ocean and from Lake Baikal in the north to the South China Sea.³⁶

Eventually Yuan Dynasty rulers drained their coffers with elaborate construction projects and failed military campaigns into Southeast Asia and Japan, eventually leading to economic collapse. Massive flooding in the 1340s led to famine that increased public discontent to the point of rebellion. In 1368, the peasant-led, native Chinese Ming Dynasty took control of China, making the Yuan one of the shortest lived of China's major dynasties.³⁷

The years from 1350–1691 have been called the Age of Disintegration. The late Yuan dynasty was fraught with dissent and outright revolution. Internal strife and open warfare between Mongolian tribes fractured the unity of the empire.³⁸ Constant internal warfare weakened the Mongolian tribes, who in 1691 were taken under the control of China's Manchu-led Qing dynasty.³⁹ To the west, Mongolian groups, such as the Kalmyk, were slowly pulled under Russian rule. The Russian goal was to integrate Mongolians with their national identity while the Manchu-run Qing Dynasty favored keeping the Mongolian tribes fractured.⁴⁰ Both Russia and China continued to manipulate Mongolian society and politics until 1911 when, with Russian backing, the Mongolians declared their independence from China.⁴¹

³⁶ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149, (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

³⁷ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149, (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

³⁸ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149 (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

³⁹ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

⁴⁰ Larry Moses and Stephan A. Halkovic, Jr., *Introduction to Mongolian History and Culture*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 149, (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1985).

⁴¹ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

Mongolia in the 20th Century

In 1919, a Chinese faction took advantage of Russia's ongoing Civil War and dispatched troops to bring Mongolia back under Chinese control. Anti-communist White Russian forces entered Mongolia and drove out the Chinese; they were themselves later defeated by Soviet Russians. The Soviets cultivated relationships with the Mongolians, and the Mongolian People's Republic was declared on November 25, 1924, under the control of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP).^{42, 43}



© Lkhmaa / Wikipedia.org
White Sulde of the Mongol Empire

The early communist period in Mongolia grew out of harsh conditions. Traditional authorities still held sway for the people, and the government was disorganized. During the 1930s, the Mongolian government launched reforms against the aristocracy and religious establishments. Impossibly high taxes were levied against Buddhist monasteries thus ensuring their closure. The communist government purged Buddhist leaders when they revolted, and began the large-scale slaughter of monks and religious leaders. Mongolia's religious establishments were systematically closed. There was a campaign to incarcerate or execute clergy between 1928 and the close of World War II.⁴⁴

By 1949, China had recognized Mongolia's independence and set up diplomatic relations with the MPRP. Mongolia continued under single-party rule with backing from the Soviet Union, and in 1961 became a member of the United Nations. Mongolia extended its diplomatic reach in 1987 when it established diplomatic relations with the United States.

By 1989, Mongolians had tired of communist single-party rule. Demonstrations began, and in December, the Mongolian Democratic Association was organized. Mongolia's watershed year was 1990. The Soviets agreed to remove their troops from Mongolia, the Constitution was amended to provide for a multi-party system and new elections, the first democratic elections were held, and the nation's first democratically elected leader took

⁴² Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

⁴³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Mongolia since 1900," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/389335/Mongolia>

⁴⁴ B. Siklos, "Mongolian Buddhism: A Defensive Account," in *Mongolia Today*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 155–182.

office. It was not until 1996, however, that power in Mongolia shifted from communist control to a coalition of democratic parties.⁴⁵

Government

Today Mongolia employs a parliamentary government administered from the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, which is an independent municipality. The chief of state is the president, and the prime minister is the head of government. Cabinet members are nominated by the prime minister in consultation with the president and confirmed by parliament.⁴⁶ Mongolia itself is divided into 21 provinces—called *aymags*—that are administered by local *hurals*, or governors.⁴⁷



The legislature of the Mongolian government, the State Great Hural, constitutes the highest authority and has the following primary functions: to act as a legislative mechanism, to determine the organization and activities of the executive and judicial branches, and to govern according to the rule of law and the interests of the Mongolian people. The State Great Hural has constitutional authority to make decisions regarding social, economic, and state structure.⁴⁸

Mongolia's constitution provides for an independent judiciary. The three branches of the judiciary—criminal, civil, and administrative—rule at the national (*aymag*) and district (*somon*) levels. Based on continental (European) and Russian law, the judiciary supervises the implementation of the constitution, adjudicates violations of constitutional provisions, and solves disputes.^{49, 50}

⁴⁵ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

⁴⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 13 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

⁴⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 13 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

⁴⁸ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., "Government: Legislative Power: Parliament of Mongolia," n. d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/government/legislative_power_parliament_of_mongolia.php

⁴⁹ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., "Government: Legislative Power: Parliament of Mongolia," n. d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/government/legislative_power_parliament_of_mongolia.php

Economy

Agriculture

The Mongolian people have traditionally been nomadic or semi-nomadic herders. Due to Mongolia's harsh climate, growing seasons are short and unpredictable. The landscape has never been conducive to commercial agriculture, though in suitable regions, Mongolians would plant small crops and return later to harvest them.⁵¹ Since mobility was vital in a violent and uncertain landscape prone to warfare, the nomadic herders of the steppes relied mostly on peaceful trade and extortion to obtain much-needed agricultural products. Today, animal herding remains the largest sector of agriculture, providing the people with food, income, transportation, and exports. Goat husbandry increased during the 1990s to meet the demand for the export of cashmere to the international market. Mongolians cultivate crops on a relatively small scale due to the harsh climate and lack of arable land. What they produce—cereals, potatoes, and vegetables—they use mainly for self-sufficiency. Forestry, fisheries, and fur production are minor contributors to the agricultural sector of Mongolia.⁵²



© shenxy / flickr.com
Mongolia grassland

Mining

Mining activity in Mongolia developed extensively during the period of Soviet influence. Mongolia's third-largest city, Erdenet, was built with Soviet assistance for the sole purpose of copper mining. Non-fuel mineral mining, the economy's fourth-largest sector, today constitutes approximately 27% of GDP, 64% of all exports, and 16% of all tax revenue. Output of the famous Erdenet mine is declining, and the Mongolian government is negotiating with foreign companies over mining operations in the southern Gobi. Mongolia's rich uranium deposits, primarily in the eastern region near Choybalsan, have been the source of much investment in Mongolia's mining industry, especially from Russia.^{53, 54}

⁵⁰ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

⁵¹ Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 46 (1), June 1986, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2719074>

⁵² *Encyclopedia of the Nations*, "Mongolia: Location and Size, Population, Animal Herding, Crop Cultivation, Mining," <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Asia-and-the-Pacific/Mongolia.html>

⁵³ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., "Government: Legislative Power: Parliament of Mongolia," n.d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/economy_and_trade

Tourism

Because of its natural beauty and variety of geographic features, tourism in Mongolia has developed rapidly in recent years. Mongolia currently has more than 450 tourism-related companies registered with the country, and as of 2008, tourism comprises approximately 18% of GDP with a growth rate of 15–20% per year. The Mongolian Tourism Association is the main organization that develops tourism in Mongolia. Its goal is to develop tourism for adventure, cultural, and eco travelers.⁵⁵

Media

The democratic revolution in 1990 ended 70 years of state-run media in Mongolia. By 1998, Mongolia had passed the Law of Press Freedom, which forbids state ownership or financing of media and its organizations. However, the subsequent rise to power of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) effectively halted any new reforms concerning freedom of the press, and as of 2001, many radio and television stations in Mongolia were still state-run.⁵⁶



© Juho Korhonen
Ger with Satellite

In 2010, Mongolia had a well-developed media environment with over 300 private and public print and broadcast outlets. Nomadic and semi-nomadic people use public radio for information; satellite TV use is on the rise. Mongolia has a solid newspaper base that includes 16 daily papers, but they are concentrated primarily in the capital Ulaanbaatar and the other principal cities of Erdenet and Darhan.⁵⁷ Overall, the press in Mongolia is free, but accusations of government monitoring and intimidation of journalists are commonplace.⁵⁸ The country's post-communist media is still developing. Although

⁵⁴ John C. K. Daly, "Mongol-Russian Uranium Cooperation," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, 9 July 2008, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4900>

⁵⁵ Embassy of Mongolia, Washington, D.C., "Government: Legislative Power: Parliament of Mongolia," n. d., http://www.mongolianembassy.us/about_mongolia/tourism

⁵⁶ UNESCO, "The Mongolian Media Landscape Sector Analysis," April 2007, http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=25643&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁵⁷ BBC News, "Mongolia Country Profile," 18 October 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1235560.stm#media

⁵⁸ Leah Kohlenberg, "Mongolia Explores the Nuances of a Free Press and Free Speech," *Eurasianet.org*, 9 February 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020700.shtml>

media outlets welcome help from abroad, journalism remains biased and is only now beginning to express nonpartisanship.⁵⁹

Ethnic Groups

Broadly, Mongolia consists of two major ethnic groups: the Mongols and the Kazakhs. There are a total of 20 Mongol ethnic subgroups, 19 in Mongolia proper. Of these, the Khalka are the dominant group and represent 80% of the Mongol group.⁶⁰ Despite the number of ethnic subgroups, the Mongols share a homogenous culture whose distinctions consist of subtle variations in dialect, history, and national costume. Most of the Mongol groups traditionally followed shamanism or adopted Tibetan Buddhism, though atheistic communism later diminished those practices. Kazakhs, on the other hand, speak a Turkic language, follow Islam, and are ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Mongols.

Khalkha

Khalkha Mongols see themselves as the true descendants of Genghis Khan, and feel they represent the true, undiluted Mongolian culture and language. The Khalkha are the most widely dispersed of the Mongol ethnic groups, and they can be found in every region of the country. Their dialect is the official language of Mongolia and is used as the language of education and official business.⁶¹

Dorvod

Part of the Hovd provinces (*aymags*), the Dorvod people are the second-largest Mongol ethnic group. They were instrumental in helping to create the original Mongolian nation under Genghis Khan and for centuries have been known for their famous storytellers. The Dorvod, are semi-nomadic people who raise horses, cattle, and sheep.⁶²

Buriat

Concentrated in the Dornod and Hentiy provinces (*aymags*)—the birthplace of Genghis Khan—the Buriat people are similar to the Khalkha, only exhibiting only minor

⁵⁹ Layton Croft and Traer Sunley, “National Public Radio Veterans Support Mongolian Independent Radio,” 3 October 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav100402a.shtml>

⁶⁰ Donald R. DeGlopper, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Ethnic and Linguistic Groups” in *Mongolia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1991).

⁶¹ Robert L. Worden and Andrea Matles Savada, eds., “The Society: Ethnic and Linguistic Groups,” in *Mongolia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1989, <http://countrystudies.us/mongolia/38.htm>

⁶² Mandal, “Oirad Mongols,” 2007, http://www.mandal.ca/mongolia/o/Oirad_Mongols.html

differences, such as dialect. Traditionally, the Buriat based their society on the clan, and clan membership dictated social and political status.^{63, 64}

Dariganga

Contemporary Dariganga occupy the southeastern region of Mongolia near the Gobi Desert in Suhbaatar *aymag*. Although some live in cities, most Dariganga are still nomadic herders who raise cattle, sheep, and horses. Some stories relate the relocation of the Dariganga by the Qing dynasty to raise horses for the emperor.⁶⁵

Kazakh

Mongolia's largest ethnic minority, the Kazakhs, speak a Turkic language. They are practicing Muslims who hold tightly to their cultural traditions and heritage. They occupy the far western Bayan-Olgii province (*aymag*), which isolates them from the rest of the country. They speak their own language, Kazakh, which is also the language of instruction in the local school system and is used in local government offices. Traditionally, the Kazakhs of Mongolia are stockbreeders and hunters, and are famed both for their horses and for hunting eagles.⁶⁶



© Matthew Winterburn
Nomadic Family in Gobi Desert

⁶³ G. Chingis, "Buryats and Mongolian buryats," *UB Post*, 7 September 2010, http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5294&Itemid=41

⁶⁴ Christopher Koplanski, "Map of Ethnic Groups," 2008, <http://www.chriskaplonski.com/mongolia/ethnicmap.html> ⁶⁵ Selena Travel, "The Wild East of Mongolia," 2011, http://www.selenatravel.com/tours/mongolia/tours_to_eastern_mongolia.html

⁶⁵ Selena Travel, "The Wild East of Mongolia," 2011, http://www.selenatravel.com/tours/mongolia/tours_to_eastern_mongolia.html

⁶⁶ R.L. Worden and A.M. Savada, eds, "The Society and Its Environment: Ethnic and Linguistic Groups: Mongols and Kazakhs," in *Mongolia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 7 December 2010, http://www.photoglobe.info/ebooks/mongolia/cstudies_mongolia_0051.html

Chapter 1: Assessment

1. Mongolia supports a policy of freedom of the press.

True

Mongolia adheres to the Law of Press Freedom passed in 1998, but it is subject to government monitoring and suffers from bias.

Mongolia is a country well suited to agriculture.

False

Although some Mongolians engage in agriculture for self-sufficiency, the climate is too harsh, and the growing season too short, to support commercial agriculture.

2. Mining has become a major component of the economy of Mongolia.

True

Non-fuel mining constitutes a large portion of Mongolia's GDP, and copper and gold combined constitute over 50% of Mongolia's exports.

Mongolia exercises a parliamentary system of government.

True

Mongolia employs a parliamentary government administered from the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. The president is the chief of state and the prime minister is the head of government.

Mongolia is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

False

Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world with an average of 1.6 people per square kilometer.

Chapter 2: Religion

Overview

Many religions are practiced in contemporary Mongolia. Approximately 50% of the population practices Lamaist Buddhism. About 4% of Mongolians (mostly the ethnic Kazakhs in the west) are Muslim. Shamanists and Christians combined make up about 6% of the population. Following decades of communist rule, 40% of the population is atheist or declares no religious affiliation.⁶⁷



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Wishing rocks

Major Religions

Lamaist Buddhism

The primary religion of Mongolia is Lamaist—or Tibetan—Buddhism. This form of Buddhism was first introduced during the Mongolian invasion of Tibet in the 13th century. However it was not adopted on a large scale until the end of the 16th century.⁶⁸ Lamaist Buddhism shares some themes with shamanism in its reliance on reincarnation and deities that represent different facets of life. Lamaist Buddhism's hierarchy of spiritual leaders also closely resembled the unified social structure created by Genghis Khan in the 13th century.⁶⁹ Buddhism flourished in Mongolia after the 16th century, and monasteries were built across the country. The Buddhist clergy succeeded in establishing political power and Mongolian nobility used the Buddhist clergy to further validate their own claims to rule. The clergy maintained authority in much of Mongolia and gained control of about



© Honza Soukup
Monastery

⁶⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 26 August 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

⁶⁸ "Buddhism in Mongolia," BuddhaNet, 2008, <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/mongol-txt.htm>

⁶⁹ B. Siklos, "Buddhism: A Defensive Account," in *Mongolia Today*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 155–182.

one third of the population of the entire country. By 1911, when Chinese rule over Mongolia ended, monasteries functioned as a political entity in Mongolia.⁷⁰

With the establishment of the Soviet-influenced Mongolian People's Republic in 1924, the Mongolian government officially began to purge religion from the country. Arbitrarily high taxes were imposed on the once-exempt monasteries. A formal process of incarceration and assassination of Buddhist lamas went into effect. By the end of 1938, only one monastery was left in the entire nation.⁷¹ Gandan Monastery reopened in 1944 under strict government supervision, and was the only functioning Buddhist monastery in the country until the Mongolian Buddhist University opened in 1970.⁷²

Shamanism

Mongolian people have traditionally practiced shamanism. Shamanism holds that all people, animals, and objects are endowed with spirits that influence human beings and the world around them. A shaman holds a position of power and authority in Mongolian society because he—or she—is chosen by the spirits to act as intermediary between the human and spirit worlds. Shamans have played an important role in preserving and maintaining traditional culture. Shamanist Mongolians in the past lived highly ritualistic lives, and many of the customs and traditions developed through early Mongolian shamanism still exist in Mongolia today.⁷³ Since the fall of communism in the 1990s, shamanism has increased in popularity as many Mongolians have sought to rekindle Mongolian traditions and cultural identity.⁷⁴



© alex_and_stacy / flickr.com
Race Horse Shamanism

⁷⁰ Donald R. DeGlopper, "Society and Its Environment: Religion: Buddhism," in *Mongolia, A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1991, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+mn0073\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+mn0073))

⁷¹ B. Siklos, "Buddhism: A Defensive Account" in *Mongolia Today*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 155–82.

⁷² "Mongolian Buddhism," n.d., http://www.mandal.ca/mongolia/m/Mongolian_Buddhism.html#_note-0

⁷³ Circle of Tengerism, "What Is Shamanism?," n.d., http://www.tengerism.org/What_Is_Shamanism.html

⁷⁴ Dan Levin, "Shamans' Spirits Crowd Air of Mongolian Capital," *New York Times*, 10 July 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/11/world/asia/11iht-shaman.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Shamanism%20Mongolia&st=cse

Islam

Of the approximately 4% of Mongolian citizens who practice Islam, the majority are ethnic Kazakhs who live predominantly in the westernmost province of the country, Bayan-Olgii. Islam first reached the Mongolian steppe around the eighth century. Islam was adopted by Mongolian leaders during the expansion of the empire after the 13th century. The Kazakhs who currently live in western Mongolia came to Mongolia to escape persecution from Czarist Russia. They were able to maintain their traditional religious beliefs because the vast distances and rugged terrain of the Altai Mountains kept them isolated. During the 70-year period of communist rule in the 20th century, the government stifled the public practice and display of Muslim tradition.⁷⁵

After communist rule ended in 1990 and Mongolia constitutionally recognized freedom of religion, Islam reemerged in the public arena. Devotional exercises and studies became more prominent as mosques were built in Bayan-Olgii province.⁷⁶ As of 2010, Mongolia had 44 Muslim centers of worship registered with the state, most in the western *aymag* of Bayan-Olgii. The Mongolian Muslim Association estimates that Mongolia has over 150,000 Muslims and more than 3,000 students in the nation's Islamic training centers and schools.⁷⁷

Christianity

Christianity reached Mongolia around the seventh century in the form of Nestorian Christianity, a sect with unique views about the separation of Jesus Christ's human and divine natures.⁷⁸ Christian groups have always been small in Mongolia, and in the current post-socialist environment, Christians make up approximately 4% of the population. Of these, 90% are Protestant, 9% are Mormon, and the remaining 1% is either Roman Catholic or Russian



© harunire / flickr.com
Church, outskirts of Erdenet

⁷⁵ Namara Brede, "Negotiating Everyday Islam after Socialism: A Study of the Kazakhs of Bayan-Ulgii, Mongolia," 2010, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography_honors/26

⁷⁶ Joanna Lillis, "Mongolia: Ethnic Kazakhs Eye Land of Opportunity to the West," *EurasiaNet*, 4 November 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b067562c.html>

⁷⁷ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁷⁸ New World Encyclopedia, "Nestorian Christianity," 8 March 2011, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nestorian_Christianity

Orthodox.⁷⁹ Christian conversion has been on the rise in recent years. However, as part of Mongolia's policy of religious freedom, the government does not collect official data on religious converts. Western Protestant church groups estimate there have been 60,000 Mongolian converts from 1990–2008.⁸⁰ Many Buddhist leaders and clergy have stated that Christianity is a threat to Buddhism and Mongolia's traditional way of life. They would like special status for Buddhism, and some have lobbied that Buddhism be declared the *national* religion, in addition to its current status as the country's "traditional religion." Many laws governing religious institutions in Mongolia are clearly antagonistic to the influx of Christians.^{81,82}

The Role of Religion in Government

Freedom of religion was guaranteed in the new Mongolian constitution of 1992, which recognizes the separation of church and state. The government does not observe any religious holidays as national holidays and will provide funding only for secular curricula in religious schools.⁸³



© Ryan Vettese
Temple under construction

However, the government and ranking lamas recognize Buddhism as the nation's traditional religion. The Mongolian government has financed the restoration of several significant Buddhist sites. Many non-Buddhist religions face varying levels of discrimination. All religious organizations must register with the government to function legally, but reports have indicated that non-Buddhist religious organizations have great difficulty obtaining proper registration. Registrations are valid for only 12 months before they must be renewed. This requirement allows the government time to vet applications and limit the

⁷⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁸⁰ Michael Kohn, "Christianity Growing Fast in Mongolia," *SFGate.com*, 18 September 2008, http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-09-18/news/17159192_1_buddhist-monks-mongolians-missionaries

⁸¹ Michael Kohn, "Christianity Growing Fast in Mongolia," *SFGate.com*, 18 September 2008, http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-09-18/news/17159192_1_buddhist-monks-mongolians-missionaries

⁸² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁸³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

number of religious organizations. Many church organizations have reported being subjected to harassment and extortion in order to maintain their legal status.⁸⁴

The Mongolian constitution limits proselytizing and the use of material incentives to spread religious views. Thus, many church organizations have been denied legal status because of the humanitarian nature of their missions. Allegations of intimidation, harassment, and denial of legal status for Christian churches abound in Mongolia, and local administrations routinely defy Supreme Court rulings that favor religious organizations.^{85, 86} Conversely, Buddhist clergy accuse Christian groups of using Western wealth to unduly influence Mongolian law and politics. They have been fighting to have Parliament make Buddhism the official state religion and to have a Buddhist curriculum taught in schools.⁸⁷

Religion and Daily Life

The impact of shamanism on Mongolian culture cannot be dismissed. Many customs practiced in Mongolia today stem from people's belief in the spirit world and the divinity of nature. Although Buddhism is the dominant religion in Mongolia, it is not uncommon for people to consult shamans regularly. Even mundane decisions require consultation about astrological taboos codified under Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Mongolians adhere to many strict rules of conduct that originated in animistic shamanism.⁸⁸



© Jason Lindley
Buddhist student

During decades of communist rule, religion was systematically purged from daily life. Thousands of monks were imprisoned or executed and their monasteries razed. Mongolians today look to Buddhism as part of their cultural identity and heritage.

⁸⁴ The National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, "Report on Human Rights and Freedoms in Mongolia 2007," 2008, <http://www.mn-nhrc.org/en/reports>

⁸⁵ The National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, "Report on Human Rights and Freedoms in Mongolia 2007," 2008, <http://www.mn-nhrc.org/en/reports>

⁸⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁸⁷ Michael Kohn, "Christianity Growing Fast in Mongolia," *SFGate.com*, 18 September 2008, http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-09-18/news/17159192_1_buddhist-monks-mongolians-missionaries

⁸⁸ "Specific Features of Mongolian Customs," *Mongoliana*, 5 January 2006, <http://www.ub-mongolia.mn/mongolia.html?start=4>

Monasteries have been rebuilt, children are being enrolled in Buddhist schools, and even previous members of the communist government have become lamas. Mongolian Lamaist Buddhism also incorporates shamanistic elements into its belief system. The *ovoo*—a pile of stones in a sacred location—is an offering to the gods of the sky and the environment. Since stewardship of the environment was crucial to the survival of nomadic and semi-nomadic Mongolians, contemporary Buddhists use this tradition to promote environmentalism, which helps maintain traditional Mongolian lifestyles and the environment.⁸⁹

Muslim Kazakhs of western Mongolia have also seen a resurgence of public religion since 1990. With over 100,000 practicing Muslims in Mongolia, primarily in the westernmost region of the country, Muslim groups have reported only minimal problems registering their mosques in the country. The Muslim cultural center and mosque in the capital Ulaanbaatar has reported no problems with the local government.⁹⁰ Mosques and other Muslim religious organizations in western Mongolia receive funding from Turkey, Kazakhstan, and the Arab Gulf states.⁹¹

Although the Kazakhs are Muslim, they are reportedly the least strict of the central Asian Muslims. They combine Islamic beliefs with traditional shamanist practices and folk rituals. During religious festivals, Muslim Kazakhs are likely to toast the prophet Muhammad with a shot of vodka. Weddings officiated by imams may close with open drinking. The Muslim Kazakh community preserves traditional Mongolian customs toward gender equality, and Kazakh women in Mongolia are free from many of the social restraints found in other Muslim communities. Young women often do not wear the *hijab* and can freely interact with men. Common-law marriage is accepted.⁹²

⁸⁹ Urantsatsral Chimedsegee, et al., “Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment, and Development,” January 2009, <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=391>

⁹⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Mongolia,” in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁹¹ Namara Brede, “Negotiating Everyday Islam after Socialism: A Study of the Kazakhs of Bayan-Ulgii, Mongolia,” 2010, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography_honors/26

⁹² “RRT Research Response: Mongolia,” Refugee Review Tribunal, 24 October 2006, <http://www.mrt.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/96/mng30829.pdf.aspx>

Religious Events and Holidays

Religious holidays are not observed as national holidays by the Mongolian government, though religious festivals play an important role in the lives of the people. Some nonreligious festivals have their origins in the traditional shamanism of the early Mongolians and celebrate the role of animism in the daily lives of the early pastoral nomads. Other festivals reflect the current status of Buddhism as the traditional national religion of Mongolia.⁹³



© harunire / flickr.com
Tsagaan Sar

Tsagaan Sar

Tsagaan Sar is the celebration of the lunar new year that ushers in the spring. The holiday is celebrated for several days between January and March, according to the lunar calendar. This holiday is an important time of renewal for Mongolian people and marks the beginning of a new cycle of migration. *Tsagaan Sar* is also a time when kinship ties are celebrated, honored, and renewed. Family members engage in ceremonies that honor the elderly, reinforce social status, and publicly define members of one's family or clan. Three days of celebration include shamanistic rituals that honor the gods of the sky and the spirits of ancestors and protect individual members of families and clans. Monasteries also take part in *Tsagaan Sar* through their own Buddhist rituals. They burn garbage to symbolize the absolution of people's sins. Prayers are said to honor the dead and to reinforce kinship ties.⁹⁴

Nadaam

Held across Mongolia each year from 11–13 July, *Nadaam* has its origins in the ancient steppe when it honored mountain gods and community endeavors.⁹⁵ Originally, Mongolian armies gathered to celebrate weddings and demonstrate martial skills. Today, the Nadaam Festival celebrates community and the three manly sports crucial to the warring lifestyle of early Mongolian nomads: wrestling, archery, and horsemanship.

⁹³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148885.htm>

⁹⁴ Guido Verboom "Religion in Mongolia: A Fire on the Steppes: Religion and Public Celebrations of Greater Mongolia," n.d., <http://www.mongoluls.net/mongolian-religion/celeb.shtml>

⁹⁵ "Nadaam Festival," Center for the Study of Eurasian Nomads, 28 December 2010, <http://www.csen.org/Mongol.Nadaam/Mongol.text.html>

Victors in the games are said to win victories for the spectators as well as themselves. Children race horses to celebrate the skill of the horses, not the riders.^{96, 97}

Ovoo

The *ovoo*—a collection of sacred stones piled into a cairn— fulfills both social and religious needs. *Ovoos* are found in sacred locations where the spirits of ancestors, sky, mountains, land, and water are believed to reside. *Ovoo* festivals are held throughout Mongolia but seldom on a regular schedule. Travelers who come across an *ovoo* should stop and circle the stones three times clockwise and place a rock or a *khadag*—a blue ceremonial scarf—on the *ovoo*. Often, Mongolians will leave offerings of food, water, and even alcohol and money.^{98, 99}



© Colin Cookman
Ovoo

Nauryz

An ancient Kazakh tradition that fell out of favor during communism, *Nauryz* is a pre-Islamic Persian New Year festival held on 22 March each year, coinciding with the spring equinox. This holiday celebrates the awakening of Mother Nature and the triumph of good (spring) over evil (winter). Much like the Mongolian festival *Tsagaan Sar*, *Nauryz* is a time for nomadic herders to meet with family and clan members and reinforce kinship and social ties.^{100, 101}

Kurban Ait

The Kazakhs of western Mongolia honor some of the traditional Islamic holidays, especially those that entail animal sacrifice and the entertainment of guests. *Kurban Ait* is

⁹⁶ “Naadam Festival,” Ayan Trails, 2011, http://www.toursmongolia.com/modules.php?name=Tours&op=show_tour&tid=48

⁹⁷ “Nadaam Festival: Horse Races,” Center for the Study of Eurasian Nomads, 28 December 2010, <http://www.csen.org/Mongol.Nadaam/Mongol.text.html>

⁹⁸ “Ovoo Worship Festival,” Ayan Trails, 2011, <http://www.toursmongolia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=50>

⁹⁹ “Ovoo,” This Is Mongolia, 2003, <http://www.thisismongolia.com/ovoo.html>

¹⁰⁰ “Nauryz, the Kazakh New Year Festival,” Mongolia Travel Guide, 2011, http://www.mongoliatravelguide.mn/index.php?url=attraction/nauryz_kazakh_festival

¹⁰¹ “Holidays Around the World: Kazak New Year: Kazakhstan’s Nauryz Meyramy,” A Global World, n.d., <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/kazak-new-year/>

one such holiday and celebrates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. Celebrated on the 10th day of the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar, this holiday honors people's love for one another and their willingness to support and care for family and community.^{102,103}

Buildings of Worship

Buddhist Temples and Monasteries

Monasteries have been an important feature of Mongolian life since Buddhism took root in the 16th century. Towns and cities often sprang up around monasteries, and monks played a large role in the education, spiritual edification, and lives of the communities they served. Since Buddhism is the traditional religion of Mongolia, it is not surprising that Buddhist temples and monasteries can be found throughout the country.



© Javier Alvarez Cobb
Erdene Zuu Monastery

Since the fall of communism in 1990, numerous monasteries have opened in both urban and rural areas. In 2007, there were an estimated 200 monasteries in Mongolia, at least one in each province. Monasteries are particularly active in the capital Ulaanbaatar.¹⁰⁴ One of the more famous monasteries is the Gandan Monastery, established in 1835 in Ulaanbaatar. After communist purges of religion in the 1930s, Gandan was the only functioning monastery left in Mongolia. The Gandan Monastery today has approximately 400 monks, hosts the Mongolian Buddhist University, and has three temples for services. The monastery also instructs students in traditional medicine and astrology as well as ritual and practice.¹⁰⁵

Mosques

Mosques are also found in Mongolia, in the far western region of the country where Muslim Kazakhs migrated in large numbers in the 19th century. One of the more famous

¹⁰² "Muslims Celebrate Kurban Ait Festival in Mongolia," Mongolian Views, 2 December 2009, <http://www.mongolianviews.com/2009/12/muslims-celebrate-kurban-ait-festival.html>

¹⁰³ "Kurban Ait Celebrated in Atmosphere of Religious Harmony," Central Asia Online, 17 December 2008, http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en_GB/features/caii/features/2008/12/17/feature-01

¹⁰⁴ "Survey of Active Buddhist Temples in Ulaanbaatar," Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries, 2007, <http://www.mongoliantemples.net/static/ulaanbaatar-active-monasteries.php>

¹⁰⁵ "Monasteries and Temples in Mongolia: Gandan Monastery," Mongoluls.net, n.d., <http://www.mongoluls.net/khiid/gandan.shtml>

mosques is in the city of Olgiy. The Islamic Center of Mongolia and a madrassa are located in this mosque.^{106,107}

Behavior in Places of Worship

Buddhist Temples

Before visiting Buddhist temples, it is wise to contact the temple ahead of time to ensure that you meet with the appropriate person. Buddhist centers often have set times open to the public. Ask for approval from monks before entering a temple during prayers or debates.¹⁰⁸



© The_Wandering_Angel / flicker.com
Prayer wheel

Exchange 1: May I enter the temple?

Visitor:	May I enter the temple?	Dugan Khiided bi orj boloKh uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Hats should never be worn inside a temple; because of the cold temperatures, shoes are removed only some of the time. Follow the example of others. Remove your shoes when in doubt. Casual dress is acceptable, but shoulders and knees should always be covered. Non-Buddhists are not required to prostrate themselves when entering a temple. But visitors should bow their heads and press their palms together at their chests while others make their prostrations. Visitors to temples should stand when teachers, monks, or nuns

¹⁰⁶ “Olgiy,” Mongolia Attractions, n.d., <http://www.mongolia-attractions.com/lgi.html>

¹⁰⁷ Lonely Planet, “Western Mongolia: Sights in Bayan Olgiy,” n.d., <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mongolia/western-mongolia/bayan-olgiy/sights>

¹⁰⁸ Urantsatsral Chimedsegee, et al., *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment, and Development* (Bath, UK: The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2009), 30

enter and leave rooms, and should bow deeply when walking directly in front of people who are seated.¹⁰⁹

Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

Visitor (female):	Do I need to cover my head?	Bi tolgoigoo KhalKhalaKh Kheregtei yuu?
Local:	No.	Ugui.

All objects in Buddhist temples are considered holy. Never sit on the lower parts of structures or touch them with your feet. *Suvrag*, which are religious monuments containing prayer books, relics of high lamas, or statues of the Buddha should be treated with great respect and circled in a clockwise direction. Visitors examining Buddhist texts should never place them on the floor, step over them, or place other objects on top of them.¹¹⁰



© Darcey Rakestraw
Altar at Gandan Monastery

Exchange 3: When do you pray?

Visitor:	When do you pray?	Ta Khediid morgol uilddeg ve?
Local:	Whenever.	Khezee ch Khamaagui.

¹⁰⁹ Urantsatsral Chimedsegee, et al., *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment, and Development* (Bath, UK: The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2009), 30-31

¹¹⁰ Urantsatsral Chimedsegee, et al., *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment, and Development* (Bath, UK: The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2009), 31

Exchange 4: May I take photographs inside the temple?

Visitor:	May I take photographs inside the temple?	Dugan Khiid dotor bi [foto] Zurag avch boloh uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Mosques

Mosque etiquette is straightforward. Rules differ for men and women. Modest, clean clothing free of images of living creatures is a must. Women should wear pants or ankle-length skirts and tops that are neither tight fitting nor transparent. The neckline of a top should reach the neck. Shoulders and arms must be covered to the wrists. A woman's hair must also be covered completely while she is in a mosque. For men, pants are preferred, but shorts that cover the knees are acceptable. Shirtsleeves should be no shorter than those of a standard T-shirt. Shoes should be removed upon entering a mosque. Both men and women should avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex.^{111, 112}



If prayers are in progress, visitors should remain silent; otherwise, soft speaking is allowed. Mobile phones and pagers should be silenced or shut off, and food and drink should never be brought into a mosque. Visitors may photograph inside a mosque, but do not photograph worshippers while they are praying or performing their ablutions.^{113, 114}

¹¹¹ "Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque," Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, 2009, <http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html>

¹¹² At the time this cultural orientation was written no country specific information was available for etiquette in Mongolia's mosques. The information in this section is general to mosques around the world.

¹¹³ "Etiquettes of Visiting a Mosque," Hounslow Jamia Masjid and Islamic Centre, 2009, <http://www.hounslowmasjid.co.uk/page2/page10/page30/page30.html>

¹¹⁴ "Mosque Rules and Etiquette," Istanbul Trails, n.d., <http://www.istanbultrails.com/2008/06/mosque-rules-and-etiquette/>

Chapter 2: Assessment

1. Mongolia has a state religion: Buddhism.

False

Although Mongolia sees Buddhism as the traditional national religion of the country, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

2. Mongolians' early practice of shamanism, helped strengthen family relationships.

True

Shamanism includes ancestor worship; thus, shamanistic rituals strengthen ties between family and clan members.

3. The Kazakhs of western Mongolia are strict Muslims.

False

Although the practice of Islam is on the rise, most Kazakhs in Mongolia combine local customs with a relaxed approach to traditional Islamic practices.

4. Visitors to places of worship in Mongolia should follow established rules of etiquette.

True

Rules of etiquette, some differing for men and women, apply to visitors of both mosques and Buddhist temples.

5. The Mongolian lunar new year celebration—*Tsagaan Sar*—is both a secular and religious holiday.

True

While the people celebrate the lunar new year socially, Buddhists make use of lunar new year rituals that symbolize the absolution of people's sins.

Chapter 3: Traditions

Introduction

Mongolian culture is deeply rooted in the customs of the steppe. The customs and traditions of the early Mongolian nomads developed as a means of survival in a vast region subject to brutal cold and lack of rain, where grazing and agricultural lands are scarce. These customs and traditions engendered in the people a deep reliance on family and formalized stewardship of the land, and became codified into the precepts of shamanism. Despite the rapid urbanization that began in the 1990s, present-day Mongolians still adhere to the traditional customs of the land. Although customs are somewhat relaxed in major urban centers, tradition rules the conduct of people in the country.



© Jeff Maurone
Young girl

Codes of Politeness

Mongolians place a strong emphasis on hospitality and engage in greeting rituals that are respectful of age, status, and gender. Generally shy, Mongolians rarely speak critically or negatively because to do so is considered impolite and because they believe negative words can invoke harmful spirits. Because of the harshness of the climate and the vast distances people travel with primitive modes of transportation, Mongolians are particularly polite and attentive to the needs of strangers, guests, and travelers.¹¹⁵



© Michael Foley
Ger couple

Exchange 5: Good morning!

Visitor:	Good morning!	Ogloonii mend!
Local:	Good morning to you too!	Tand ch bas ogloonii mend hurgeye!

Men often greet one another with either a handshake or single nod of the head, and shoulder hugs may be common between good friends.¹¹⁶ However, Mongolians in the country seldom shake hands with visitors, greeting them instead with outstretched arms if

¹ Asia Planet, "Mongolia Information: Lifestyle," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/lifestyle.htm>

¹¹⁶ Culture Crossing, "Mongolia: Greetings," n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student.php?id=138

the meeting is the first of a particular year.¹¹⁷ Strictures against shaking hands with the elderly still persist today. These restrictions originated in the early Mongolian belief that the touching of hands is shameful because it attempts to make the other person dirty or impure. For women, shaking hands is rare. More often, they will exchange verbal greetings.¹¹⁸

Exchange 6: Hi, Mr. Bold [*Bold guai*]! (*Informal*)

Visitor:	Hi, Mr. Bold [<i>Bold guai</i>]!	Sain baina uu Bold guai!
Local:	Hello!	Sain uu!
Visitor:	Are you doing well?	Ta sain uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Age becomes an important factor in meetings between the sexes. Younger Mongolians tend to group themselves by gender. Physical contact between members of the opposite sex is rarely displayed in public. When dealing with their elders, younger people are required to pay great respect. Elders are always greeted first with words of praise. Younger persons extend their right hand and bow three times while touching their forehead with their fingers.^{119, 120} Mongolians observe complex rituals of greeting and receiving guests in the *ger*—the traditional home of the Mongolians. Primary dwellings in the countryside, *gers* are found in the cities as well, and guests and visitors must adhere to strict rules of etiquette. Visitors should never knock on the door of a *ger*. They should announce their presence; the owners of the *ger* then greet their guests outside.



© Zbigniew Kulak
Family inside their home

Exchange 7: How are you?

Visitor:	How are you?	Ta sain baina uu?
Local:	Fine, very well.	Sain. Sain baina.

Upon entering a *ger*, male visitors should immediately move to the left. Since all *gers* face the south, males move to the western side of the *ger*, which is reserved for men. Women occupy the eastern side of the home. Non-Mongolians are often overwhelmed by

¹¹⁷ Erdes Impex, “Traditions and Customs of Mongolia: Greeting,” n.d., http://www.erdessimpex.mn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61:greetings&catid=27:demography-mongolias-population-and-ethnic-groups&Itemid=130

¹¹⁸ Mongolian Resorts, “Customs and Traditions,” 2011, <http://www.mongolia-resorts.com/travellers-information/how-to-behave/customs-and-traditions/>

¹¹⁹ Mongolian Resorts, “Customs and Traditions,” 2011, <http://www.mongolia-resorts.com/travellers-information/how-to-behave/customs-and-traditions/>

¹²⁰ Culture Crossing, “Mongolia: Greetings,” n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student.php?id=138

the rituals that surround even the most mundane of daily tasks. Mongolians, however, expect foreigners to unknowingly violate rules of etiquette and seldom take offense. They are aware of the complexity of their social customs and treat visitors with respect and patience.^{121, 122}

Hospitality and Gift Giving

Mongolians are noted for their hospitality, a tradition stemming from their early nomadic lifestyle on the steppe. Because of the harsh climate, vast distances, and rugged landscape of the country, early travelers seldom carried many provisions. Instead, they relied on the hospitality of other Mongolians to provide for many of their needs. Even enemies encountering one another on the steppe adhered to rules of hospitality and often exchanged gifts of food.¹²³ Today it is not



© Antoine Roy
Tea time

uncommon for people in the country to leave their *gers* open. Travelers may enter a *ger* to prepare tea, warm themselves, and rest before continuing their travels. Gift giving is an important part of Mongolian hospitality. It is a sign of respect and friendship that strengthens social bonds and promotes social stability, which is highly valued in Mongolian society.¹²⁴ It is impolite to refuse any offering of food or gifts, and visitors should always accept what is offered to them, even if they do not intend to eat or drink it.

Exchange 8: Thank you for your hospitality.

Guest:	Thank you for your hospitality.	Zochilomtgoi huleen avсанд байарлалаа.
Host:	You are welcome.	Zugeer zugeer.

Mongolians will not visit one another without a gift, especially if visiting a home where there are children or elderly people. Candies for children and milk or dairy products for the elderly are standard, but exchanges of food and tobacco are not uncommon. Sharing tea is valued because of its associations with friendship and mutual exchange. Sharing *airag* (fermented mare's milk) or vodka is common among men.¹²⁵ On formal occasions, such as *Tsaagan Sar* (Lunar New Year), the elderly are presented with a *khadag*, a long,

¹²¹ Culture Crossing, "Mongolia: Greetings," n.d., http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student.php?id=138

¹²² Asia Planet, "Mongolia Information: Lifestyle," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/lifestyle.htm>

¹²³ Asia Planet, "Mongolia Information: Lifestyle," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/lifestyle.htm>

¹²⁴ Sarah Rogers and Mark Wang, "Environmental Resettlement and Social Dis/Rearticulation in Inner Mongolia, China," 2006, www.landfood.unimelb.edu.au/rmg/geography/papers/Wang8.pdf

¹²⁵ Asia Planet, "Mongolia Information: Lifestyle," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/lifestyle.htm>

blue silk scarf which symbolizes peace and honor. A *khadag* is a traditional gift and sign of reverence toward the recipient.^{126, 127}

Types of Food and Eating Habits

Mongolia is a land of vast steppes and high, rugged mountains. It suffers long winters of extreme cold and brutal, damaging storms. There is little rainfall, permafrost occurs in over half the country, and only about 1% of the land is arable. Because of the geography and climate, Mongolians have developed a diet that relies heavily on animals and their by-products.



© Christian Van Der Henst S.
Yamaanii

Exchange 9: The food tastes so good.

Guest:	The food tastes so good.	Hool mash saiKhan amttai baina.
Host:	I'm glad you like it.	Taalagdaj baigaad bi bayartai baina.

Meat is a staple in Mongolia. Meat, along with copious amounts of fat, is heavily consumed during the lengthy winter months and provides the people with some protection against the extreme cold.¹²⁸ Mongolians regularly eat meat from what are referred to as “the five snouts”: sheep, cattle, goats, camels, and horses.

Meat products are prepared in many ways: dried, powdered, boiled, stewed, and made into sausages. A popular method of cooking is to place hot rocks inside the body of the animal and to cook it from the inside out. This approach works well with the nomadic lifestyle; herders do not need to carry heavy cooking equipment as they migrate to pasturelands.¹²⁹

Exchange 10: What type of meat is this?

Guest:	What type of meat is this?	Ene yuunii maKh ve?
Host:	Goat.	Yamaanii

¹²⁶ Khaliun Travel, “Khadag: Blue Silk Scarf,” 2008, <http://www.khaliuntravel.com/attractions/mongolian-specials/khadag-blue-silk-scarf>

¹²⁷ Mongolia today, “Tsagaan Sar, the Lunar New Year,” n.d., http://www.mongoliatoday.com/issue/2/tsagaan_sar_2.html

¹²⁸ Asia Recipe, “Mongolian Food Culture: The Hierarchy of Foods in the Mongolian Diet,” n.d., <http://asiarecipe.com/monfood.html>

¹²⁹ Ayan Trails, “Mongolia: Mongolian Food and Drinks,” n.d., <http://www.toursmongolia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=93>

Along with meat, Mongolians eat a wide variety of dairy products—known as “white food”—made from the milk of domestic animals. During the short summer months, rural Mongolians spend much of their time preparing dairy products for immediate consumption and for storage throughout the winter. Mongolians believe that dairy products cleanse their bodies after eating primarily meat and fat during the winter months. They consume many types of yogurt, cottage cheeses, dried curds, and fermented mare’s milk.¹³⁰ Because much of the dairy food Mongolians prepare is stored for later use, it is extremely hard and acidic.¹³¹



© Darcey Rakestraw
Lamb-filled dumpling

Exchange 11: What is the name of this dish?

Guest:	What is the name of this dish?	Ene yamar nertei hool ve?
Host:	This is <i>buuz</i> . ¹³²	Ene bol buuz.

Mongolians also eat vegetables and grains, but on a limited scale. Because of the harsh climate and scarcity of arable land, Mongolians have traditionally foraged for herbs, plants, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, and nuts. With urbanization beginning in the 1990s, a wider variety of non-Mongolian foods have been introduced into the diet. However, these foods are expensive and are rarely found outside major cities. Only wealthier Mongolians are able to make these foods a regular part of their diet. In cities such as Ulaanbaatar, the capital, one can find western-style supermarkets and restaurants that serve international cuisine. This influx of nonnative food products has caused great concern to Mongolian doctors and dieticians who claim that Mongolians are genetically predisposed to health problems directly related to a non-Mongolian diet.¹³³

¹³⁰ Ayan Trails, “Mongolia: Mongolian Food and Drinks,” n.d., <http://www.toursmongolia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=93>

¹³¹ Tim Wu, “The Mongolia Obsession: The Most Disgusting Food. Ever.,” in *Slate*, 25 September 2008, <http://www.slate.com/id/2200544/entry/2200548>

¹³² Buuz is a steamed meat dumpling.

¹³³ N. Oyunbayar, “Mongolian Food: Meat, Milk, and Mongolia: Misunderstood and Often Maligned, the Mongolian Diet Does Make Sense,” 2007, <http://www.mongoluls.net/ger/meatmilk.shtml>

Mongolian Clothing

Developed out of the necessities of survival on the steppe, clothing in Mongolia—especially in rural areas—has changed little over the centuries. Traditionally Mongolian clothing consists of a caftan-like garment (*deel*), a cold-weather jacket (*khurim*) worn only in the winter months, a sash, boots (*gutul*), and hats (*louz*). As with other aspects of their culture, Mongolians observe strict rituals of dress that denote sex, age, and social status. Among urban Mongolians, particularly young adults and adolescents, Western clothes are popular.



© Brent Olson
Mongolian Nadaam celebrators

Exchange 12: Is this acceptable to wear?

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	Uuniig omsohod toKhiromjtoi yuu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Deel

The *deel* (pronounced *del*) is the traditional outfit of the Mongolian people. Basically a long gown, it is ideally suited to life on the steppe. It can be used as a blanket or tent. It can also shield people while they relieve themselves. The *deel* has long sleeves and a high collar that can be used as gloves and a muffler, respectively. The overlapping front helps repel wind and keeps the wearer warm. During the extremely cold Mongolian winters, both men and women wear a *khurim*, a short jacket, over the *deel*. Each ethnic group in Mongolia has its own unique *deel* with further distinctions that represent a person's social class, gender, and marital status.¹³⁴

A man usually wears a plain-colored *deel* of brown, gray, or other dark colors. The outfit, including the sash, is utilitarian. The sash protects a horseback rider's stomach. A man will also hang his knife, snuff container, tobacco pouch, and flint from his sash.¹³⁵

A woman's *deel* is also utilitarian but, depending on a woman's marital status, is usually more lavish and decorative than a man's.¹³⁶ Simplified because of the influence of

¹³⁴ Exploriant, "Mongolian Culture and Its People: Clothing," 2009, <http://www.exploriant.com/Attractions/MongoliaCulture.htm>

¹³⁵ Exploriant, "Mongolian Culture and Its People: Clothing," 2009, <http://www.exploriant.com/Attractions/MongoliaCulture.htm>

¹³⁶ Mongolia Today, "Traditional Clothes," 2002, <http://www.mongoliatoday.com/issue/7/clothes.html>

Western culture, a woman's *deel* is usually of brighter colors and has a shiny, silky feel. A woman's *deel* often features a pattern of circular stitching.¹³⁷

Gutul

Gutul are the traditional boots of the Mongolian people. Made of cattle hide, these boots are very stiff and are designed to be practical in the harsh environment of the steppe. They feature an upturned toe that many have assumed has religious significance. However, *gutul* predate Buddhism. The upturned toes of the boots help horsemen avoid getting stuck in their stirrups if they fall from their horses. Also, because the boots are very stiff, the upturned tips help the wearer walk because he doesn't have to force the leather to bend. During the winter months, *gutul* are worn with thick felt socks, and the upturned toe of the boot allows air to flow, which helps keep one's feet warm. *Gutul* are trimmed with leather appliqué and hand stitched. The process of hand stitching and ornamentation has long been the task of women.^{138, 139, 140}



© Brent Olson
Traditional boots

Non-religious Celebrations

Celebrations and festivals play a vital role in the lives of Mongolian people. They hold festivals to celebrate the seasons and hunting, to commemorate the dead, and to honor traditional nomadic life. Most festivals, though secular in modern Mongolia, originated in the practice of early shamanism or later Buddhism. Mongolians also hold public celebrations that honor their modern history and values.

Mongolian Republic Day (Independence Day)

Held on 26 November, Mongolian Republic Day celebrates Mongolia's independence from China in 1921 and the implementation of its new government and constitution on 26 November 1924.¹⁴¹ Although Mongolia adopted a new constitution in 1992 after the fall

¹³⁷ Asia Insider Photos, "Mongolian Clothes for Women: Traditional, Yet Wild Enough for Star Wars!," 2010, <http://www.asia-insider-photos.com/mongolian-clothes-women.html>

¹³⁸ Renaissance Tours, "Mongolian Costumes: Shoots," 2010, <http://www.renaissancetours.mn/en/guide-to-mongolia/mongolian-attraction/nomadic-lifestyle/mongolian-costumes>

¹³⁹ Khaliun Travel, "Mongolian National Clothes: Shoes," 2008, <http://www.khaliuntravel.com/attractions/mongolian-specials?start=1>

¹⁴⁰ Mongolia Today, "Traditional Clothes: Shoes," 2002, <http://www.mongoliatoday.com/issue/7/clothes.html>

¹⁴¹ Amber Barger, "Mongolian Independence/Constitution Day, A Short History Lesson," 29 November 2010, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travelblogs/41/92052/Mongolian+Independence-Constitution+Day,+A+Short+History+Lesson?destId=357015>

of the communist regime, Mongolians still celebrate the inauguration of their original constitution.¹⁴²

International Women's Day

Held on 8 March and recognized as a public holiday in Mongolia, International Women's Day dates back to the Soviet Union's influence on Mongolia. Mongolian women have traditionally enjoyed a high degree of equality and status. On this day, women are celebrated for the value they bring to their families, communities, and nation. To celebrate this day and to honor their women, some Mongolian men take on women's traditional duties, usually by cooking at home.^{143, 144}

Golden Eagle Festival

The Golden Eagle Festival, held each year in Bayan-Olgii in western Mongolia, has only recently become a regular event. During the 70 years of communist rule in Mongolia, much of traditional Kazakh religion and culture was suppressed. The Golden Eagle Festival was established to celebrate and preserve the traditional hunting method of the Kazakhs in the west. Primarily for Kazakhs, this festival offers a venue for traditional hunters to demonstrate their skill in training their golden eagles for hunting. The festival also helps the Kazakh people earn money for land and animal conservation in their traditional lands. The Golden Eagle Festival exposes young Kazakhs to their traditions of hunting, land stewardship, song and dance, as well as sporting events.¹⁴⁵



© Zbigniew Kulak
Eagle hunter

¹⁴² Mongolia Tourism, "Public Holidays: Independence Day," 26 January 2011, <http://www.mongoliatourism.org/mongolia-introduction/mongolia-public-holidays/mongolia-public-holidays/independence-day.html>

¹⁴³ United Nations Development Programme, "Mongolia: Democratic Governance and Human Rights," 8 March 2010, <http://www.undp.mn/news-dghr080310.html>

¹⁴⁴ Mongolia Tourism, "Public Holidays: International Women's Day," 26 January 2011, <http://www.mongoliatourism.org/mongolia-introduction/mongolia-public-holidays/mongolia-public-holidays/international-womens-day-8-march.html>

¹⁴⁵ Ayan Trails, "Mongolia: Eagle Hunting Festival," n.d., <http://www.toursmongolia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=48>

Dos and Don'ts

Mongolians adhere to complex and highly ritualized behaviors when interacting with one another. Foreign visitors are often overwhelmed by the number of rules of social etiquette.^{146, 147, 148}

Do

- Say hello (*sain bainuul*) when you arrive anywhere, though saying hello again to people you have already spoken to on that day is strange to Mongolians.
- Accept all offers of food and drink; guests should always take a small bite of food, even if they don't want it, and should at least put drinks to their lips.
- Keep sleeves pulled down and avoid showing your wrists.
- Always accept food, drinks, and other offerings with the right hand or both hands with palms facing up and always offer items to others with the right hand.
- Hold cups from the bottom.
- Leave weapons outside before entering a *ger*.
- Leave hats on when entering a *ger*; Mongolians show respect by leaving their hats on, though you may tip your hat in greeting.
- Always offer guests tea, candy, or coffee.
- Items placed on the communal table when people are gathered together become communal property.

Don't

- Do not knock on the door of a *ger*. Call out *no-khoi kho-rio* ("Hold the dog") and the family will come out to greet you.
- Do not talk to or greet a person across the threshold of a *ger*. Greetings are made outside.
- When near any altars, avoid pointing your feet in the direction of the altar, and do not turn your back on the altar or religious objects.
- Never throw garbage into a fire, put a fire out by stomping with your foot or by pouring water on it. Fire is sacred to Mongolians and must be treated with respect.
- Do not whistle in a *ger*; Mongolians believe it brings bad fortune.
- Never lean against the door frame or support poles of a *ger*.

¹⁴⁶ Mongolian Ways, "Mongolian Customs," 2007, <http://www.mongolian-ways.com/customs.htm>

¹⁴⁷ Asia Planet, "Mongolia Information: Culture," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/culture.htm>

¹⁴⁸ Legend Tour, "Information for Travelers: Facts for the Visitor," n.d., http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/informations/facts_for_the_visitors.shtml

- Do not place hats with the open end up, and do not allow hats belonging to different people to touch.

Chapter 3: Assessment

1. Mongolia is a modern, urbanized country.
False
Urbanization has brought some modern conveniences and Western institutions to the cities, but Mongolia remains largely a rural nation.
2. The Mongolian diet is rich in fruits and vegetables.
False
Fruits and vegetables are in short supply in Mongolia because arable land is scarce and the harsh climate makes the growing season brief.
3. Festivals in Mongolia honor the history and values of the people they celebrate.
True
Festivals such as the Kazakhs' Golden Eagle Festival help maintain traditions suppressed during communist rule.
4. Public displays of affection are common in Mongolia.
False
Although Mongolians frequently touch when greeting or talking with one another, public displays of affection are rare.
5. Many Mongolians still live in traditional dwellings called *gers*.
True
Rural Mongolians live predominantly in *gers*, and they are common in urban areas as well.

Chapter 4: Urban Life

Introduction

Mongolia began urbanizing in earnest in the 1980s.¹⁴⁹ Communism fell in 1990, but Soviet pullout left the economy in a serious depression. The country moved to a market economy, fueled by mining, communication, trade, and services.¹⁵⁰ Mongolia privatized its state-run economy and people moved in large numbers to the cities, especially the capital Ulaanbaatar, in search of jobs. Between 2000 and 2002, massive livestock losses and decreased export revenues hurt the economy. No longer able to support themselves, rural herders migrated to the cities to earn a living.



© nomadologist / flickr.com
Khangaian Ger Khoroolol, Ulaanbaatar

Problems with Urbanization

Rapid urbanization created a serious population imbalance. Mongolia has a population of approximately 3 million. Over 60% of the population lives in urban areas and about 1 million live in Ulaanbaatar alone. Nationwide, 36% of the population lives below the poverty line, but in Ulaanbaatar the number below the poverty line is over 70%.¹⁵¹ Rural-to-urban migration since 2000 has overwhelmed many cities, which are incapable of meeting the basic needs of migrants. New migrants often settle in *ger* districts—tent slums surrounding urban areas—that lack water, heating, electricity, basic health care, and education for the young. Alcoholism, domestic violence, prostitution, and malnutrition are on the rise.^{152, 153} Migrants from the country often cannot register with city governments, which limits their employment opportunities. Impoverished, they must scavenge for food and



© j-b.d / flickr.com
Gers and apartments

¹⁴⁹ Chris Horwood, "Cultural Change Ulaanbaatar: Painful Transitions," in *Tomorrow's Crises Today: The Humanitarian Impact of Urbanisation*, 2007,

<http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthID=63&ReportID=74973>

¹⁵⁰ Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 26 August 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

¹⁵¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Mongolia," in *The World Factbook*, 1 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

¹⁵² European Commission for Humanitarian Aid, "Humanitarian Aid for the People of Mongolia Affected by Winter Disasters (Dzuds)," 2004, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding/decisions_archives_en.htm

¹⁵³ Asian Development Bank, "Mongolia: Fact Sheet," 2009, <http://www.adb.org/mongolia/main.asp>

fuel. They burn garbage, old clothing, and tires for heat. Pollution in the cities is heavy.¹⁵⁴ The number of homeless children in the cities is also on the rise. Each year thousands of children fight endemic poverty by begging and scavenging. To escape severe winter cold, families and homeless children live underground in city sewers.¹⁵⁵

Urban Health Care

Urban health care falls below western standards.¹⁵⁶ Before 1990, the state financed and delivered health care in Mongolia and services were free. The Soviet-style system used hospitals and emphasized curative rather than preventive medicine, which is unsustainable in Mongolia's current market economy. The cost of health care is prohibitive, especially for the large numbers of urban poor.¹⁵⁷



Exchange 13: Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	Oir Khavid emneleg bii yuu?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	Tiim Khotiin tovd bii.

Rapid urbanization has overwhelmed the ability of most cities to provide good health care. Medical centers are understaffed and poorly equipped. The capital, Ulaanbaatar, has the largest number of medical facilities, but they provide only limited general health services. Specialized health care is almost nonexistent in Mongolian cities, especially for infants and the elderly. To offset the limitations of the state health-care system, costly and poorly regulated private medical facilities are on the rise in many areas.¹⁵⁸

Exchange 14: Is *Emch guai* [the doctor] in, sir?

Visitor:	Is <i>Emch guai</i> [the doctor] in, sir?	[Emchiin ner] emch guai bii yuu erKhem ee?
Local:	No.	Ugui.

¹⁵⁴ Francis Markus, "Mongolia: Red Cross Helps Migrants Overcome Red Tape," International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 6 December 2007, <http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/asia-pacific/mongolia/mongolia-red-cross-helps-migrants-overcome-red-tape/>

¹⁵⁵ Chris Horwood, "Cultural Change Ulaanbaatar: Painful Transitions," in *Tomorrow's Crises Today: The Humanitarian Impact of Urbanisation*, 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthID=63&ReportID=74973>

¹⁵⁶ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia: Country Specific Information," 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

¹⁵⁷ Asian Development Bank, "Mongolia, Health and Social Protection," 2008, www.adb.org/documents/evaluation/capes/mon/CAPE-MON-Health-Social-Protection.pdf

¹⁵⁸ World Health Organization, "Country Cooperation Strategy Brief: Mongolia," n.d., www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_mng_en.pdf

Exchange 15: I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?

Patient:	I have pain, Doctor. Can you help me?	Minii bie ovdoj baina. Emchee nadad tuslaach?
Doctor:	Yes, I can help you.	Tiim, bi tand tuslaya.

Exchange 16: Do you know what is wrong?

Patient:	Do you know what is wrong?	Yu ni boloKhgui baigaag ta medej baina uu?
Doctor:	No.	Ugui.

Mongolians living in the slums have few health-care resources. Facilities are inaccessible or are severely understaffed, averaging fewer than 10 full- and part-time staff members per facility. Up to 20% of the urban poor are not included in the country's social insurance or free health services because they cannot register with the civil authorities.¹⁵⁹



© Johannes Lundberg
Young girl at the communal water tap

Limited access to safe water and sanitation, poor health care, and poor food and air quality all contribute to a general low level of health among urban Mongolians, especially the poor. Just over 50% of the population has access to safe water sources. In the slums safe water is purchased at state-run water kiosks. Sanitation, though, is problematic in the slums where homes are not connected to city sewage facilities. Pit latrines are the main cause of hepatitis A, typhoid, and dysentery. Hepatitis B and C are prevalent among health-care workers because of poor waste management within the workplace. Food-borne illnesses are prevalent in Mongolia. Respiratory illnesses are frequent in the cities because of severe air pollution, especially in the winter months.¹⁶⁰

Infectious diseases are present in the cities at certain times of year. Tuberculosis infection levels are high, with a mortality rate of 29 per 100,000; 74% of registered cases of tuberculosis occur in people living below the poverty line.¹⁶¹ Many also suffer meningococcal meningitis. During the hunting season, bubonic plague from marmots is a serious concern. Even though city governments have outlawed marmots within city limits, many people smuggle them in.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ The World Bank, "Mongolia: Enhancing Policies and Practices for Ger Area Development in Ulaanbaatar," 2010,

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMONGOLIA/Resources/Full_report_in_Eng.pdf

¹⁶⁰ World Health Organization, "Country Cooperation Strategy Brief: Mongolia," n.d., www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_mng_en.pdf

¹⁶¹ World Health Organization, "Country Cooperation Strategy Brief: Mongolia," n.d., www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_mng_en.pdf

¹⁶² Martha Avery, *Women of Mongolia*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

Mongolian health services are unable to provide a high standard of care. Many Western medicines are unavailable. Western medicines that are available are not subject to reliable, consistent regulation and are of low quality. The cost for medical care is prohibitive for the uninsured. Medical facilities demand payment—often in cash—before they will provide care.^{163, 164}

Education

Schools in Mongolia operate on three levels. Primary education lasts 5 years (for 7–11 year-olds). Lower secondary school lasts 4 years (for 12–15 year-olds). Upper secondary school lasts 2 years but is not compulsory.¹⁶⁵ Urbanization has contributed to overcrowding in schools, resulting in pupil-to-teacher ratios as high as 77:1 in cities with the highest rates of rural-to-urban migration. Still, literacy rates are high at 97 %.¹⁶⁶



© Colin Cookman
Elementary school

To combat overcrowding in the schools, the Mongolian government has instituted a policy that reduces the number of children promoted from lower to upper secondary school to 70%. Completion rates for urban schools are high: 96% for primary schools, 86% for lower secondary schools, and 61% for upper secondary schools.¹⁶⁷ However, dropout rates are higher in the Kazakh communities in western Mongolia.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Mongolia: Country Specific Information,” 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

¹⁶⁴ Smart Traveller, “Travel Advice: Mongolia,” 20 January 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Mongolia>

¹⁶⁵ The World Bank, “Mongolia: Public Financing of Education: Equity and Efficiency Implications,” 2006, http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=51187349&piPK=51189435&theSitePK=327708&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708&entityID=000090341_20061110135740&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708

¹⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “Mongolia,” in *The World Factbook*, 20 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

¹⁶⁷ The World Bank, “Mongolia: Public Financing of Education: Equity and Efficiency Implications,” 2006, http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=51187349&piPK=51189435&theSitePK=327708&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708&entityID=000090341_20061110135740&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708

¹⁶⁸ UNICEF, “UN Expert on the Right to Education Concludes Visit to Mongolia,” n.d., http://www.unicef.org/mongolia/2145_11903.html

Urban Daily Life

Cities in Mongolia epitomize Soviet design. Multistory apartment complexes abound and have their own shops, playgrounds, and schools. Developed apartment complexes and homes are connected to sewage and electrical grids, but housing is expensive and power outages are frequent. All Mongolian cities have *ger* districts—or slums—that are not connected to public services.¹⁶⁹ Communications, food processing, transportation, and mining are the principal occupations. Women make up a high proportion of the workforce.¹⁷⁰



© Tuija Aalto
Sukhbaatar square

Contemporary Mongolians enjoy spending time with friends. They attend plays and films or meet in cafés. Younger people enjoy the many bars and nightclubs.¹⁷¹

Public Places

Restaurants

The principal cities have restaurants of all kinds. *Guanz*—small, cheap restaurants that sell tradition Mongolian food—can be found everywhere. The equivalent of a roadside café, they are affordable for most Mongolians.¹⁷² Non-Mongolian cuisine has become quite popular in the cities. Visitors, business people, and tourists can find restaurants that serve American, Korean, Chinese, Italian, and Japanese foods.¹⁷³ Diners are warned to make sure that food is cooked properly and that general sanitation is maintained to avoid stomach illnesses.^{174,175,176}



© Tuija Aalto
Khan Bräu brewery and pub

¹⁶⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Studies: Mongolia: The Urban Population,” June 1989, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+mn0050\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+mn0050))

¹⁷⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Studies: Mongolia: Labor Force,” June 1989, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+mn0103\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+mn0103))

¹⁷¹ Mongolia, “Ulaanbaatar City,” 2010, <http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/discover/ub-city>

¹⁷² Blue Peak Travel Photography, “Traveling by Jeep in Mongolia,” 2009, <http://www.bluepeak.net/mongolia/travel.html>

¹⁷³ Mongoluls, “Mongolian Food: Meat, Milk, and Mongolia: Misunderstood and Often Maligned, the Mongolian Diet Does Make Sense,” 2007, <http://www.mongoluls.net/ger/meatmilk.shtml>

¹⁷⁴ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Mongolia: Country Specific Information,” 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

¹⁷⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Regulatory Issues: Good Safety Situation in Mongolia,” 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/004/ab420e.htm>

Exchange 17: May I have a glass of water?

Customer (male):	May I have a glass of water?	Bi neg shil us avch boloKh uu?
Waiter:	Yes, sir!	Tiim, erKhem ee!

Exchange 18: Do you have dessert?

Customer:	Do you have dessert?	Tanaid amttan bii yuu?
Waiter:	Yes, we have cake.	Tiim, manaid tort bii.

Exchange 19: I would like coffee or tea.

Customer:	I would like coffee or tea.	Bi koffe esvel tsai uumaar baina.
Waiter:	Okay.	Za.

Exchange 20: Put this all on one bill, okay?

Customer:	Put this all on one bill, okay?	Bugdiig n Khamtad n neg tolbert tootschiKhoodoi za?
Waiter:	Okay.	Za.

Market Place and Street Vendors

Vendors are numerous in Mongolian cities. Operating kiosks, vendors sell everyday items such as beverages, tobacco, toilet paper, feminine hygiene supplies, and food products. Kiosks stay open late and sell items cheaply and individually.¹⁷⁷



© Fancis Deport
Marketplace

Exchange 21: Can you give me change for this?

Buyer:	Can you give me change for this?	Ta uund nadad Khariult ogch chadaKh uu?
Seller:	Yes.	Tiim.

¹⁷⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Information for Travelers to Mongolia," n.d., <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mongolia.aspx>

¹⁷⁷ Nomin Lkhagvasuren, "Street Vends Stave Off Liberalisation Wolf," IPS News, 8 May 2006, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=33159>

Exchange 22: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Buyer:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	Ta amerikiin mongol temdegteer guilgee KhiiKh uu?
Seller:	No, we only accept <i>tugrug</i> .	Ugui, bid zovKhon togrooor guilgee Khiine.

Mongolian markets are permanent features in the cities. Often referred to as black markets because vendors are unregistered and income is unrecorded, markets sell everything from fruits and vegetables to traditional clothing and artifacts. Imitations of popular Western brands are common.¹⁷⁸ Markets usually charge a small entrance fee, and vendors negotiate prices.¹⁷⁹ Pickpockets target busy markets because they are crowded and people are distracted.¹⁸⁰



© Owally / flickr.com
Fruit stand

Exchange 23: Is the market nearby?

Visitor:	Is the market nearby?	Oir Khavid zaKh bii yuu?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	Tiim, tend baruun tald bii.

Exchange 24: May I examine this close up?

Buyer:	May I examine this close up?	Bi nariin uzej boloKh uu?
Seller:	Okay.	Za.

Exchange 25: Can I buy a doll with this much money?

Buyer:	Can I buy a doll with this much money?	Ene KhuuKheldeig bi ene uneer Khudaldaj avch boloKh uu?
Seller:	Yes.	Tiim.

¹⁷⁸ Business Mongolia, "Mongolia's Hidden Market Counts for 30% GDP," 4 August 2009, <http://www.business-mongolia.com/mongolia/2009/08/04/mongolia%e2%80%99s-hidden-market-counts-for-30-gdp/>

¹⁷⁹ Mongolia-Adventure, "Black Market," 2009, http://www.mongolei-abenteuer.de/ind_ulan_e.html

¹⁸⁰ Embassy of the United States, Mongolia, "Pickpockets in Ulaanbaatar: How to Avoid Becoming a Victim," n.d., http://mongolia.usembassy.gov/pickpocket_tips.html

Traffic and Transportation

Road building in Mongolian cities has not kept up with increasing urbanization. Cities lack parking for the growing number of automobiles, and roads are in poor condition. Potholes, cracks, flooding caused by poor drainage, and little to no maintenance complicate driving in the cities. During winter, ice becomes a serious problem because cities do not use sand or salt on the roads. Not all roads are paved. Dirt paths, located mainly in the *ger* districts, make access by public transport and service vehicles very difficult, sometimes impossible.¹⁸¹



© Darcey Rakestraw
Streets of Ulaanbaatar

Buses and trolleys provide the primary public transportation in the cities. They are extremely crowded and pickpockets target passengers. Taxis serve all areas of the cities and are an inexpensive alternative to public transportation. Taxis are easily identified by the word TAXI written on them. Drivers often do not use their meters but can be urged to do so, or passengers can negotiate a flat rate in advance.¹⁸²

Exchange 26: Will the bus be here soon?

Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	Avtobusan udaKhgui ireKh uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Exchange 27: Can you take me there?

Visitor:	Can you take me there?	Ta namaig tiishee avaachij chadaKh uu?
Local:	Yes, I can.	Tiim, bi chadna.

Trains provide transportation between cities. Ulaanbaatar has express trains that run daily to the other two principal cities, Erdenet and Darkhan. The country has only one main line that runs north to south through the central region of the country, with some branch lines that primarily serve the industrial centers of the country.^{183, 184}

¹⁸¹ The World Bank, "Transport in Mongolia: Urban Transport," 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPTRANSPORT/0,,contentMDK:20767661~menuPK:2069306~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:574066,00.html>

¹⁸² Asia Planet, "Mongolia Location: Ulaanbaatar: Getting Around," 2002, <http://www.asia-planet.net/mongolia/location.htm>

¹⁸³ Lonely Planet, "Mongolia: Getting Around: Train," 2011, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mongolia/transport/getting-around>

¹⁸⁴ Mongolia Hotel Link, "Transportation in Mongolia: Rail," 2010, <http://www.mongoliahotel-link.com/mongolia-transportation>

Exchange 28: Is there a train station nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a train station nearby?	Oir Khavid tomor zamiin buudal bii yuu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Street Crime and Solicitations

Mongolian cities are relatively safe, although street crime is on the rise, especially in Ulaanbaatar. Pick pocketing and bag snatching are common. Violence against foreigners is increasing, especially against those believed to be of Korean or Chinese descent. Nationalist groups have become a regular presence in the principal cities and are prone to attacking foreign men who date local women.^{185,186}

Solicitations for money are common. In Mongolian cities, large numbers of homeless frequent tourist destinations and ask for money. Street children in the principal cities sometimes organize themselves into groups to beg.^{187,188}



© Fernando Martins
Temple beggar

¹⁸⁵ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia: Country Specific Information," 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

¹⁸⁶ Tania Branigan, "Mongolian Neo-Nazis: Anti-Chinese Sentiment Fuels Rise of Ultra-Nationalism," Guardian, 2 August 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/02/mongolia-far-right>

¹⁸⁷ Street Children in Mongolia, "Street Children in Ulaanbaatar," 2009, <http://www.streetchildren.de/en/street-children-ulaanbaatar/index.html>

¹⁸⁸ Embassy of the United States, Mongolia, "Pickpockets in Ulaanbaatar: How to Avoid Becoming a Victim," n.d., http://mongolia.usembassy.gov/pickpocket_tips.html

Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Mongolia has a large urban population.

True

Rural Mongolians migrated to the cities for jobs when the country moved to a market economy.

2. Mongolian cities have infrastructures in place to help rural-to-urban migrants.

False

Rural-to-urban migrants have overwhelmed many cities, which are incapable of meeting the basic needs of migrants.

3. Mongolian health care falls below Western standards.

True

Cities have limited medical facilities that are understaffed and poorly equipped, providing only general health services that leave infants and the elderly underserved.

4. Few women work outside the home in Mongolian cities.

False

Women make up a high proportion of the workforce in the cities.

5. Dining in Mongolian cities is limited.

False

Small restaurants called *ganz* are popular and affordable for most Mongolians. Many non-Mongolian restaurants can be found in the cities, although they are expensive.

Chapter 5 Rural Life

Introduction

Mongolia is a land of vast distances. Once a country of nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, much of the Mongolian population now lives in the cities. However, despite urbanization and a new market economy, the traditional lifestyle of the nomads still exists.



© mysim / flickr.com
Yurt

For centuries, Mongolians have persevered on the steppe. Relying on their animals for survival, nomadic herders migrated seasonally to pasture their herds. They lived in isolated family groups because the landscape could not support large-scale herds. Under socialist rule beginning in the 1920s, agriculture and livestock production became state-run, with family groups banding together on collective farms. The socialist government modernized nomadism, and collective agriculture fostered land conservation. Rural Mongolians thrived under socialism.¹⁸⁹ Mongolia's transition to democracy and a free-market economy began in the 1990s and introduced changes to the Mongolian cultural landscape. Rural Mongolians increased their production of animal by-products to meet demand in urban markets. Modern amenities, such as solar panels, radios, and satellite TV, were also introduced to the steppes. Nevertheless, the nomadic lifestyle remains, and many rural Mongolians live just as their ancestors did before them.^{190,191}

Land Distribution and Ownership

As a nation of nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, Mongolians practiced a communal land-sharing system that gave custodial rights to tribes. Unwritten laws allowed the use of certain grazing lands according to clan and tribal affiliation. Mongolia was governed by a feudal system where the local authority, or lord, granted land use rights based on how many people he oversaw. In effect,



© The_Wandering_Angel / flicker.com
Nomadic family outside their ger

¹⁸⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Mongolia: Modernized Nomads," June 1989, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+mn0062\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+mn0062))

¹⁹⁰ Travel Pod, "Mongolian G2G," 2010, <http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/keelaurow/1/1285087279/tpod.html>

¹⁹¹ Blue Peak Travel Photography, "Mongolia: Yurt (Ger)," 2009, <http://www.bluepeak.net/mongolia/ger.html>

no one owned land, but individuals had exclusive land use rights during each of the seasons.¹⁹²

Exchange 29: Do you own this land?

Official:	Do you own this land?	Ta ene gazriig ezemshdeg uu?
Local:	Yes. No.	Tiim. Ugui.

From the 1920s through 1990, land in Mongolia was state-owned and supported collective farms. Family units within collectives continued to keep livestock and were allowed private ownership of small herds of animals, a system which encouraged land stewardship and careful management. The government provided resources to collectives and allowed them the mobility of the traditional nomadic lifestyle.¹⁹³

Since 1990, Mongolia has implemented a series of economic and political reforms to privatize land. Supporters of privatization believe that private land ownership will strengthen the economy and foster environmental improvements in rural areas. Mongolia's privatization policies aim to promote domestic and foreign investment, resolve rural-to-urban migration problems, promote food production, and develop an efficient market economy.^{194, 195}

Rural Economy

Livestock

Rural Mongolians rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Livestock herding is the foundation of agriculture in the country and generates about 90% of agricultural output.¹⁹⁶ Mongolia has almost 30 million animals, which, combined with poor land management, contribute to overgrazing. The climate also threatens agriculture. *Dzud*—hot dry summers followed by brutally cold winters—have devastated the rural economy. The *dzud* of



© Karina Moreton
Herder

¹⁹² David Sneath, "Notions of Rights over Land and the History of Mongolian Pastoralism," 2000, <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/handle/10535/2366>

¹⁹³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Mongolia: Modernized Nomads," June 1989, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+mn0062\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+mn0062))

¹⁹⁴ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Mongolia," 8 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

¹⁹⁵ N. Tumenbayar, "Land Privatization Option for Mongolia: Introduction," 2000, <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/133/tumenbayarn041100.pdf;jsessionid=E504A1DD E3C27AAA18A8C783663B6F9E?sequence=1>

¹⁹⁶ Rural Poverty Portal, "Mongolia: Geography, Agriculture, the Economy and Education," n.d., www.adb.org/documents/reports/country-gender-assessments/cga-mon.pdf

2009–2010 killed 22% of Mongolia’s livestock. Raw materials from livestock are also part of the rural economy. Demand for cashmere has increased sharply, and goat herding has subsequently expanded.^{197, 198}

Crops

Mongolians grow limited amounts of wheat, barley, and vegetables.¹⁹⁹ The growing season is short; seed stock is of poor quality; and harvesting is inefficient. Farmers have limited access to markets because of vast distances and poor transportation routes. Farmers produce crops mainly to meet the needs of their families and for livestock fodder.²⁰⁰

Exchange 30: What crops do you grow?

Official:	What crops do you grow?	Ta yamar taria end taridag ve?
Local:	I grow wheat, rye, and hay.	Bi ulaan buudai, KhoKh taria, ovs/surel tarialdag.

Gender Roles

Status for men and women in Mongolian society has always been relatively equal. Men and women shared the same basic human rights although their roles differed according to division of labor. Men were soldiers, administrators, and herders. They hunted, slaughtered animals, and engaged in skilled labor. Women were responsible for child care, housework, cooking, cleaning, and domestic chores.²⁰¹



© Karina Moreton
Horse herder

Privatization and the transition to a market economy have changed the roles of women in rural Mongolia. Women still cook, clean, gather water and fuel for cooking and cleaning, and care for children. Increased poverty, however, has forced women to take part in

¹⁹⁷ The World Bank, “Rural Development and Agriculture in Mongolia,” 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPRURDEV/0,,contentMDK:20534341~menuPK:3127775~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:573964,00.html>

¹⁹⁸ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Mongolia,” 8 March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>

¹⁹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Mongolia,” in *The World Factbook*, 8 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>

²⁰⁰ The World Bank, “Rural Development and Agriculture in Mongolia,” 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPRURDEV/0,,contentMDK:20534341~menuPK:3127775~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:573964,00.html>

²⁰¹ Every Culture, “Mongolia: Gender Roles and Statuses,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Mongolia.html>

traditionally male work. Women actively herd, slaughter, and process animals for their families and for sale. Reduced state social services have decreased women's access to child care, health care, and preschools. Households headed by women are on the rise in rural Mongolia.^{202,203}

Rural Transportation

Transportation in rural Mongolia does not meet Western standards. Around 57% of Mongolia's total network of roads are unpaved dirt tracks.^{204,205} The harsh climate makes driving difficult and hazardous. Vehicles get stuck in the mud and swept over by water in the warm months. Winter snow and ice cover tracks, making it difficult to navigate. The rugged terrain also damages vehicles, and frequent breakdowns plague travelers.²⁰⁶



© j-b.d / flickr.com
Motorcycle

Motorcycles are common in rural Mongolia. Inexpensive, they allow herders to tend their livestock and travel to towns and to visit relatives and friends. Wealthier herders use jeeps for transportation, but only around 1 family in 10 owns a car in rural Mongolia.²⁰⁷ The rural poor use horses for transportation. The poorest of herder families must use public transport, hire drivers, or rely on friends and relatives. Travel by foot and hitchhiking is common for daily chores.^{208, 209}

²⁰² Asian Development bank, "Mongolia Country Gender Assessment," 9 May 2003, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan038216.pdf>

²⁰³ Asian Development bank, "Mongolia Country Gender Assessment," 2005, www.adb.org/documents/reports/country-gender-assessments/cga-mon.pdf

²⁰⁴ The World Bank, "Mongolia: Mongolia Road Composition," 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/MONGOLIAE/XTN/0,,contentMDK:20190294~menuPK:327755~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:327708,00.html>

²⁰⁵ S. Ochirbat, "Problems of Rural Roads in Mongolia," 27 October 2010, http://www.gtkp.com/userfiles/file/Rural%20Roads%20of%20Mongolia_Ochirbat%20Sod.pdf

²⁰⁶ Blue Peak Travel Photography, "Traveling by Jeep in Mongolia," 2009, <http://www.bluepeak.net/mongolia/travel.html>

²⁰⁷ Mongolia Today, "White Death Strikes Again: Market Economy and Nomads," n.d., <http://www.mongoliatoday.com/issue/5/dzud.html>

²⁰⁸ Mercy Corps, "Herder Livelihood Survey," 2006, <http://www.hungercenter.org/international/documents/S%20Doutriaux%20Herder%20Survey%20Report.doc>

²⁰⁹ Martha Avery, *Women of Mongolia*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

Health Issues

Rural health care is poorly administered and underserved. Health-care centers are located in provincial towns, and nurses serve the smaller sub-districts. In remote areas, health care is non-existent. For serious cases, nurses can refer patients to district-level health-care centers, but poverty makes such trips difficult or impossible. Rural Mongolia also suffers a shortage of doctors, many of whom have migrated to the cities for better employment opportunities. The vast distances and poor roads make it difficult for health-care professionals to serve rural communities. The mobility of nomadic herders makes it difficult for them to find access to health care.^{210, 211, 212}



© Josh Chin
Local visit from the doctor

Exchange 31: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Official:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	Oior Khavid eruul mendiin klinik bii yuu?
Local:	Yes, over there.	Tiim, tend baina.

Sanitation is problematic in rural areas. Food quality is often poor and water sources are unreliable. Stomach illnesses are common.²¹³ Inflation caused by the global economic crisis has made health care and medicines unaffordable for the rural poor in Mongolia. Officials are also concerned that health-care demands of chronic illnesses associated with an aging population will not be met.²¹⁴

Maternal health services are inadequate. As a result, many pregnant women suffer from anemia and vitamin deficiencies. Malnutrition is also a concern, affecting approximately 6% of children.²¹⁵ Children are under-vaccinated for preventable diseases, such as measles, mumps, and rubella. Children are not vaccinated for pneumonia and diarrheal diseases, the number one killer of children in Mongolia. Herders also suffer high rates of

²¹⁰ World Health Organization, "WHO Country Cooperation Strategy for Mongolia, 2010–2015," n.d., http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mng_en.pdf

²¹¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia: Country Specific Information," 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

²¹² Asian Development Bank, "Mongolia: Health and Social Protection," 2008, www.adb.org/documents/evaluation/capes/mon/CAPE-MON-Health-Social-Protection.pdf

²¹³ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Mongolia: Country Specific Information," 3 March 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_973.html

²¹⁴ World Health Organization, "WHO Country Cooperation Strategy for Mongolia, 2010–2015," n.d., http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mng_en.pdf

²¹⁵ Asian Development Bank, "Mongolia: Health and Social Protection," 2008, www.adb.org/documents/evaluation/capes/mon/CAPE-MON-Health-Social-Protection.pdf

disease transmitted from animals. Instances of anthrax and avian flu are common, and Mongolia has one of the highest rates of brucellosis in the world.²¹⁶

Education

Access to high-quality education declined during Mongolia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s. Increased poverty in rural areas directly contributed to the breakdown of the rural school system. Impoverished families took children out of school to work. Since 1990, the number of children who have never attended primary or secondary school has grown. In 1997, local governments closed many schools in remote areas. Because of the vast distances and poor road conditions, bringing education to rural areas is difficult and costly, especially in winter. Low teacher salaries also make it difficult to attract teachers to rural areas.^{217, 218, 219, 220}



© Osaka Japan
Young girl with brother

Exchange 32: Is there a school nearby?

Official:	Is there a school nearby?	Oir Khavid surguuli bii yuu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

When children reach school age, they are often sent to provincial towns where they live in unsanitary and overcrowded dormitories and attend school. Many children prefer to return to their families.²²¹ International aid organizations work with the Mongolian government to provide alternative educational opportunities, such as mobile *ger* schools for herder communities.^{222, 223, 224}

²¹⁶ World Health Organization, "WHO Country Cooperation Strategy for Mongolia, 2010–2015," n.d., http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mng_en.pdf

²¹⁷ The World Bank, "Mongolia: Public Financing of Education: Equity and Efficiency Implications," 2006, http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=51187349&piPK=51189435&theSitePK=327708&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708&entityID=000090341_20061110135740&searchMenuPK=327737&theSitePK=327708

²¹⁸ The World Bank, "Mongolia: Rural Education and Development Project," 2010, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22644150~menuPK:141311~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

²¹⁹ VSO International, "Mongolia: Education," 2010, <http://www.vsointernational.org/where-we-work/mongolia.asp>

²²⁰ VSO International, "Mongolia Education Summary," 2007, http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/mongolia-education-summary-mar07_tcm76-20564.pdf

²²¹ United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, "Mongolia: Newslines: Mongolia Faces Challenges Keeping 'Herder Children' in School," n.d., http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/mongolia_1563.html

²²² UNICEF, "At a Glance: Mongolia: Travelling Schools Bring Education to Migrant 'Herder Children,'" 22 September 2007, http://www.unicef.org/education/mongolia_40960.html

Exchange 33: Do your children go to school?

Official:	Do your children go to school.	Tanai KhuuKhduud surguulid yavtsgaadag uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Nomadic Way of Life

Nomads today live much the same as they did in centuries past. They rely on their animals for survival and move seasonally to find water and pasture for their livestock. Sheep have always been a mainstay for nomads on the steppe, providing food, clothing, shelter, and fuel.

Demand for cashmere has pushed nomads to increase their goat herds. Yaks and oxen are common beasts of burden in regions of pristine grassland. They are used to pull carts and are a good source of meat and milk products. Nomads in the desert regions rely heavily on the Bactrian, or two-humped, camel for transport. Camels also provide food and wool. Horses are the most important animal to nomadic people in Mongolia. The horse made the nomad mobile and helped him tend livestock and cover vast distances.^{225, 226}



© Karina Moreton
Mongolian family moving

Exchange 34: Do you know this area very well?

Official:	Do you know this area very well?	Ta ene Khaviin gazriig sain medeKh uu?
Local:	Yes, I grew up here.	Tiim, bi end osoj tornison.

Life has changed little for 21st-century nomads. They are still highly mobile, still live in *gers*, and still rely on animals for survival. However, contemporary nomads now try to meet the demands of a market economy rather than living for subsistence. The poverty rate is high, partly because an increase in the size of herds has contributed to

²²³ Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, "Human Rights Education in Mongolian Schools: Present State and Challenges," 2006, http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/2006/03/human-rights-education-in-mongolian-schools-present-state-and-challenges.html

²²⁴ Mongolian Views, "Mongolia: Encouraging a Better Educated Tomorrow," 28 August 2010, <http://www.mongolianviews.com/2010/08/mongolia-encouraging-better-educated.html>

²²⁵ Discover Mongolia, "Mongolia Culture and History: Nomad Lifestyle," 2010, http://www.discovermongolia.mn/country/Nomad_lifestyle.html

²²⁶ Asia for Educators, "The Mongols in World History: The Pastoral Nomadic Lifestyle," 2004, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/pastoral/pastoral6.htm>

desertification caused by overgrazing. High interest rates, bad loans, and rapidly changing commodities prices have also impacted nomads negatively.²²⁷

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Mongolia has only six border crossing points open to most foreign nationals. They include the international airport at Ulaanbaatar and the road/train crossing to China at Zamin Uud. The other four crossings are to Russia, located at Tsagaannuur, Sukhbaatar, Altanbulag, and Ereen-Tsav. Other border points are seasonal or closed to all but Mongolians, Chinese, and/or Russians.²²⁸



© Michael Chu
Border outpost

Exchange 35: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Official:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	Khamgiin oir shalgan ongoruuleKh tseg Khaana baina ve?
Local:	Two kilometers from here.	Endees hoyor kilometriinzaitai.

Border crossing points are open only at set times, and walking across borders is prohibited. Border crossings into Russia are particularly difficult. Large amounts of paperwork, which Russian border guards scrutinize carefully, are required.^{229,230}

Exchange 36: Is this all the ID you have?

Guard:	Is this all the ID you have?	Tand ene l unemleKh baina uu?
Driver:	No.	Ugui.

²²⁷ Tania Branigan, "Mongolia: How the Winter of 'White Death' Devastated Nomads' Way of Life," in *The Guardian*, 20 July 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/20/mongolia-nomads-livestock-winter-poverty>

²²⁸ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Travel Advice: Mongolia," 22 February 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/mongolia#bordercrossing>

²²⁹ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Travel Advice: Mongolia," 22 February 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/mongolia#bordercrossing>

²³⁰ Adventure Bimbling, "Mongolia: Border Crossing Points," n.d., http://www.adventurebimbling.com/mongolia/mongolia_borders.html

Exchange 37: Are you carrying any guns?

Guard:	Are you carrying any guns?	Ta yamar negen buu zevseg zoovorloj baina uu?
Driver:	Yes.	Tiim.

Exchange 38: Please get out of the car.

Guard:	Please get out of the car.	Ta mashinaas garna uu.
Driver:	Okay.	Za.

Exchange 39: Show us the car registration.

Guard:	Show us the car registration.	mashiniiKhaa burtgeliig bidend uzuul.
Driver:	Okay.	Za.

Land Mines

Mongolia has reported that it is not affected by mines. Currently, the government has no active program for mine clearance but may have an extensive stockpile of mines from the former Soviet Union. Mongolia has been an observer at conferences of the Mine Ban Treaty but has not adhered to its objectives, though the country states it will not transfer, acquire, or place land mines. Although Mongolia is party to the Convention on Conventional Weapons, it is not party to protocols on remnants of war and has not participated in discussions on cluster munitions. Mongolia reports that it has never used mines within its territory.²³¹



© Kit Seeborg
Mongolia landscape

Exchange 40: Is this area mined?

Visitor:	Is this area mined?	Ene gazart uurKhai Khiigdej baigaa yuu?
Local:	No.	Ugui.

²³¹ Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Mongolia," 21 July 2010, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/121

Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Socialist state-run farms broke up families of herders.

False

Family units made up farm collectives. Mongolians thrived under socialism.

2. Animals are crucial to the rural economy.

True

Livestock herding is the backbone of agriculture and generates about 90% of agricultural output.

3. Roads in rural Mongolia are well developed.

False

Rough dirt tracks are found throughout rural Mongolia. They are subject to flooding in summer and are covered by ice and snow in winter.

4. All rural children have an opportunity to go to school.

False

Local governments shut down many schools, and poverty has forced many families to rely on child labor to survive.

5. Mongolia has many border crossings checkpoints.

False

Despite its vast borders, Mongolia only has six border crossing checkpoints open to most foreigners.

Chapter 6 Family Life

Introduction

Family is the foundation of Mongolian culture. Mongolians favor the immediate family over the extended family, but traditional herding groups consist of related families. Rural Mongolians tend to stay close to one another, however many large families broke up when people began migrating to the cities during the 1990s. Except for the Kazakh minority in western Mongolia, most people are Lamaist Buddhists. Women enjoy social equality and are a large part of the workforce.



© Michael Foley
Ger family

Family Structure

Nuclear families, consisting of a husband, wife, and children, are the norm in Mongolia. Sometimes elderly relatives live with the family. In nomadic families, sons leave the family *ger*—the traditional Mongolian tent—when they marry and establish their own families nearby. These adult sons usually remain part of the family herding group. In semi-nomadic families, though, it is not uncommon for a son to remain with his parents after marriage, bringing his new wife to live with them. Urban Mongolians have continued to maintain the traditional family structure. With modernization has also come poverty and an increased number of single-parent homes—usually headed by women—in both rural and urban areas.^{232, 233}



© Karina Moreton
Mongolian family

Exchange 41: How many people live in this house?

Official:	How many people live in this house?	Ene orKhod Kheden Khumuus amidartsgaadag ve?
Local:	Seven.	Doloo.

²³² Every Culture, “Mongolia: Marriage, Family, and Kinship,” 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Mongolia.html>

²³³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Mongolia: Kinship, Family, and Marriage,” in *Mongolia: A Country Study*, 1989, <http://countrystudies.us/mongolia/43.htm>

Interactions within the Family

Mongolian society and families are patriarchal. Fathers are the heads of households, but women exert a great deal of influence on decision making. Mongolian men rarely make any serious decisions without consulting their wives.²³⁴



© Karina Moreton
Mongolian woman

Women

Women participate at all levels of the workforce. Rural women are the caretakers of their homes. They cook, clean, milk animals, and perform other household chores while the men herd and slaughter animals and take care of buildings and repairs. Traditionally, it was the men who represented families in local, regional, and national politics. Today's Mongolian women are herders, shop owners and politicians. They have reported discrimination on the job and are overrepresented in lower-paying jobs.^{235, 236, 237}

Elders

Elders occupy an important position within the Mongolian social structure where they exert a great deal of influence. Families care for the needs of their elders until their deaths.²³⁸ Elders help raise children in Mongolian society. Young people are taught to revere their elders and treat them with great respect.²³⁹

Children

Traditionally, Mongolian children were educated at home by family members. Parents raised their children to meet the physical demands of a nomadic life, and carefully instilled in them a reverence for their elders. Parents also nurtured the intellectual development of their children—a process that begins before birth. Many customs about

²³⁴ Every Culture, "Mongolia: Marriage, Family, and Kinship," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Mongolia.html>

²³⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Mongolia: Kinship, Family, and Marriage," in *Mongolia: A Country Study*, 1989, <http://countrystudies.us/mongolia/44.htm>

²³⁶ Teresa Poole, "Frontline: Hatgal, Mongolia—Wasteland Village Saved by Its Women," *The Independent*, 6 August 1998, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/frontline-hatgal-mongolia--wasteland-village-saved-by-its-women-1169920.html>

²³⁷ International Telecommunication Union, "Women's Issues in ICT in Mongolia," 2001, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/55/510.html>

²³⁸ Ts. Baatar, "Social and Cultural Change in the Mongol-American Community," n.d., <http://condor.depaul.edu/rrotenbe/aer/v17n2/Baatar.pdf>

²³⁹ Peace Corps, "Just Like the Old Days," n.d., <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/stories/stories.cfm?psid=51>

the treatment of pregnant women developed from this attention to the unborn child's moral and intellectual development..²⁴⁰

Exchange 42: Are these people [children] part of your family?

Official:	Are these people [children] part of your family?	Edgeer Khumuus [KhuuKhduud] tanai ger buliin Khumuus uu?
Local:	Yes.	Tiim.

Marriage

Marriage in Mongolia affirms the equal status of men and women within society. Traditionally, after a husband's death a woman inherited property, became head of the household, and retained ownership of her dowry. Women also had the equal right to petition for divorce. According to old customs, marriages were civil affairs—often arranged by parents—that strengthened the herding camps involved.²⁴¹

Modern marriages are not very different from traditional marriages. While couples today usually initiate marriages, arranged marriages still occur in remote areas. Marriages represent agreements between families rather than a contract between the couple. To represent the union of the two families, they exchange wealth. It is usual for the man to bring livestock, and the woman contributes a dowry of jewelry, clothing, and furniture. Newlyweds in rural areas set up their own households. The woman moves to her husband's *ger*, situated near his family's camp. They usually remain part of the same herding group.²⁴²

Marriages in urban areas follow similar customs. People usually marry within their own social group, so schoolmates and co-workers often marry one another. Co-workers often provide gifts to help the new couple set up house. In recent years, the wedding industry has blossomed in the cities. For a fee, companies will provide photographers, traditional wedding costumes, wedding halls, and limousine services.²⁴³

In Mongolia, common-law marriages are not a disgrace, and both spouses possess full marriage rights. Interreligious and interethnic marriage is legal, but a strong sense of identity in each group makes such marriages socially unacceptable.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Mongoliana, "Specific Features of Mongolian Customs," 5 January 2006, <http://www.ub-mongolia.mn/mongolia/culture-mongolia/customs-and-traditions/mongolian-customs-and-traditions.html#>

²⁴¹ Per Inge Oestmoen, "Women in Mongol Society: The Characteristics and Roles of Females among the Mongols," *The Realm of the Mongols*, 2001, <http://www.coldsiberia.org/monwomen.htm>

²⁴² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Studies: Mongolia: Kinship, Family, and Marriage," n.d., <http://www.country-studies.com/mongolia/kinship,-family,-and-marriage.html>

²⁴³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Studies: Mongolia: Kinship, Family, and Marriage," n.d., <http://www.country-studies.com/mongolia/kinship,-family,-and-marriage.html>

²⁴⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Mongolia: Contemporary Marriage Customs, Including Information on Customs in Ulan Bator, Arranged Marriages, Child Betrothals, Common Law Relationships, Inter-Ethnic Marriages between Khalkas and Kazakhs, Inter-Religious Marriages between Muslims and

Social Events

Weddings

Buddhist traditions influence when couples marry. Many young couples time their marriage to fall on days of the Buddhist calendar known as “Blessed Days,” which they believe are auspicious for their future.²⁴⁵ Weddings are social affairs, and new couples host large feasts for their families and friends. It is customary for friends and relatives to provide the new couple with gifts to help them begin their married life.^{246, 247}



© Lee LeFever
Mongolian wedding

Birth

Mongolians honor births with a celebratory meal of *buuz*, meat dumplings that are also the traditional food served during the celebration of the Lunar New Year. According to tradition, grandparents were responsible for naming children. Modern, urban parents now name children themselves. Mongolians believe that the souls of children reside both in the child and in the world of spirits, so parents take great care to protect their children from negative influences. Haircutting ceremonies are popular when children become toddlers and signify that the child lives fully in the world.²⁴⁸

Funerals

As adherents of Lamaist (Tibetan) Buddhism, Mongolians for many centuries practiced open-air burial, ritually leaving the bodies of the dead to be devoured by animals. Buddhist belief in reincarnation meant that the body was merely an empty shell, though ritual burial practices varied with income level and importance. These open-air burials also offered a practical way of disposing of the deceased in lands where the ground is

Buddhists,” 1 March 1999,

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic.463af2212.49709e7c10.3ae6ab1758.0.html>

²⁴⁵ Khaliun Travel, “Mongolian Wedding Ceremony,” 2008,

<http://www.khaliuntravel.com/attractions/mongolian-specials/mongolian-wedding-ceremony>

²⁴⁶ Culture Grams, “Mongolia: Dating and Marriage,” 2011,

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=105&cn=Mongolia&sname=Dating_and_Marriage&snid=12

²⁴⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Studies: Mongolia: Kinship, Family, and Marriage,” n.d., <http://www.country-studies.com/mongolia/kinship,-family,-and-marriage.html>

²⁴⁸ Culture Grams, “Mongolia: Lifecycle,” 2011,

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=105&cn=Mongolia&sname=Life_Cycle&snid=28

frozen for much of the year. The communist government outlawed this practice in Mongolia, but it has returned to parts of the country as Buddhist practices reemerge.²⁴⁹

Today many Mongolians bury their dead in cemeteries, but modern funerals are costly. Family members must pay lamas to say the rites over the dead and to advise the family on the proper burial place and routes to and from the cemetery. Family and friends often help defer the cost of funerals by providing money and animals.²⁵⁰

Family and friends show respect for the dead by leaving offerings of food and circling the coffin three times. Funeral processions may take long, circuitous routes to the cemetery to confuse evil spirits that might hinder the soul's departure.²⁵¹

Mongolian Names

Names are important in Mongolian society. The tradition of symbolic names continues today and remains consistent in cities and in the country. Mongolians name their children to bring them good fortune or to fool evil spirits. Family elders used to name newborns, sometimes in consultation with a shaman. Today, parents name their children, sometimes in consultation with a lama.^{252,253}

Names consist of two parts. Names for boys suggest strength and solidity such as "Steel-Axe," "Iron-Hero," or "Strong-Nice." Girls' names, such as "Golden-Flower," "Moon-Light," or "Sun-Beam," suggest beauty and may include names of flowers, colors, or the sun and moon.²⁵⁴



Mongolians are known also to give their children unpleasant names. Families whose previous children were sickly or have died will give new babies unpleasant names. This practice is thought to fool the evil spirits believed to be responsible for the illnesses or deaths. Names such as "Vicious-Dog," "No-Name," "Not-Human," or "Not-This-One" are common.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Heike Michel, "The Open-Air Sacrificial Burial of the Mongols," n.d., <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~corff/im/Texte/burial.html>

²⁵⁰ Every Culture, "Mongolia: Religion: Death and the Afterlife," 2011, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Mongolia.html>

²⁵¹ Simon Monster, "A Funeral in Ulaanbaatar: Interserve Partner Simon Monster Attends a Mongolian Funeral," 2004, <http://www.interserve.org.au/resource/funeral.pdf>

²⁵² Mongolia Travel Guide, "Mongolian Names," 2011, <http://www.mongolia-travel-guide.com/mongolian-names.html>

²⁵³ Mandal, "Mongolian Names," 2007, http://www.mandal.ca/mongolia/m/Mongolian_names.html

²⁵⁴ Mandal, "Mongolian Names," 2007, http://www.mandal.ca/mongolia/m/Mongolian_names.html

²⁵⁵ Mandal, "Mongolian Names," 2007, http://www.mandal.ca/mongolia/m/Mongolian_names.html

Mongolians do not use last (family) names. A child receives his or her own first name and also uses the father's first name. The father's name will precede the given name. When Mongolians introduce themselves using these two names, they are called by their given or second name.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Mongolia Travel Guide, "Mongolian Names," 2011, <http://www.mongolia-travel-guide.com/mongolian-names.html>

Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Mongolians favor the extended family over the nuclear family.
False
Although members of herding camps are usually related, most Mongolians live in small nuclear family groups.
2. Mongolian men rule their households.
False
Mongolian families are patriarchal, but men rarely make any serious decisions without consulting their wives.
3. Mongolian women only work in the home.
False
Women participate at all levels of the Mongolian workforce.
4. Children's education is very important in Mongolian society.
True
Parents nurture the intellectual and moral development of their children, even before they are born.
5. All Mongolian burials follow Soviet-era rituals.
False
Most Mongolians today follow the practice of cemetery burial. However the Lamaist Buddhist practice of open-air "sky burials" still takes place in parts of the country, and has become more prevalent in recent years with the resurgence of Buddhist belief.

Mongolian Final Assessments

1. The principal cities of Mongolia have well-developed infrastructures.
2. The Kazakhs are the largest ethnic minority in Mongolia.
3. Genghis Khan divided the Mongolian people into numerous ethnic groups.
4. Tourism has become an important component of the Mongolian economy.
5. Mongolia is a culturally fragmented society.
6. Shamanist customs and traditions are still practiced in the daily lives of many Mongolians.
7. Since communist rule ended, Christianity has been on the rise in Mongolia.
8. The rock piles found across Mongolia—*ovoo*—are simply navigational markers.
9. Religious practices in Mongolia include those that focus on family and kinship.
10. A large percentage of Mongolians practice no religion.
11. Hospitality is important to Mongolians.
12. Traditional clothing is common in Mongolia.
13. Mongolians place little value on the environment because the country is so sparsely populated.
14. Great respect is given to the elderly in Mongolia.
15. Gift giving is customary in Mongolia.
16. Mongolia has a low rate of poverty.
17. Mongolia has problems with infectious diseases.
18. Mongolia has a high literacy rate.
19. Sanitation standards are high in Mongolian restaurants.
20. Public transportation is well developed in the cities.
21. Pollution and overgrazing have become serious problems in rural Mongolia.

22. The transportation system for rural Mongolians is underdeveloped.
23. Health care services are severely limited in rural Mongolia.
24. Nomads no longer exist in Mongolia.
25. Mongolia is seriously affected by land mines.
26. Mongolian girls marry into their husbands' families.
27. Elders hold a high position in Mongolian society.
28. Mongolian women are equal partners in their marriages.
29. Marriages are performed in religious ceremonies in Mongolia.
30. Mongolians follow strict naming conventions.

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