US FORCES INDOPACIFIC CULTURE GUIDE

MONGOLIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo: Mongolian dancers perform the East Mongolian dance during Mongolian culture night for Khaan Quest).

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on East Asia.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Mongolian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is meant to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: Mongolians perform a folk dance called "Aduuchin," which means "horseman" and celebrates the importance of horses to nomadic Mongolians).

For more information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"—in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains—which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems, and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social

identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

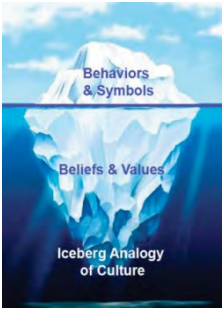
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions, and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of any worldview is a belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support those ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend

judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout East Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

East Asia includes the present-day countries of China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, and South Korea. By the 700s AD, ancient East Asian tribes and peoples had consolidated into unified Chinese, Japanese, and Korean states; Mongolia formed a state in the 13th century.

China has played a central role in East Asian history, influencing the region's culture, philosophy, and politics. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, the people of Japan and Korea adopted several aspects of Chinese culture, including clothing and architecture (Photo: The Great Wall of China).

Despite its predominance, China remained vulnerable to nomadic Mongol tribes living along its northern border. In the

12th and 13th centuries, Mongol forces under the command of Genghis Khan swept through Asia and parts of Europe, conquering China and Korea. Though vast and diverse, the Mongol Empire was ultimately short-lived.

Over the next 500 years, East Asian societies advanced along differing paths. Japan developed largely in isolation, while Korea—a Chinese tributary state—had some limited outside connections. After the Mongol Empire's demise in the 14th century, Mongolia came under Chinese control, which lasted until Mongolia aligned with the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1924. Europeans established interactions with China in the 1500s. Although trade with Europe initially allowed China to thrive, it eventually helped Europeans expand their control in East Asia.

As Japan industrialized in the mid-19th century, it competed with European powers to colonize other parts of Asia (Pictured: 1898 political cartoon depicting European and Japanese rulers dividing China over the protests of a Chinese official). By the mid-1900s, Japan had colonized Korea, northeastern China, and Taiwan. This colonial activity led to power struggles with other powers, angering Japanese colonial subjects.

World War II (WWII) left a lasting mark on East Asia. Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 led to a long struggle between Japan and the US. Similarly, Japan committed atrocities that inspired hatred throughout East Asia. In 1945 Japan surrendered and was forced to give up its colonies.

Following WWII Cold War politics shaped East Asia's destiny. In China, USSR-backed communists seized control of mainland China, forcing US-backed nationalists to retreat to the island of Taiwan off the Chinese coast. Korea was divided into the US-controlled South and USSR-controlled North as part of a postwar transition. In 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, sparking the Korean War and permanent separation.

During the second half of the 20th century, Japan and South Korea became wealthy, democratic societies with developed

economies. China liberalized its economy but did not reform politically. Mongolia followed communist economic policies until the 1990s, when it liberalized both politically and economically. North Korea remains communist and isolated.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Despite the longevity of its societies, East Asia has experienced substantial political change since the mid-1900s.

Following WWII, Japan rebuilt its economy, aligned with the US, and democratized, although retaining its emperor as a symbol of national unity. While the same party has ruled for all but 5 years since 1955, Japan today enjoys economic prosperity and political freedom.

Once it established a communist stronghold in China, the USSR reasserted Chinese sovereignty although at the expense of several million casualties from political purges and avoidable famines. In 1978 China's government introduced market reforms that lifted millions out of poverty. Nevertheless, the communists have maintained a tight rein on power, denying the Chinese people their autonomy.

Arriving in 1949, Taiwan's Chinese nationalists established an authoritarian rule that has promoted rapid economic growth. Today Taiwan has a thriving economy and a vibrant, multiparty democracy. Although China claims sovereignty over Taiwan, the island functions as an independent country.

The two Koreas have followed vastly different paths since their division (Photo: South Koreans protest for North Korean freedom near the border between the Koreas). During the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea was ruled by authoritarians who favored economic

growth over political freedom, prompting the country to industrialize rapidly. Having democratized in the late 1980s, South Korea now has an open, democratic political system and one of the world's most developed economies. North Korea, by contrast, remains militaristic, repressive, and economically weak.

Long a communist state, Mongolia transitioned to democracy after a peaceful revolution in 1990. Although the communist Mongolian People's Party continued to win elections in the early 1990s, several new parties have won majorities in the Mongolian Parliament in subsequent elections.

Regional security threats and mutual distrust motivate military posturing in East Asia. Having the largest military in the region, China lays claim to several disputed territories and defends a wide range of commercial interests. A well-equipped force, China's military has advanced technologically in recent years. The Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese militaries are substantially smaller than China's but are professional and well-resourced. Technically still at war with South Korea, North Korea has a massive but poorly trained and equipped military of more than a million troops. Mongolia has no international disputes and only a small military. While nationalism and historical animosity threaten East Asian security, most countries in the region trade or engage diplomatically. All East Asian countries apart from North Korea have US embassies.

Japan and the Koreas are ethnically homogeneous societies. Similarly, 94% of Mongolians are ethnic Mongols, while Turkic people constitute the rest of the population. Although 91% of China's population belongs to the Han ethnic group, the Chinese government also recognizes 55 other ethnic groups. No countries in East Asia have substantial foreign-born or immigrant populations.

Many differences exist among social groups within East Asian countries. Wealth, age, educational attainment, employment,

family background, and marital status factor into a person's social status. In most East Asian countries, city dwellers tend to regard their rural counterparts as backwards, less cultured, and less educated. While some generational differences exist, most East Asians consider social and familial harmony paramount. Thus, young people tend to respect elders' wishes.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early East Asians were animists, believing that gods or ancestral spirits inhabited various natural objects and expressed their will in daily life. Today East Asians of many different faiths still follow certain ancient religious practices, such as making offerings to ancestral spirits. Japan's indigenous animist religion, Shintoism, stresses the spiritual connection between Japan's land and its people (Photo: Japanese temple). Similarly, beliefs about shamans and their connection to a spiritual realm persist among some Chinese, Mongolians, and Koreans.

Multiple belief systems historically have coexisted peacefully in East Asia, many of which originated in China and are not linked to specific gods. East Asians typically observe practices from several belief systems simultaneously. In the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Chinese philosophers Confucius and Laozi developed Confucianism and Daoism, respectively. As these philosophies spread, they shaped regional ideas about social harmony. Whereas Confucianism describes how various types of social relationships should function ideally, Daoism emphasizes balance, simplicity, compliance with the natural order, and reverence for ancestors and Laozi.

Around 150 AD, Buddhism spread from the Indian subcontinent into China, eventually reaching other parts of Asia. East Asian

Buddhism has many variations because its adherents have adapted the faith to their cultures, philosophies, and traditions. Many East Asians practice some form of Buddhism today.

While Islam and Christianity have been present in East Asia for centuries, their influence has been limited to certain places. Arriving in China in the 7th century AD, Islam has a long history in western China and Mongolia and has undergone a modest expansion in recent years. Christianity also was introduced to East Asia in the 7th century AD and eventually gained converts among some Mongol tribes. Beginning in the 1500s, European missionaries expanded Christianity's reach. Today most East Asian Christians live in South Korea, where roughly 30% of the population is Christian.

During the 20th century, communist East Asian governments often curtailed religious practice in favor of atheism. China is still officially atheist, and the Communist Party of China forbids party members from following any religion. The North Korean government takes a different approach by promoting ***Juche***, a state-sponsored faith that combines aspects of Eastern and Western belief systems with reverence for Kim Il-sung, the first North Korean President, and his family. Despite these recent examples of religious suppression, East Asians have tended to resume open religious practice as the government permits. For example, Buddhism has thrived in Mongolia since the country abandoned communism in 1990.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Most East Asians highly value family relationships. Individuals are expected to subordinate their desires to those of their families as a means of promoting harmony and the best interests of the family as a whole (Photo: A Japanese family in 1928). Children are taught

to respect and obey their elders from a young age. In return, parents devote themselves to their children and make many sacrifices for their wellbeing. These sacrifices enable children's success, preserve the family legacy, and ensure that parents will have a caretaker in old age.

Traditionally, East Asian families have been large, close-knit, multi-generational kin groups whose members support each other. Members of the same extended family traditionally have lived in close proximity, an arrangement that provided many benefits in the rural, agricultural villages that once were widespread in East Asia. Although family life still revolves around farming or herding in some rural areas, family life has changed as East Asia has industrialized and urbanized. While caring for elderly relatives is still common, some modern East Asian households, especially in urban areas, consist of nuclear families (2 parents and their offspring) that live far from their ancestral homes.

East Asian dwellings vary widely. In large urban areas like Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar, and Shanghai, people typically live in either older homes or modern, high-rise apartment buildings. By contrast, rural East Asians typically live with their extended families in freestanding houses. China and Mongolia have especially extensive rural hinterlands. A number of Mongolians continue to live seasonally as nomadic herders in collapsible huts (pictured).

Marriage is a key milestone for East Asians, who typically date and select their own spouses with the advice and approval of elders. Since many young East Asians today delay marriage to pursue educational or career opportunities, the average marriage age has increased. Nevertheless, the traditional expectation that young East Asians will marry, bear children, and care for their elderly parents remains deep-seated.

East Asians commemorate major life stages through a range of ceremonies and celebrations. The birth of a healthy child, for example, is a joyous occasion that prompts parties, gift-giving,

and welcoming and naming ceremonies. Conversely, funerals and other death customs are more somber and demonstrate respect for the deceased.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological and reproductive differences between males and females. Gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

While most East Asian countries provide for legal gender equality, women are subordinate to men in practice. Moreover, cultural norms tend to entrench traditional roles, whereby women remain underrepresented in both business and government. Many of East Asia's predominant philosophies and religions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, establish men as family providers and direct women to behave subserviently. Nevertheless, East Asian women still make important contributions to society, having enjoyed expanding rights over the past 50 years.

In states under communist influence, women have been allowed to work outside the home, although also expected to continue performing domestic duties. By contrast, women in Japan and South Korea gained social rights more gradually. Today, most East Asian women, particularly in urban areas, have access to training and education equal to that of their male peers.

While women typically receive less pay than men and rarely reach senior levels of leadership, East Asians generally accept women in the workplace. Many women balance career and family responsibilities, although they are more likely than men to leave the workforce to care for children or elderly relatives.

Due to family planning policies and increased use of contraceptives, among other factors, East Asian countries have low birthrates. Of note, China's birthrates have declined more than 40% since the government introduced a One-Child Policy in 1979. Due to an enduring cultural preference for sons, the

policy has driven many Chinese couples to abort female fetuses or give up their daughters for adoption in hopes that their lone child will be a son. These practices have skewed China's gender ratio.

East Asians historically have not regarded homosexuality as an acceptable practice. Consequently, homosexuals in the region typically have assumed heterosexual family roles. Nevertheless, gay rights are beginning to gain traction mostly in China, South Korea, and Japan, although same-sex marriages remain taboo.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication refers to the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. In East Asian countries, most inhabitants speak the official language or a similar dialect. For example, more than 99% of people in Japan and the Koreas speak the official state languages, while more than 90% of Mongolians speak Khalkha Mongolian, the official language.

China is East Asia's most linguistically diverse country having 292 spoken languages. A majority of China's population speaks the official Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan) language, although a number of groups continue to speak ethnic languages as a means of preserving their unique identities (Pictured: A Chinese dictionary).

Speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and other Chinese languages use an ancient, character-based writing system to record sound and meaning. Developed around 1200 BC, the Chinese writing system has tens of thousands unique characters. Historically, Mongolians, Japanese, and Koreans also transcribed their languages using Chinese characters. While the Japanese and Koreans eventually devised their own writing systems, their languages still use some words and characters borrowed from Chinese. Mongolians have used many scripts to write their language, although they, like Russians, now use Cyrillic.

East Asians typically avoid confrontation, seek consensus, and refrain from displaying emotions in public. In order to maintain social harmony, East Asians often try to “save face” – avoid embarrassment to themselves or others. They tend to begin conversations by discussing neutral topics, such as health, family, and hobbies. While specific greeting customs – such as bows, handshakes, and forms of address – vary by country, all East Asians tend to use both verbal and non-verbal cues to convey respect and reinforce social hierarchy.

East Asians typically are reserved when meeting new people for the first time, particularly foreign nationals. Eventually, they become more comfortable and candid as they get to know a new acquaintance. Being introduced through a well-respected mutual contact alleviates these reservations to some extent.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems like schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Most East Asian cultures value education. Historically reserved for young male elites, formal education was an essential qualification for prestigious civil service jobs in ancient China, Japan, and Korea, where students often took personal lessons from famous scholars. Scholars and teachers historically have been and continue to be highly respected in East Asia, typically receiving high salaries and esteem.

Today East Asian children across social and economic ranks have access to basic education. Primary education is compulsory throughout East Asia, where literacy rates reach 96%. Although East Asian students tend to be among the world’s top performers on international achievement tests,

some observers criticize East Asian schools for their emphasis on memorization over critical thinking and creativity.

Urban schools tend to be better resourced and staffed than those in rural areas, particularly in China and Mongolia. Unlike their wealthier urban peers, many rural students cannot afford additional tutoring and tend to lag behind on national examinations.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to building lasting relationships. Most East Asian cultures consider personal relationships and efficient time management equally essential and not mutually exclusive in professional and social settings.

East Asians typically adhere to deadlines and schedules and may multitask to maximize efficiency. While they typically refrain from taking time to build relationships during meetings, they often use after-work social events to build and maintain personal relationships with coworkers. Accordingly, socializing over meals or drinks helps foster relationships.

East Asians occupy public and private space in ways that may be unfamiliar to Americans. For example, since East Asian cities tend to be crowded, personal space is at a premium. Similarly, people tend to stand in close proximity in social contexts. East Asians keep inside spaces clean, removing shoes and wearing slippers after they enter a home, school, or temple (pictured).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. A country's clothing, games, music, theater, literature, and artwork reflect a variety of historic, cultural, and religious influences as well as its geographic features, climate, and global interconnectedness.

East Asia is known for its rich artistic traditions that emphasize principles such as balance, precision, and harmony, although these traditions vary by culture and time period. While the region has a long tradition of classical dance and music using a range of musical instruments, more recently, some musicians have adopted modern Western styles, particularly pop music.

East Asia also has a long, rich, and well-preserved tradition of literature and folklore. East Asian classics, such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, are well-known even in the US. Historically, East Asia's religions and philosophies, particularly Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs, have influenced its arts, crafts, and architecture. Today modern secular influences tend to inspire East Asian artists. By contrast, North Korean art, music, and cinema are limited to themes that honor its leaders.

East Asians enjoy soccer and table tennis. Baseball is popular in Japan and South Korea, while basketball is common in China. Mongolians excel at archery, wrestling, and horseback riding. Martial arts, such as Japan's ***judo*** and ***karate*** or Korea's ***taekwondo***, are popular throughout the region. Many East Asian athletes have excelled in worldwide sports competitions. Notably, China, South Korea, and Japan have hosted the Olympics, collectively earning hundreds of medals.

While traditional clothing varies among and within East Asian countries, it is typically colorful and elaborately decorated. Most East Asians reserve traditional clothing for special occasions. For instance, Koreans wear ***hanbok*** or ***choson-ot***, a 2-piece garment with a short jacket for weddings or funerals. Japanese people often wear the ***kimono***, an ankle-length, long-sleeve robe, for special occasions. Across East Asia, Western-style clothing is the most common style for daily wear.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of

disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

East Asian cuisine varies widely even within single countries. Rice is East Asia's main staple grain featured at most meals as a complement to meat, seafood, or vegetables. Rice is also an ingredient in many desserts. Many East Asian cuisines also include noodles, dumplings, and soups. Although the Koreas share a culinary heritage, North Koreans' diet has less variety and more corn since it is cheaper than rice. Mongolia's cuisine consists largely of meat and dairy from sheep, cows, camels, yaks (indigenous Asian long-haired ox), and goats, with few vegetables or spices due to a lack of arable land.

East Asians regularly drink teas and also enjoy a number of indigenous alcoholic beverages, including Japanese ***saké***, made by fermenting rice, and Mongolian ***airag***, which comes from fermented horse milk.

Although most East Asian countries have experienced gradual increases in life expectancy as they have industrialized, accessibility and affordability of modern medical care vary widely. Preventative care is considered important to maintain health. Many East Asians rely on traditional medicines such as acupuncture and herbal medicines to cure their ailments. Some mainstream medical practitioners have incorporated traditional practices into their clinical healthcare. Of concern is the use of toxic herbal treatments that can harm patients, rare animal species like rhinos and tigers, and the environment.

While most communicable diseases have been eradicated or controlled in East Asia, less healthy lifestyles have contributed to an increase in non-communicable illnesses, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Emerging infectious diseases, such as "bird flu" (avian influenza), can threaten public health and spread rapidly in densely populated cities. In addition to purely medical concerns, China, Japan, and South Korea also face the common problem of financing healthcare for their growing elderly populations. Meanwhile, Mongolia and North Korea still grapple with malnutrition.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

East Asian economic systems range from communism to free market capitalism. With the exception of North Korea, East Asian countries have benefited from industrialization and global trade and investments. China, Japan, and South Korea, in particular, have some of the world's largest economies, ranking 2nd, 3rd, and 12th in the world by nominal gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

China's shift from planned to free market economics enabled it to realize dramatic economic gains. Since liberalizing its economy, China has experienced economic growth averaging 7% annually, largely due to its exports. This expansion so far has freed 500 million people from poverty, although wealth remains primarily in the hands of China's elites. While China continues to grow, the pace has slowed (Photo: Shanghai skyline).

Japan and South Korea have industrialized, highly developed economies. Since World War II, both countries have achieved large economic gains. In the 1990s, Mongolia abandoned its planned economy and privatized many industries, leading to substantial economic growth and social change. By contrast, North Korea's economy struggles under international sanctions and relies heavily on China to boost its failing economy.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. While technological development is often seen as purely positive, governments can also harness technology to monitor their citizens and crackdown on dissent.

Technology has enabled development throughout East Asia, although it has occurred at different rates. For example, while Japan and South Korea have adopted a range of industrial and Internet-enabled technologies, North Korea purposely shuns many of those technologies in order to remain isolated. China, Japan, and South Korea have well-developed physical and telecommunications infrastructures that enable transportation, trade, and connectivity with the entire world.

Transport infrastructure varies widely throughout East Asia. For example, high-speed trains crisscross much of Japan (pictured), while only about 6% of Mongolia's roads are paved. Consequently, most Mongolians travel by foot, on animals, or on motorcycles.

While Japan and South Korea have relatively few mineral resources, Mongolia, China, and North Korea have large mineral deposits. Most East Asian countries use diverse energy sources such as coal and oil, importing substantial quantities of oil and natural gas from other regions. China is the world's 2nd largest oil importer and largest producer and consumer of coal. Apart from North Korea, East Asian countries have sought to develop nuclear power and hydropower as alternative energy sources.

Freedom of the press and Internet vary substantially in East Asia. China and North Korea lack these freedoms, sponsoring state-controlled media outlets. Japan, Mongolia, and South Korea, by contrast, have relatively few restrictions on the press and Internet. While the number of Internet users in China alone exceeds the entire US population, China's government heavily censors online content and monitors its citizens' Internet use. Japanese and South Korean residents are avid Internet users, enjoying some of the world's fastest Internet connections.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize East Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of Mongolian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Landlocked between Russia and China, Mongolia has a long and varied history. In the 13th century, Mongol warriors led by Genghis Khan conquered swaths of Eurasia to create the world's largest land empire. After centuries of internal conflict and the target of other powers' expansionist efforts, Mongolia declared independence in 1911. Beginning in 1921, Mongolia's communist leaders closely aligned with the Soviet Union. Since 1990, Mongolia has transformed its government into a multiparty democracy and adopted market capitalism.

Note: The term "Mongol" denotes a member of the Mongol ethnic group. By contrast, "Mongolian" refers to a citizen of Mongolia, regardless of ethnicity.

Early History

Archaeological evidence suggests that modern humans reached the region around 40,000 years ago. Over subsequent centuries, various peoples inhabited the Mongolian steppe as pastoralists, herding their livestock from pasture-to-pasture. Around 1,000 BC, residents began erecting 3-10 ft tall stone slabs engraved with stylized humans, birds, or reindeer. These so-called deer stones (pictured) were often placed near burial mounds called ***khirigsuur***. Other early archaeological finds include rock carvings and paintings.

The Huns: Mongols regard the nomadic Huns as their ancestors and view the 209 BC founding of the Hun state as the beginning of Mongol history. Known as the Khünnü in Mongolia and the Xiongnu in China, the Huns created an empire in Central Asia that waged several centuries of war with the Chinese before

disintegrating. Subsequently, some Huns migrated to Europe, where well-known leader Attila the Hun's 5th-century attacks on the Roman Empire contributed to its collapse.

The Turkic Tribes: Between the 7th-10th centuries, a series of Turkic-speaking groups controlled the region, notably the Orkhon Turks, Uyghurs, and Kyrgyz. Unlike the Huns, many of these groups sought to combine herding with settled life, consequently building some towns and ceremonial centers. These groups also helped develop commerce and introduced new writing systems to the region (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).

In the 10th century, a Mongol group called the Khitan established the Liao Dynasty in northeastern China. Liao documents mention a tribal confederation known as the "Nation of All Mongols," likely located in the eastern half of northern Mongolia. The Khitan eventually fell to Turkic Tatars and Jurchens, who later established the Jin Dynasty in northern China.

The Rise of Genghis Khan

At that time, multiple Mongol tribes and clans (groups of families) roamed the steppe, making and changing alliances according to their own interests. Around 1162, a Mongol child named Temüüjin was born into a clan, whose ancestor had been a ruler of the Nation of All Mongols. With the death of his father, young Temüüjin inherited a feud with both the Jurchens and Tatars and spent much of his youth learning to cultivate alliances and refine his warrior skills of horsemanship and archery.

By 1206, Temüüjin had united the ***tuurgatan***, the "people of the felt-walled tents" or the Mongol tribes. At an assembly, they proclaimed him ruler of all the Mongols while giving him the rank of ***khan*** and the title "Genghis" (often written "Chinggis" in Mongolia). Some scholars believe "Genghis" derives from a Turkic word meaning "ocean," symbolizing the depth and breadth of his wisdom (Photo: Monumental statue of Genghis Khan about 34 mi east of Ulaanbaatar).

Genghis Khan

Accounts of Genghis Khan's conquests typically focus on the ferocity of Mongol attacks. Genghis is also admired as a lawmaker, whose recordkeeping and dedication to the rule of law formed the basis of subsequent legal systems. Genghis is also remembered for his system of military organization, training, and strategy; a mounted courier service to transmit messages across long distances; a standardized taxation system; the protection of traders and diplomats; and religious freedom.

For years, Mongolia's communist authorities minimized Genghis' achievements, while condemning as "bourgeois nationalist" any celebration of the Mongol Empire. Even so, in 1962, they organized celebrations in honor of the 800th anniversary of Genghis' birth. However, the USSR objected, arguing that Genghis was a "reactionary" whose "Mongol yoke" had severely damaged Russia. As a result, those celebrations were canceled.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Mongolia's leaders began to reevaluate Genghis Khan and the historical significance of the Mongol Empire. Since the 1990 end of the Cold War in 1990, pride in Genghis Khan and his achievements has reemerged. In 2005, the remains of communist revolutionary heroes were removed from a mausoleum on Ulaanbaatar's Sükhbaatar Square to make way for a new monument dedicated to Genghis Khan.

The Mongol Empire

After ensuring his control to the west and north, Genghis Khan turned his sights south. In 1215, he captured the Jin Dynasty's capital of Yanjing (the modern-day Chinese capital of Beijing), then attacked and defeated an empire in Persia (present-day

Iran), eventually raiding as far west as Eastern Europe and creating the vast Mongol Empire. Spanning the Eurasian continent, the empire was a multi-cultural and religiously tolerant realm, which brought Europe and East Asia into direct contact for the first time. Upon Genghis' 1227 death, the empire was divided among his sons, creating Mongol kingdoms in Persia (called the Ilkhanate), Central Asia (Chagatai Khanate), southern Russia (the Golden Horde), and northern China and Mongolia.

Genghis' son Ögedei continued the Mongol advances into Chinese territory, eventually defeating the Jin and giving him control over all of northern China. In Mongolia, Ögedei constructed a new capital, Karakorum, near the present-day town of Kharkhorin. During that period, Ögedei's son invaded Tibet, then later invited a leader of Tibetan Buddhism to Mongolia. As a result, a "patron-priest" relationship was established between Mongol and Tibetan Buddhist leaders, which would continue into the 20th century.

The Yuan Dynasty under Kublai Khan: After Ögedei's 1241 death, succession disputes divided Genghis' extended family. Stability returned in 1260 with the selection of Genghis' grandson Kublai as the great khan. Unlike other family members, Kublai (depicted in a 13th-century illustration) rejected the nomad-warrior lifestyle, preferring instead to become the ruler of a sedentary society. Naming himself emperor of China, Kublai adopted the Chinese name Yuan for his dynasty and renewed his march south, defeating the last of southern Chinese rulers by 1279.

Ruling from a new capital at present-day Beijing, Kublai oversaw an empire that retained many Chinese cultural and institutional structures. Nevertheless, the Mongols rejected assimilation with the Chinese, retaining their own language, customs, and traditions, while banning all Chinese from government positions.

Over time, unsuccessful military campaigns in Vietnam, Japan, and Indonesia weakened the Mongol state. After Kublai's 1294

death, ineffective leaders were unable to enforce the authority of the central government. Following disastrous flooding and famine in the mid-14th century, Chinese rebel movements began to form, which soon controlled large areas of China. In 1368, one Chinese rebel proclaimed the founding of his own Ming Dynasty and forced the last Yuan emperor to flee Beijing, ending Mongol rule of China. Retreating before the Ming Chinese troops, many Mongols returned to their homeland.

Internal Strife

With the 1368 toppling of the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongol unity Genghis Khan had so carefully constructed was shattered. In the following centuries, several Mongol tribes and alliances, including the Oirats and Khalkh, among others, competed for territory, resources, and influence. The Ming Chinese also tried to bring the Mongols under their control, even destroying the old Mongol capital of Karakorum in 1380. Nevertheless, the Mongols successfully resisted through guerrilla warfare and raids deep into Chinese territory.

Revival of Buddhism: While Kublai Khan had continued the patron-priest relationship with Tibetan Buddhism begun by Ögedei Khan, few Mongols outside the royal court had converted to the religion. This situation began to change in the late 16th century, when Altan Khan, ruler of the eastern Mongols, invited the high ***lama*** (teacher) of the "Yellow Hat" school of Tibetan Buddhism (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) to Mongolia in 1578. At their meeting, Altan Khan granted the Yellow Hat leader the title ***dalai*** (meaning "oceanic" and denoting great wisdom), a title shared by all subsequent leaders of the Yellow Hat school. On his part, the Dalai Lama acknowledged that Altan Khan (depicted in a 16th-century illustration) was the reincarnation of Kublai Khan. Subsequently, Yellow Hat Tibetan Buddhism became the official religion in Altan's domain. With the construction of new monasteries and training of new *lamas*, the

religion (also known as “Lamaism” in Mongolia – see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) began to spread.

In 1639, Zanabazar, the son of a Khalkh Mongol khan, was recognized as the reincarnation of an important Tibetan Buddhist scholar. The next year, Zanabazar was proclaimed the first ***Javzandamba Khutagt*** (supreme spiritual authority) and later received the title ***Öndör Geegen*** (“High Enlightened One”), becoming the leader of Lamaism in Mongolia. Besides advancing Buddhism in Mongolia, Zanabazar was an artist, scholar, and linguist, who created a new script (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) (Illustration: 19th-century depiction of Zanabazar).

The Manchu Qing and “Inner” and “Outer” Mongolia

In the late 16th century, descendants of the Jurchens called the Manchu began to seek expansion from their homeland northeast of Mongolia. By the early 17th century, the Manchu and their Mongol allies occupied and controlled the southern fringe of Mongolia, an area subsequently known as “Inner Mongolia” and an autonomous province of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) today. By contrast, the region of modern-day Mongolia became known as “Outer Mongolia.”

From their base in Inner Mongolia, the Manchu overthrew the Chinese Ming Dynasty in Beijing in 1644 and installed their own Qing Dynasty. They also integrated Inner Mongolia into their imperial administration. By contrast, the Mongol tribes in Outer Mongolia resisted the Manchu for decades, but conflict between the tribes, prevented Mongol unification. Seeking an advantage and under the advice of the *Javzandamba Khutagt* the Khalkh Mongols swore allegiance to the Manchu Qing emperor in 1691. With the resources subsequently provided by the Qing, the Khalkh annihilated the Oirats in a long series of military campaigns, solidifying their predominance in Outer Mongolia (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*). Because of differing experiences, Inner and Outer Mongolia followed different

historical trajectories, with Inner Mongolia much more closely integrated with China than Outer Mongolia in subsequent centuries.

Meanwhile, the Russians were moving eastward, founding new settlements in Siberia, to the north of Mongolia, and provoking conflicts with the Manchu Qing. In a 1727 treaty, imperial Russia acknowledged Qing China's control over all of Mongolia, though revolts by some Mongol tribes against the Manchu Qing continued well into the 1750s. These conflicts resulted in a redistribution of the Mongol tribes across the two Mongolian regions and the migration of some tribes to areas of modern-day Russia and China. Over the next 150 years, Mongolia suffered stagnation and economic decline. Besides high taxes, other factors contributed to the region's impoverishment. For example, the Chinese merchants who controlled trade exploited and oppressed the Mongol herders, and Chinese settlers disrupted Mongol herding patterns in some areas.

Independence Declared

By the late 19th century, Japan and Russia were aggressively pursuing expansion, causing a series of wars and territory exchanges among Qing China, Japan, and Russia. Meanwhile, internal unrest and conflicts with foreign powers had significantly weakened the Manchu Qing. After several failed uprisings, revolutionaries finally succeeded in overthrowing the Qing regime in 1911, ending over 2000 years of imperial rule in China and establishing the Republic of China (ROC) (Illustration: Painting of the *Bogd Khan* by Balduugiin Shara – see p. 7 *of Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Unrest was also widespread in Mongolia. In late 1911, the eighth *Javzandamba Khutagt* was proclaimed the ***Bogd Khan*** (Holy King), and activists declared the independence of Mongolia, an area comprising both Inner and Outer Mongolia and Tuva, a Russian republic today. In 1912, Russia and the *Bogd Khan*'s representatives signed a treaty recognizing independent Mongolia. However, 3 years later, Mongolia was

compelled to accept a Russian-Chinese-Mongolian treaty giving China control of its foreign affairs and returning Inner Mongolia to full Chinese control. Further, Russia began colonizing Tuva.

Struggle for Control

In the 1917 Russian Revolution, the communist Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian tsar (emperor) and assumed power, though pro-tsarist troops continued to oppose the Bolsheviks for a time. In 1922, the Bolsheviks founded the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Taking advantage Russia's weakness, Chinese troops invaded Mongolia and deposed the *Bogd Khan* in 1919.

In response, Mongol nationalists formed the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) and sought assistance from the Russian Bolsheviks, even traveling to Moscow to meet with Russian leader Vladimir Lenin. However, before the Bolsheviks could be organized, pro-tsarist ("White") Russian troops under the command of Baltic German Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg entered Mongolia, drove out the Chinese occupation forces, and restored the *Bogd Khan* to his throne in early 1921 (Photo: Mongol cavalrymen from a pro-tsarist Russian division in 1920).

While Mongols initially welcomed the Baron, especially his support of the *Bogd Khan*, his occupation proved oppressive. Soon, Mongol revolutionaries led by Damdiny Sükhbaatar and Khorloogiin Choibalsan (a future head-of-state) were organizing resistance from their base in Siberia. In mid-1921, their Mongolian People's Army plus Bolshevik ("Red") Russian troops advanced into Mongolia and captured the capital. On July 11, a date subsequently celebrated as a national holiday (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), the revolutionaries reinstated the *Bogd Khan* as a constitutional monarch with limited powers. The Baron was subsequently delivered to the Soviet authorities and executed.

The Mongolian People's Republic

Following a power struggle, several MPP leaders were executed for "counter-revolutionary activities." Moreover, the deaths of hero Sükhbaatar in early 1923 and the *Bogd Khan* in 1924 further contributed to instability. In 1925, the MPP was renamed the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), and a new constitution gave the MPRP a "guiding role" in the government. The country was renamed the Mongolian People's Republic and its capital Ulaanbaatar ("Red Hero") (Illustration: A 1932 Mongolian stamp depicting Sükhbaatar).

Mongolia's new communist leaders moved quickly to establish control, obstructing and then banning the search for the next *Javzandamba Khutagt* (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The 1920s-30s were marked by radical shifts in MPRP's policies. The forced collectivization of herding, nationalization of all private property, seizure of religious property, and expulsion of Buddhist monks (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*), among other policies, provoked a series of violent insurrections which were finally suppressed in 1932. Fearing additional unrest, Soviet leaders compelled the MPRP to adopt a more "moderate" approach in implementing their communist agenda. For example, efforts to collectivize herding were postponed until the 1950s-60s.

The Threat from Japan and Political Purges

Meanwhile, Japan had renewed its expansionist efforts, establishing a presence in the Chinese region of Manchuria on Mongolia's eastern border. By 1932, Japan occupied all of Manchuria, where it established the puppet state of Manchukuo. A year later, Japan also claimed Outer Mongolia. In 1935, Mongolian and Japanese troops skirmished on Mongolia's eastern border, prompting the Soviet and Mongolian governments to sign a mutual aid pact in 1936. In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China (the Second Sino-Japanese War) that eventually became part of the greater World War II (WWII) conflict.

Within Mongolia, the Japanese threat and ongoing internal instability prompted political hysteria. Led by former revolutionary and Minister of Internal Affairs Choibalsan, the Mongolian authorities together with the Soviet secret police arrested and executed some 35,000 Mongolians on charges of counter-revolutionary or espionage activities. Around half of the victims were religious leaders (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Purges of the MPRP leadership also continued, with two former Prime Ministers (PMs) also arrested and executed.

Battle of Khalkhyn Gol: In 1939, Japanese troops invaded Mongolia's Northeast. Japan's goal was to incorporate Mongolia and Siberia into its empire, thus establishing a buffer zone between itself and the USSR. Skirmishes throughout the early summer near the Khalkhyn Gol (Khalkh River) soon escalated. By June, Japan had dispatched some 30,000 men to the region, and Mongolian cavalry divisions had been augmented by Soviet forces. A July attack by the Japanese was met with a major Soviet counterattack in August, notably the USSR's first fighter-bomber offensive. In the subsequent battles, the combined Mongolian-Soviet forces annihilated the Japanese. As a result, Japan was forced to abandon its plan to invade the USSR, shifting its expansionist efforts to the Pacific and Southeast Asia (Photo: Mongolian soldiers during the Battle of Khalkhyn Gol).

Life in the People's Republic

In 1939, Choibalsan became PM, and a year later, Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal was named MPRP general-secretary. In one position or another, these two men ruled Mongolia for the next 45 years, Choibalsan until his 1952 death and Tsedenbal until his 1984 ouster from office. Both men aligned Mongolia closely with the USSR, relying on it for political direction and economic assistance.

WWII: As WWII engulfed Europe, Mongolia remained uninvolved until Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in 1941. Thereafter, Mongolia provided gold, livestock, and uniforms to support its Soviet ally. At the February 1945 Yalta Conference, the Allies (the USSR, Great Britain, and the US, among others) agreed to allow the Soviets to enter the war against Japan in exchange for certain territories and the agreement that Mongolia's status as a Soviet satellite would be preserved. Subsequently, the USSR and Mongolia declared war on Japan, and Mongolian troops joined the Soviets' invasion of China (Photo: Choibalsan presents an award to a Soviet pilot in 1939).

At that time, only the USSR had officially recognized independent Mongolia, and the ROC still claimed the territory. After WWII's end, the United Nations (UN) oversaw a 1945 referendum, in which Mongolians overwhelmingly voted in favor of independence, compelling the ROC to officially recognize Mongolia. When Chinese communists overthrew the ROC and established the PRC in 1949, Mongolia abandoned its relations with the ROC (thereafter based in Taiwan) in favor of the PRC. Similarly, it established relations with North Korea and other Soviet satellite countries in eastern and central Europe through the 1950s. Mongolia did not become a member of the UN until 1961 and did not establish diplomatic relations with the US until 1987.

Between the Soviets and the PRC: Although Mongolia's 1950's economy centered on pastoralism and was heavily dependent on financial support from the USSR, Mongolia experienced some expansion in farming, mining, and industry. The Trans-Mongolian Railway, a joint Mongolian-Soviet project spanning the country from north-south and a symbol of Soviet-Chinese solidarity was completed in 1955. However, when the Soviet-Chinese relationship soured in the early 1960s, Mongolia sided with the USSR, signing a treaty allowing the Soviets to station troops, aircraft, and missiles in Mongolia.

Meanwhile, Mongolia was slowly opening up to the world, establishing diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972. In 1981, a joint Mongolian-Soviet copper mine opened in Erdenet, foreshadowing Mongolia's future growth through its mineral wealth (see p. 2 and 4 of *Economics and Resources*). The same year, the first Mongolian cosmonaut, Jügderdemidiin Gürragchaa, spent several days in orbit aboard a Soviet spacecraft (Illustration: Coat of arms of Mongolia from 1941-60).

Meanwhile, Tsedenbal became MPRP general-secretary in 1981 and began to purge the party of his opponents. To control societal discourse and the flow of information, Tsedenbal ordered that all the country's typewriters and photocopiers be registered with the government. However, opposition to Tsedenbal within the MPRP steadily grew, and he was ousted from his position of power in 1984.

Reform and the Birth of Democracy

Beginning in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a series of reforms, ***perestroika*** (restructuring) and ***glasnost*** (openness), that would eventually result in the dissolution of the USSR. Although the attempted reforms were largely unsuccessful, they signaled that the era of Soviet intervention in its satellite countries was over, igniting democratic movements in subsequent years across Eastern Europe and in Mongolia.

Tsedenbal's successor, Jambyn Batmönkh, called for similar systemic reforms in Mongolia, but they too were largely ineffective. Instead, economic stagnation continued, and demands for social change increased. In late 1989, students (notably Sanjaasürengiin Zorig, founder of the Mongolian Democratic Association) began holding rallies in Ulaanbaatar. Influenced by the pace of change in the USSR and Eastern European countries, Batmönkh and the MPRP relented somewhat in early 1990, removing the statue of former Soviet leader Stalin from its prominent place in the capital. Nevertheless, protests and demonstrations continued. In

response, Batmönkh and the entire MPRP leadership resigned while promising gradual change and multiparty elections.

As the new head-of-state, MPRP official Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat oversaw a series of constitutional amendments that removed mention of the MPRP, while legalizing other political parties, reorganizing the legislative branch, and establishing an appointed presidency. Despite the participation of several new political parties, the MPRP won 85% of seats in the 1990 legislative elections. The legislature then officially appointed Ochirbat as President. By the end of the year, Mongolia had begun its transition to a market economy. In early 1992, Mongolia adopted a new constitution that removed its designation as a "People's Republic," defined a single-chamber legislature, and provided for a directly-elected President. The last Russian troops left Mongolia in fall 1992.

Contemporary Mongolia

In the mid-1992 legislative elections, the MPRP maintained its majority, and despite a major split with his party, incumbent President Ochirbat prevailed in the 1993 elections, the country's first direct presidential election. With the USSR's collapse, Mongolia lost the financial support that it had relied on for decades, leading to food and energy shortages and a serious economic crisis (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Meanwhile, privatization efforts moved slowly amidst a burdensome bureaucracy (Illustration: State emblem of Mongolia).

In the 1996 legislative elections, a coalition of opposition parties supplanted the MPRP, ending its monopoly on governance. Nevertheless, high unemployment cost President Ochirbat support, and he lost to MPRP candidate Natsagiin Bagabandi in 1997. Bagabandi's first tenure as President (he won reelection in 2001) was tumultuous, notably the murder of democracy activist Sanjaasürengiin Zorig. In the 2000 elections, MPRP won a landslide victory to regain control of the legislature.

Following this loss, several opposition parties combined to form the Democratic Party (DP). Inconclusive results in 2004 led to a DP-MPRP coalition government. In 2005, the MPRP maintained its hold on the Presidency, with its candidate Nambaryn Enkhbayar prevailing. However, political stability was elusive, with 10 MPRP cabinet ministers resigning in a protest move in 2006. When preliminary results in 2008 appeared to give the MPRP a majority, demonstrators accused it of vote-rigging and set the MPRP's Ulaanbaatar headquarters on fire. In response, President Enkhbayar proclaimed martial law. Further, the authorities arrested some 700 demonstrators, sentencing many to prison and prompting accusations of human rights violations. To calm the situation, the MPRP agreed to govern in a coalition with the DP.

In the 2009 presidential elections, DP candidate Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj prevailed, becoming the first democrat to hold the office. He was reelected in 2013. Meanwhile, the MPRP voted to revert to its old name, Mongolian People's Party (MPP – see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

In 2016, the MPP won an overwhelming legislative majority (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*. In the 2017 presidential election, all three major candidates faced allegations of corruption. No candidate received a majority in the first round of voting, requiring a subsequent run-off, which DP candidate Khaltmaa Battulga won with just over 50% of the vote (Photo: President Battulga with US President Trump in the White House in 2019).

Today, Mongolia continues to face entrenched corruption, high unemployment and poverty rates, a dependency on mineral exports, rising food costs, a lack of infrastructure, and housing shortages. Nonetheless, it has earned praise for achieving political stability amidst extremely challenging economic conditions and is viewed as one of Asia's most prominent examples of a successful democracy.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. In Mongolia, many myths, folktales, and legends explore the connections between people and the spirit world (see p. 2 and 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*)

Dating to the 13th century, *The Secret History of the Mongols* is a four-volume work that has some historical basis. For example, the author covers the reigns of both Genghis and Ögedei Khan, while providing copies of official documents and direct quotes from important characters. However, other sections are more clearly imaginative, detailing Mongol legends and tracing the mythical ancestry of Genghis Khan.

Mongolia also has a rich oral literature tradition. Professional storytellers and poets are still admired today for their ability to learn and recite epic tales comprising thousands of verses. Praise poems are often recited at significant events, like weddings. Other stories focus on the struggle between good and evil, often relating the adventures of heroes, who confront various challenges and interact with animals and spirits with supernatural powers (Photo: A Mongolian demonstrates traditional archery during a US-Mongolian Armed Forces joint exercise).

The Legend of Huuheldei Mergen Khan: During a hunting trip, Huuheldei Mergen Khan slays a reindeer with impressive antlers. Overcome by the deer's beauty, Huuheldei Mergen feels deep remorse and carries its head to a mountain peak, where he remains for the next 3 years offering sacrifices in the deer's honor. One day, the deer's head rises into the sky, leaving a rainbow trail. Transfixed, Huuheldei Mergen destroys his weapons and throws himself off a cliff. Before he reaches the ground, three eagles grasp him and deliver him to heaven.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Mongolia
Монгол Улс
ᠮᠣᠩᠭᠣᠯ᠋ ᠤᠯᠤᠰ
(Mongolian)

Political Borders

Russia: 2,145 mi
People's Republic of China (PRC): 2,877 mi

Capital

Ulaanbaatar

Demographics

Mongolia's population of about 3.25 million is growing at a rate of 1.1% annually. About 69% of Mongolians live in urban areas, with the capital of Ulaanbaatar providing a home to nearly half the population. Beyond Ulaanbaatar and the northern city of Darhan, Mongolia is sparsely populated. With fewer than three people per sq mi, Mongolia is one of the world's least densely populated countries. Around one-third of Mongolians are pastoralists, who spend at least part of the year moving from pasture-to-pasture with their livestock herds.

Flag

The Mongolian flag consists of three equal vertical sections, one blue band flanked by two red ones. Centered in the hoist side's red band is Mongolia's national emblem. Known as the ***soyombo***, the emblem derives from a 17th-century Mongol script (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) and represents fire, the sun, moon, earth, water, and the ***arga bilig*** (a yin-yang symbol denoting balance amid complementary opposition). Red stands for progress and prosperity, while blue symbolizes the sky.

Geography

A landlocked nation in northern Asia, Mongolia borders Russia to the north and China to the east, south, and west. Mongolia's total land area just over 599,800 sq mi, making it slightly smaller than Alaska and twice the size of Texas. Mongolia is one of Asia's larger nations and the world's second largest landlocked nation, after Kazakhstan.

Vast semi-desert plains and rolling grassy steppes characterize much of Mongolia's interior and cover some 80% of its total area. The sprawling Eastern Steppe is the world's largest unspoiled temperate grassland. Further east, Mongolia's border region, known as the Dariganga, is home to some 200 extinct volcanoes. Mountains rising in the North, West, and Southwest contain most of the nation's forests. Mongolia's highest peak, the ***Nayramadlin Orgil*** (Khuiten Peak), reaches 14,350 ft in the western Altai Mountains.

The world's third largest desert, the Gobi Desert stretches across Mongolia's South along the border with the PRC and features rocky ridges and gravel-covered plains. While pastures cover some 73% of Mongolia's territory, less than 1% of land is arable. Lakes dot mountain valleys, and most waterways flow to the north. Many rivers freeze over in the winter and are only navigable late spring-early fall (Photo: Camels on a Mongolian plain).

Climate

Mongolia experiences an arid continental climate marked by short summers, long and bitterly cold winters, and large variation in daily and seasonal temperatures. Ulaanbaatar experiences average daily temperatures of -7°F during the winter month of January and 63°F during the summer month of July. By contrast, temperatures in the Gobi region can reach as high as 104°F on a summer day. Higher elevations generally see cooler

temperatures but experience little snowfall. Mongolia is notably nicknamed “Land of Blue Sky” due to some 250 days of sunshine per year. Rainfall occurs primarily in the summer, with precipitation levels decreasing significantly north to south.

Natural Hazards

Mongolia is prone to grassland and forest fires, drought, massive dust storms, and ***dzud*** (unusually harsh winter conditions). Occurring 3 consecutive years (1999-2001) and again in 2010, *dzud* tends to cause significant livestock loss, food shortages, and economic hardship, particularly for the roughly 25% of Mongolians who rely on their livestock for their livelihood. The 2010 *dzud* was the most damaging in recent history, causing the deaths of some 10.3 million livestock and adversely affected about 750,000 Mongolians (some 25% of the population at the time). Mongolia is somewhat vulnerable to earthquakes, with the most recent 1957 one killing 30 people (Photo: A Mongolian uses a motorcycle to herd camels).

Environmental Issues

Mongolia’s reliance on animal husbandry, its underdeveloped industrial practices, and a low population density have generally allowed it to avoid the severe environmental concerns and degradation plaguing some of its more industrialized neighbors. Still, a lack of environmental protection laws coupled with recent trends have led to some challenges. For example, in some areas, a growing livestock population and climate changes, such as increasing temperatures and decreasing rainfall, have led to the degradation of pastures, facilitating desertification and soil erosion. Moreover, harmful mining activities, particularly water dredging and the disposal of dangerous chemicals such as cyanide and mercury into rivers, lakes, and grasslands, contaminate Mongolia’s waters and soil or cause waterways to dry up completely.

In recent years, Ulaanbaatar has emerged as one of the world's most polluted cities, with coal-heated dwellings (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*), coal-fired power plants, and automotive exhaust contributing to high rates of air pollution (see p. 7 of *Sustenance and Health*). These problems are compounded as additional pastoralists relocate to Ulaanbaatar, when destructive *dzud* conditions, droughts, and other environmental challenges force them to seek other employment opportunities.

Government

Mongolia is a semi-presidential republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 21 provinces (***aimag***) administered by elected governors and provincial assemblies. Provinces subdivide into some 300 rural districts (***sum***). There is also one municipality (***khot***), the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Mongolia's latest constitution was adopted in 1992 and separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches while also outlining the basic rights and freedoms of the Mongolian people (Photo: A thick smog hangs over Ulaanbaatar).

Executive Branch

The President, who is head-of-state, commander-in-chief of the Mongolian Armed Forces, and chair of the National Security Council, is elected to serve up to two consecutive 4-year terms by popular vote from a pool of candidates proposed by the political parties represented in Mongolia's legislature. Current President Khaltmaa Battulga took office in 2017 (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*), with the next election scheduled for 2021. The President shares executive power with the Prime Minister (PM), who is head-of-government. With the support of a Cabinet of Ministers, the PM oversees the country's daily affairs. Nominated and confirmed by the legislature, the PM is traditionally a member of the political party or coalition that holds the most seats in that body. The current PM, Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh, took office in 2017.

Legislative Branch

Mongolia's legislature is a single-chamber ***Ulsiin Ikh Khural*** (State Great Khural or SGK) composed of 76 members directly elected in single-seat constituencies by a simple majority vote to serve 4-year terms. Each constituency requires at least 50% voter participation to be considered valid. The SGK controls most legislative powers, including amending the constitution, appointing positions in government, and approving declarations of war (Photo: Government Palace in Ulaanbaatar).

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, provincial and capital city appellate courts, district courts, and a system of administrative courts that oversee minor civil cases. As the highest court, the 25-member Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for civil and criminal cases and is organized into civil, criminal, and administrative divisions. All justices are appointed by the President for lifelong terms based on the recommendations of a 14-member advisory body of judges and judicial officials, known as the General Council of Courts. The Constitutional Court's nine members are appointed by the SGK to serve 6-year terms, following their nominations by the President, the SGK, and the Supreme Court, each of whom picks three candidates.

Political Climate

Since peacefully transitioning to a democracy in 1990 (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*), Mongolia's political landscape has been characterized by a multi-party system in which political parties or coalitions of parties compete for power. Generally, parties and coalitions with a majority in the SGK hold the bulk of government leadership positions and retain considerable control over the political arena. While party platforms tend to differ, all ruling administrations since 1990 have generally sought to strengthen Mongolia's democratic institutions, stimulate foreign investment, and modernize the nation. Political parties also seek to battle corruption and bolster a struggling economy. Nevertheless, the

actions of individual politicians have frequently been at odds with these stated goals.

Over the last 3 decades, Mongolia has seen power alternate between coalitions led by two parties: the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) and the Democratic Party (DP). Founded in 1920, MPP is Mongolia's oldest political party. Having governed Mongolia during the communist era as the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP – see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*), the MPP remained powerful even after Mongolia transitioned to democracy. By contrast, the DP was formed in 2000 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). As the governing party during a sharp economic decline that began in 2014 (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), the DP experienced a significant loss in ~~2016~~2020, winning just ~~9~~ 11 SGK seats compared to the MPP's ~~65~~62. The next parliamentary ~~elections are scheduled for~~elections scheduled for June ~~2020~~2024.

After the SGK passed legislation in 2019 expanding the authority of President Battulga, international observers and members of Battulga's own DP party criticized the move as an attempt to consolidate presidential power. Since then, Battulga has engaged in other controversial actions, notably dismissing the Prosecutor General while undergoing a corruption investigation, implicating dozens of SGK members and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. International observers charge that these and other actions erode the rule of law and undermine democratic progress. Further, they have added to public frustration with a perceived lack of accountability among officials and widespread corruption and cronyism (favoritism towards friends and associates) across all levels of government (Photo: President Battulga visits US President Trump in the White House in 2019).

While voter turnout has decreased somewhat since Mongolia's first multiparty election in 1990, electoral participation remains

high, with some 74% of eligible voters participating in the 2016 legislative election. However, in a sign of their dissatisfaction with the candidate choices in the 2017 presidential election, some 8% of voters submitted a blank ballot. Despite their frustrations with politicians and political parties, most Mongolians continue to view democratic principles and their presidential system of government favorably.

Defense

Mongolia's Armed Forces (MAF) consist of ground and air branches with a joint strength of 9,700 active duty troops, 137,000 reserve personnel, and 7,500 paramilitary troops. The MAF are charged primarily with participating in multinational peacekeeping efforts and assisting in humanitarian and disaster relief. The MAF relies heavily on Soviet-era equipment. While Russia has provided some second-hand military equipment in recent years, the MAF's resources and infrastructure remain relatively outdated. The law requires all male citizens to complete 1 year of military service between the ages of 18-25. Alternative service is available for those who object on ethical or religious grounds.

Army: As the largest branch, Mongolia's Army is comprised of 8,900 active-duty troops divided into three maneuver brigades and battalions (including mechanized, light, and air maneuver) and one combat support regiment (Photo: MAF members train during a multinational exercise).

Air Force: Mongolia's Air Force consists of 800 active-duty personnel divided into a transport squadron, an attack /transport helicopter squadron, and 2 air defense regiments equipped with 3 aircraft, 12 helicopters, and air defense equipment.

Paramilitary: Mongolia's Paramilitary force of 7,500 active members consists of 6,000 Border Guards, 1,200 Internal Security Troops, and 300 Construction Troops.

Mongolian Air Force Rank Insignia

Private

Private
First Class

Junior
Sergeant

Sergeant

Senior
Sergeant

Sergeant
Major

Junior
Lieutenant

Lieutenant
Colonel

Senior
Lieutenant

Captain

Major

Lieutenant
Colonel

Colonel

Brigadier
Colonel

Major
General

Lieutenant
General

General

Foreign Relations

Mongolia was closely bound politically and economically with the Soviet Union (USSR) for much of the 20th century (see p. 10-12 of *History and Myth*), notably following the USSR's lead in foreign policy. Since 1990, Mongolia has pursued a more balanced foreign policy, striving to cultivate relations with global powers like the US, PRC, Russia, South Korea, and Japan, while preserving its national autonomy. Today, Mongolia maintains diplomatic relations with 163 countries.

Mongolia has gained membership in numerous regional and global organizations such as the World Trade Organization, Asian Development Bank, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, among others. Moreover, Mongolia participates in the United Nations' global peacekeeping operations and currently has some 1,000 peacekeepers deployed in various locations in Africa.

Between 2003-08, Mongolia sent troops to assist US-led operations in Iraq and today participates in engagements in Afghanistan. Although Mongolia is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO – a political and military alliance among 28 nations, including the US, that promotes its members' security through collective defense), it is one of nine NATO global partner nations and one of three in East Asia, along with South Korea and Japan (Photo: MAF members during training with US Marines).

Relations with the US: The US and Mongolia established diplomatic ties in 1987 after experiencing cool relations for decades due to Mongolia's ties to the USSR, then the US's ideological and political adversary. In the 1990s, the US and Mongolia fostered economic and cultural ties, forging several trade and investment agreements that helped grow Mongolia's economy. Today, Mongolia views the US as its most important "third neighbor," a

term Mongolia uses for allies that do not physically border Mongolia yet with whom Mongolia retains close political, social, and economic ties. Meanwhile, the US views Mongolia as an emerging partner and democratic advocate within the region. The US also seeks to leverage its relationship with Mongolia to reduce the influence of Russia and the PRC in Mongolia's internal affairs, foreign policy, and security matters (Photo: US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper greets Mongolian Minister of Defense Nyamaagiin Enkhbold in Ulaanbaatar in 2019).

The US and Mongolia cooperate on several security-related issues such as nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, demining, and other programs, particularly in Mongolia's border regions. The US also provides military-to-military training to help build the MAF's capacity to perform peacekeeping missions, strengthen its MAF doctrine and values, increase interoperability with US forces, and generally deepen bilateral military ties. As part of this effort, the US and MAF engage in an annual US-led multinational military exercise held in Mongolia known as Khaan Quest. In 2019, Khaan Quest focused on peacekeeping and stability operations and featured participants from some 29 nations, the PRC included (Photo: Mongolian Honor Guards at the 2019 Khaan Quest).

US financial aid to Mongolia has aimed to strengthen Mongolia's democratic institutions and governance systems, promote economic growth, grow civil society, and address deficiencies infrastructure, healthcare, and education, among others. Mongolia and the US also share economic ties. Under debate in the US Congress as of spring 2020, the Mongolia Third Neighbor Trade Act would ease trade

restrictions between the two nations and stimulate foreign investment in Mongolia.

Relations with China: Mongolia and the PRC experienced tense relations since the PRC's 1949 founding (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Since 1990, Mongolia has sought to foster diplomatic and economic ties with the PRC. Today, Mongolia's economy is heavily reliant on trade with the PRC, which buys almost all of Mongolia's exports (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*). The PRC is also Mongolia's largest source of foreign direct investment, with Chinese companies investing particularly heavily in Mongolia's mining industry (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*). Moreover, Mongolia and the PRC have recently engaged in talks to integrate some of Mongolia's proposed road, rail, and other infrastructure projects into the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative – a multi-billion-dollar development plan that China is using to stimulate commerce in the region and enhance its global influence.

Despite these economic linkages, some Mongolian leaders and the general public tend to view the PRC with some wariness, fearing that Mongolia's reliance on trade with the PRC could ultimately leave it vulnerable to the PRC's political influence. Tensions also intermittently arise over visits to Mongolia by the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), whom the PRC accuses of fueling unrest within the PRC. For example, the Dalai Lama's 2016 visit to Mongolia prompted an angry response from the PRC and economic retaliation against Mongolia (Photo: A Mongolian officer cadet at Five Hills Training Center in Ulaanbaatar).

Relations with Russia: For much of the 20th century, Russia (as part of the USSR) served as Mongolia's central political, military, and economic partner. During that time, Russia also

supplied Mongolia all its military equipment, trained the Mongolian army, and, starting in the 1960s, stationed some 75,000 troops in Mongolia amid deteriorating Soviet-PRC ties (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Since 1990, Mongolia has retained close political, military, social, and economic ties with Russia, and many Mongolians hold positive perceptions of the country. The two regularly engage in joint military exercises, and Mongolia heavily depends on Russia to meet its energy needs, importing over 90% of its refined oil from Russia. Moreover, Mongolia and Russia have entered into agreements to jointly develop railways, roads, and power grids that more closely integrate the two nations. Talks have also included plans to establish a free trade zone and economic corridor that would ease the flow of goods between the two.

Security Issues

Mongolia faces comparatively fewer security concerns than most other nations in the region, due largely to Mongolia's isolated yet strategic location between Russia and the PRC. Both of these global powers help insulate Mongolia from large, external threats. Mongolia has experienced no domestic terrorist attacks, and no known organized criminal organizations operate within the country. The most pressing concern appears to be a modest increase in the popularity of extremist, ultra-nationalist groups such as Tsagaan Khass (White Swastika) and Dayar Mongol (All Mongolia) that promote hateful views of and violence against ethnic minorities (Photo: US Maj Gen Richard M. Burr visits with Mongolian Maj Gen B. Bayarmagnai in a ***ger***, a traditional Mongolian dwelling – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

Although it faces few internal security threats, Mongolia proactively participates in cooperative counterterrorism exercises and other engagements to develop the MAF's capacity. The US, Russia, India, and the PRC have formed a partnership for providing mutual defense training.

Ethnic Groups

Mongolia is ethnically homogenous, with Mongols comprising some 90% of the population, according to the 2010 census. Mongols divide into several distinct groups, the largest of which is the Khalkh, constituting some 82% of the total population. Other Mongol groups in order of size include the Dörvöd (2.8% of the total population), Bayad, Buryat, Zakchin, Dariganga, and Darkhad, among others. These smaller groups reside predominantly in Mongolia's border regions. Some of these groups have their own languages or dialects of standard Mongolian (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*).

Some 6 million ethnic Mongols (almost twice Mongolia's current population) live in neighboring Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region in the PRC (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Mongolian schoolchildren).

Most of the rest of the population are members of Turkic groups residing primarily in the Altai region in Mongolia's West. Comprising some 3.9% of the total population as of 2010, Kazakhs are Mongolia's second largest ethnic group. Other Turkic groups include Tuvans and Tsaatan. Non-native populations include Russians, Chinese, Koreans, and some Europeans and North Americans (Photo: Residents of the southern town of Dalanzadgad).

Social Relations

Mongolians are traditionally pastoralists, moving with their livestock herds from pasture-to-pasture. Today, about one-third of Mongolians maintain this way of life, typically moving four

times annually. This way of life historically promoted a sense of equality among pastoralists and a self-identity starkly in contrast to that of settled peoples in neighboring lands. Further, Mongolian herders have a tradition of hospitality, generosity, and willingness to help others, habits likely due to the difficulties a pastoral existence can present (Photo: Mongolians prepare for a horse race during the Khaan Quest multinational military exercises).

Many of Mongolia's ethnic groups have their own customs and traditions. For example, unlike most other Mongols, the Buryat people traditionally live in Russian-style wooden houses instead of *gers* (felt-walled tents – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Instead of herding the goats, sheep, horses, cattle, or camels common among other Mongolian pastoralists, the Tsaatan of Mongolia's Northwest traditionally herd reindeer. Traditionally, Mongolia's Kazakhs train golden eagles to hunt for them.

In recent decades, an array of environmental catastrophes and economic challenges have compelled many pastoralists to abandon their traditional way of life and seek new economic opportunities in urban areas (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*). Generally, society today tends to divide along rural-urban lines. Although extended family networks remain strong, with rural and urban family members often helping each other. For example, rural relations may supply meat and dairy products to their urban family members, who in turn provide housing for rural children seeking better educational opportunities.

Still, pastoral Mongolians are likely to be poorer than settled ones and lack access to equivalent public services (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge* and p. 5 of *Sustenance and Health*). Kazakhs tend to have higher poverty rates and receive less schooling than the Mongol majority (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According the 2010 census, about 53% of Mongolians are Buddhists, 3% Muslim, 3% shamanist, and 2% Christian, while some 39% claim no religious affiliation.

Mongolia's constitution provides for the separation of church and state and prohibits discrimination based on religion. While it allows all religious groups to practice freely, the law limits proselytization, prohibits religious groups from engaging in any political activity, and limits religious activities in public places like schools and parks. It also forbids religious activities that infringe on public order, national security, or the freedoms and rights of any Mongolian citizen. While the constitution names no state religion, it recognizes Buddhism and its traditions as dominant influences in Mongolian society and grants Buddhism some privileges not afforded other traditions. Further, some government officials, notably the President, publicly lead ***ovoo*** rituals (see "Religion Today") (Photo: Amarbayasgalant Monastery in northern Mongolia).

The law requires all religious groups to register with the state to receive the right to build and own places of worship, qualify for state funding, and receive other benefits. However, the law provides little guidance on the registration process. Consequently, registration guidelines differ substantially among provinces, causing hardships for some minority religious groups seeking official status. Generally, Mongolian society is characterized by peaceful interfaith relations and is relatively free of instances of religiously-motivated violence and prejudice. However, some Christian, Muslim, and other minority religious groups occasionally report harassment of community members and disrespect of religious rituals on social media.

Early Spiritual Landscape

Many of the region's early inhabitants followed animism – the belief that a spiritual presence resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate, such as the sky, animals, trees, rivers, and rocks. Animism promotes the notion that all natural objects are sacred, and this conviction establishes a close connection between animists and their environment. Further, they practiced shamanism, the recognition of shamans (religious mystics), who perceive and interact with spirits in order to protect, help, and heal members of a community.

Such guardian and ancestor spirits can safeguard or harm the natural world and its inhabitants by causing sickness, family discord, or other misfortune. Accordingly, shamans communicate with the spirits to negotiate with them, guide the souls of the deceased, cure illness, or achieve other positive outcomes. Famed Mongol leader Genghis Khan (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*) employed a shaman who identified potential marriage partners and favorable dates to engage in battle, among other decisions.

Buddhism

Buddhism traces its beginning to around 500 BC, when Siddhartha Gautama, a South Asian prince, attained spiritual insight through meditation. Buddhists believe that humans are fated to suffer, that suffering is caused by greed or desire but can be stopped by following a spiritual path that includes unselfish living and meditation. Buddhists' ultimate goal is to achieve nirvana – a state of peace and unity with the universe (Photo: Buddhist prayer flags).

Buddhism is based on a voluminous set of scriptures and emphasizes ethical and moral instruction to help people follow a spiritual path. Buddhism also offers an explanation of life after death, specifically, that humans proceed through cycles of birth, death, and rebirth or reincarnation. Several centuries after Gautama's death, Buddhism divided into two schools of thought – Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Most prevalent in

Mongolia today, Mahayana differs from Theravada in its view of Gautama: while adherents of Theravada believe Gautama is the only enlightened being, the Mahayana school teaches that Gautama was one of many. Mahayana further teaches that all followers may attempt to reach nirvana, while the Theravada school stipulates only ordained monks may do so.

The Spread of Buddhism in Mongolia: While Buddhism likely arrived in the 1st century, it did not gain many followers until the 13th century, when Ögedei and later Kublai Khan engaged with ***lamas*** (teachers or spiritual guides) from the "Red Hat" school of Tibetan Buddhism (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Nevertheless, the religion likely gained few followers outside the royal court.

Buddhism experienced a revival in the late 16th century, when Mongol leaders Abatai Khan and Altan Khan converted to Buddhism after visiting with the *lama* of the "Yellow Hat" school of Tibetan Buddhism. In an exchange of gifts and titles, Altan gave the Yellow Hat *lama* the title of Dalai Lama (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). In subsequent years, the Dalai Lama's Yellow Hat school, known as Lamaism in Mongolia, spread widely (Photo: The Erdene Zuu Monastery, established in the 16th century in central Mongolia).

In 1639, Abatai Khan's great-grandson, Zanabazar, was recognized as the reincarnation of a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and enthroned as Mongolia's first ***Javzandamba Khutagt*** (Lamaism's supreme spiritual authority and the third highest overall in Yellow Hat Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama and the Pancha Lama). Until his 1723 death, Zanabazar worked to cultivate the religion in Mongolia, proselytizing widely and establishing temples and monasteries, among other accomplishments (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

In the 18th century, conflict between Mongols and the Manchu Qing Dynasty led the Qing Emperor to issue a decree that all subsequent incarnations of the *Javzandamba Khutagt* had to be born in Tibet and appointed through a process closely supervised by the Qing imperial court. In the early 20th century, the Qing-appointed eighth *Javzandamba Khutagt* began to identify with rising Mongol nationalism and became an important symbol of Mongolia's struggle for independence. In 1911, Mongolia named this eighth *Javzandamba Khutagt* as its head of state, giving him the title ***Bogd Khan*** (Holy King) (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*).

Religion in the 20th Century

In 1921, Mongolia came under control of a Soviet-backed communist government. Over time, the communists' atheistic worldview, or the disbelief in deities and the rejection of religion, brought significant changes. The authorities banned the search for the ninth incarnation of the *Javzandamba Khutagt* following the *Bogd Khan*'s 1924 death, yet the Buddhist community initially retained its power and wealth. It also controlled large estates and temples staffed by thousands of *lamas* and monastic workers. However, in the 1930s, the communist regime began severely restricting religious practices. Seeking to dismantle the Buddhist community, a 1935 law required monks to leave their monastic duties to find government-approved jobs or join the army and even marry.

Subsequent political purges resulted in the deaths of some 17,000 religious leaders, both Buddhist monks and shamans (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). Moreover, authorities looted and destroyed nearly all Buddhist temples and monasteries. By some estimates, only 241 monks remained in Mongolia by 1941. As religious oppression continued for the next 5 decades of communist rule, most religious activity was forced underground (Photo: Ulaanbaatar's Gandantegchinlen Monastery, commonly known as Gandan Monastery, one of the few religious sites that survived the purges).

Mongolia's 1990 transition to democracy brought shifts in the nation's religious landscape. With Mongolians again allowed to practice religion freely, Buddhism experienced a revival. In 1991, the Dalai Lama visited Mongolia from his exile in India and made an announcement that further fueled interest in Buddhism. Namely, he declared that the ninth *Javzandamba Khutagt* had been identified in Tibet in 1936 and his identity hidden. After spending most of his life in a monastic community in India, the ninth *Javzandamba Khutagt* took up residency in Ulaanbaatar's Gandan Monastery in 2011 before dying a year later.

On his most recent visit to Mongolia in 2016, the Dalai Lama announced that the tenth *Javzandamba Khutagt* had been born in Mongolia, making him the first Mongolian-born supreme spiritual leader of Lamaism in some 300 years. However, as of spring 2020, he has not yet been publicly identified (Photo: Buddha figures on sale at a market in Mongolia).

Religion Today

While Mongolia demonstrates significant religious tolerance, some religious organizations face significant hurdles in obtaining and maintaining their registration with the state. For example, of the nearly 850 religious organizations present in Mongolia, some 350 operate without official registration. To address these and similar issues, Mongolia created the position of ambassador-at-large for religious freedom in 2018. Moreover, leaders of Mongolia's religious organizations meet regularly and with the international community to advocate religious tolerance and promote interfaith dialogue.

Buddhism: Beginning in the 1990s, Buddhist *lamas* who survived the communist era began to reestablish monasteries, schools, and temples. Since then, a new generation of monks has committed to preserving and promoting Buddhism and its traditions. Today, Mongolia is home to some 120 Buddhist monasteries and temples operated by 5,000 *lamas*. Still, the loss

of Mongolia's rich pre-communism monastic community and the destruction of its historic temples and precious artifacts like paintings and sculptures remains keenly felt in Mongolia today.

Most Mongolian Buddhists today are followers of Lamaism (or Yellow Hat Gelugpa Buddhism) headed by the Dalai Lama from his exile in India. The Dalai Lama is a revered figure in Mongolia, and his connection to the country complicates its relations with its southern neighbor, the People's Republic of China (PRC). In general, the PRC views the Dalai Lama with suspicion, considering him a potential source of unrest in Tibet, an autonomous region of the PRC. Consequently, the PRC uses its political and economic might to try and reduce the Dalai Lama's influence in Mongolia. For example, the Dalai Lama's 2016 visit to Mongolia and the announcement of the tenth *Javzandamba Khutagt's* reincarnation caused significant friction (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Ulaanbaatar's Buddhist University).

Shamanism: Like Buddhism, shamanism has also experienced a resurgence in recent years. Further, Mongolians tend to blend aspects of shamanism or other folk religions with Buddhism in their devotional practices. For example, they may pray at Buddhist temples but also consult a shaman for advice and support. Mongolians engage both shamans and Buddhist *lamas* to perform certain rituals, often at one of many ***ovoos*** (sacred stone monuments – pictured) found throughout the country. Mongolians perform these rituals for a variety of reasons, such as bringing luck before a long journey, protecting livestock from predators, and banishing evil spirits.

Christianity: Christianity likely first arrived in the region as early as the 7th century but failed to take root. In the 13th century, Christianity peacefully coexisted alongside Buddhism in the Mongol Empire. Over subsequent centuries, Christian missionaries traveling along the Silk Road (an ancient network of trade routes linking East Asia and Europe) converted small pockets of the region's population. After the Silk Road's 18th century collapse, the number of Christian adherents began to dwindle. Efforts to revive Christianity in the early 20th century were thwarted by the rise of communism.

Today, most Mongolian Christians are Protestants, with smaller numbers of Roman Catholics. Other traditions include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Some Christian institutions, primarily located in Ulaanbaatar, provide social services to children, the poor, and the elderly (Photo: A Latter-day Saints church in the town of Sükhbaatar in northern Mongolia).

Islam: Most ethnic Kazakhs (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*) are Sunni Muslims. Like Buddhists, Mongolia's Muslims suffered during the 1930s communist campaigns to rid the nation of religious activity, with most mosques destroyed. Today, a few mosques remain in the remote West (Photo: A mosque in Mongolia's far western Bayan-Ölgii province).

Other Religions: The Baha'i Faith and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church) each has a small presence in Mongolia.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Historically a nation of pastoralists, Mongolia has been exposed to significant societal changes due to economic modernization and urbanization in recent decades. Nevertheless, traditional values such as regard for community, respect for elders, and loyalty to family continue to influence Mongolian life.

Residence

In 1960, some 36% of Mongolians resided in urban areas. Since the 1990 end of communism (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*), more Mongolians have moved to cities, some simply seeking new economic opportunities, with others forced to abandon their rural ways of life due to disruptive climate events (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). By 2018, the share of urban-dwellers had increased to about 68%. About one-third of Mongolians retain a pastoral way of life, moving from pasture-to-pasture with their herds.

Rural: In rural areas, most Mongolians live in traditional ***gers*** (pictured), portable, round tents covered in felt or canvas and supported by wooden frames. Easily assembled, dismantled, and transported for reassembly, *gers* are suitable shelters in all seasons. Traditionally, the *ger's* door faces south. Inside, family heirlooms, photos, and religious objects are placed on the north side, with males occupying the west and females the east. A single *ger* typically houses a nuclear family (two parents and their children). Other rural dwellings include brick or wood houses (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Urban: Affordable housing is a serious problem in urban areas. In Ulaanbaatar, some 55% of city residents reside in either *gers* or makeshift brick, wood, or concrete housing in unplanned districts on the city's outskirts. These areas typically lack access

to sewer systems, running water, and waste disposal. Residents rely on wood or coal-burning stoves for cooking and heating, contributing to Ulaanbaatar's pollution and causing significant health problems (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). Other urban housing options are Soviet-style apartment blocks, with up to three generations sharing a small apartment. By contrast, more well-off city-dwellers reside in new, luxury high-rises or in single-family homes.

Family Structure

Mongolians traditionally regard men as the household heads, while the mother holds responsibility for household chores and childcare (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Most Mongolians today live as nuclear families, though some households include grandparents, who help with childcare, and a growing number of households are headed by single parents. Mongolians typically maintain close relationships with their extended relations, living nearby and supporting each other. Generally, Mongolians are loyalty to their elders, typically providing physical and financial care for their aging parents (Photo: US Army Spc Gunbold Ligden, a Mongolian native, poses with family members while in Mongolia for training).

Children

While Mongolian families were traditionally larger, they tend to have just two or three children today. Especially in rural areas, parents prize their children's independence and expect them to perform chores from a young age. Moreover, Mongolians attempt to raise their children to be obedient, cooperative, disciplined, and respectful. Children usually live at home until they marry or have their own offspring.

Birth: Mongolians rarely hold a baby shower or discuss potential names before a birth, as both practices are considered unlucky. Although specific traditions vary, the family usually marks a birth

with a celebratory meal. Other traditions include the new mother wearing winter clothing to help her recover and the father hanging a felt fox over the baby's bed to protect him from evil spirits. Further, Mongolians mark a *ger* occupied by a new mother and her baby with a red flag or sash, signaling that guests should avoid entering the structure (Photo: A Mongolian mother and baby after receiving medical treatment during Khaan Quest, a multinational peacekeeping operations exercise).

Names: Mongolian given names often demonstrate desirable personal qualities such as strength. Other personal names derive from the names of the planets, days of the week, and flowers. Parents may change their babies' names several times, especially if the child becomes sick.

First Haircut: At age 2 or 4 for girls and 3 or 5 for boys, family members gather to celebrate a child's first haircut (***usnii nair***). During the ceremony, each guest cuts off a lock of the child's hair and presents him with a gift. Afterward, the group celebrates with a feast of traditional foods and drink (Photo: Children in Ulaanbaatar).

Dating and Marriage

Traditionally, Mongolian marriages were arranged as the union of two families. Today, Mongolians typically marry for love, choosing their own partners through school, family, friends, coworkers, religious events, or the Internet. The legal age for marriage is 18, though 16-year-olds may marry with parental consent. Most Mongolians marry in their mid-20s, with many young people increasingly delaying marriage until they finish their education or secure steady employment.

Weddings: Following a lengthy engagement period, a traditional wedding begins with the groom and his family enjoying a feast and holding prayers at the bride's home. During these festivities, the bride puts on new jewelry to symbolize her new life. The couple and their families then proceed to the groom's home for another feast and blessing, at which time the groom changes clothes as a symbol of his new life.

Today, many Mongolian couples opt for a western-style wedding performed by a civil servant in a large rented hall called a "wedding palace." Festivities often include a reception during which family and friends give speeches and celebrate with traditional Mongolian food and song (Photo: A Mongolian couple in their home).

Divorce: Mongolian divorce rates have steadily increased in recent decades, rising from 0.6 to 2 per 1,000 people between 2000-18, yet still lower than the US rate (2.9). Reasons cited for increased divorce rates include financial problems, unemployment, alcoholism, and domestic violence (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Death

Historically, Mongolians practiced so-called sky burials, leaving their deceased out in the open to decompose by the natural elements. While a few Mongolians continue this tradition today, most prefer cremation or casket burial.

Most Mongolians memorialize the death of a loved one with a series of rituals based in Buddhist traditions. Upon death, the deceased is placed in a red and black casket, which remains in the family home overnight, while a Buddhist ***lama*** (see p. 3 and 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) offers prayers. The family may also consult a *lama* for advice on burial locale. During the burial, attendees light matches to guide the spirit to heaven and sprinkle the grave with milk, rice, and sand. Following the burial, family and friends gather for a meal and to share memories of the deceased.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditional values privilege men over women in most spheres, though women in pastoral communities historically held important responsibilities, notably managing the family's finances. Today, Mongolian women face several challenges to their full participation in society. Nevertheless, Mongolia is closer to gender equality than many other Asian countries.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: Traditionally, Mongolian women were responsible for childcare and most household duties, buying and selling livestock, and tracking the family's budget. During the communist era (see p. 8-12 of *History and Myth*), social policies such as subsidized childcare and extended maternity leave allowed many mothers to work outside the home. Today, women who hold jobs remain responsible for household duties and typically spend twice as much time on such chores as males (Photo: A member of the Mongolian Armed Forces Central Military Band).

Labor Force: In 2019, about 53% of Mongolian women worked outside the home, similar to rates in neighboring Russia (55%) but lower than rates in Kazakhstan (65%) and China (61%). Women predominately hold jobs in education, healthcare, and tourism. By contrast, men tend to work in the mining, transportation, defense, and construction sectors. Many women, especially rural-dwellers, labor in the informal sector and consequently are vulnerable to exploitation.

Mongolian women face barriers to their equal participation in the workforce. In a 2017 survey, some 63% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment from a supervisor. Further, women typically earn less than their male colleagues. A lack of childcare resources forces many mothers to take time off, hindering their career development and slowing their

progression toward promotion. Nevertheless, women are more likely to enroll in higher education (see p. 4-5 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and be employed than men.

Gender and the Law

Mongolia's constitution guarantees women and men equal rights and prohibits gender-based discrimination. Other laws mandate 120 days of maternity leave and prohibit employers from inquiring about family status during job interviews. Despite this legal framework, gender disparities exist. For example, while laws mandate equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters, sons tend to disproportionately inherit property. Further, some laws are vague or confusing. For example, sexual harassment in the workplace is outlawed, but lack of clarity regarding investigation and prosecution means perpetrators often are not unpunished (Photo: Former Parliament member Oyungerel Tsedevdamba speaking at the Regional Dialogue on LGBTQ Human Rights and Health in Asia-Pacific in 2015).

Gender and Politics

Despite some governmental policies to increase women's participation in political life, their involvement remains low. While quotas mandate that a certain percentage of candidates be women, these requirements sometimes remain unmet. The State Great Khural (SGK – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) even decreased its minimum female candidate quota from 30% to 20% in 2016. As of 2019, just 13 of 75 (17%) seats in the SGK are held by women, lower than rates in Kazakhstan (27%), China (25%), and the US (23%) and comparable to Russia (16%). Further, women occupy just two ministerial cabinet positions.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

According to a 2018 survey, some one-third of women have faced physical or sexual abuse from a partner. However, experts suggest that this rate is an inaccurate representation of actual incidents. Many victims fail to report GBV due to mistrust of the

authorities. Even if victims do report crimes, the police often consider domestic violence a private affair and fail to intervene. Further, social and cultural norms, as well as legal and procedural obstacles complicate the reporting process. In an attempt to reduce crimes, Mongolia has strengthened anti-GBV laws criminalizing domestic violence.

Trafficking: Mongolia is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex and labor trafficking. Despite various anti-trafficking efforts, the government does not yet meet the minimum international standards for trafficking's elimination.

Sex and Procreation

At 2.9 children per woman in 2017, Mongolia's birthrate has decreased significantly from a high of 7.6 in 1966. The government provides some support for family planning and has improved access to reproductive health services for rural women in recent years, though appropriate and accurate sex education in schools is often lacking (Photo: US Navy Sailors complete a medical checkup for a Mongolian family).

LGBTQ Issues

While homosexuality was decriminalized in 2002, same-sex couples may not legally marry nor receive the same legal protections as heterosexual couples. In 2017, new laws outlawed discrimination and hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, law enforcement officials have not received training in preventing and prosecuting such crimes.

Mongolia's first Gay Pride week was celebrated in 2013 in Ulaanbaatar, where acceptance for LGBTQ individuals is higher than in rural areas. Nevertheless, members of the LGBTQ community continue to face widespread discrimination and abuse.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The official language is Mongolian. Kazakh and Tuvan are notable languages having historical presence in the country but no official status.

Mongolian

Mongolian belongs to the Mongolic language family, a group of languages spoken in East-Central Asia. Standard Mongolian is based on the Khalkh dialect, the first language of some 80% of the population. Other Mongolic varieties include Oirat (221,000 speakers) and Buryat (42,500).

Writing Systems: Over the centuries, several different writing systems have been used for Mongolian. The oldest is ***Uigarjin*** or Uighur script. It dates to Genghis Khan's rule during the 13th century (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*), when Uyghur (a Turkic people) scribes adopted their ancient alphabet for the Mongolian language. With some 26 characters written vertically from left to right, the script was predominant in Mongolia until the 1940s. It is still used to write Mongolian in Mongolian-majority regions in China today.

During the 16th-17th-century revival of Buddhism (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth* and p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), several new scripts were developed to facilitate translation of Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan religious texts into Mongolian. The most notable of these is ***soyombo*** developed by Zanabazar, the first ***Javzandamba Khutagt*** (supreme spiritual authority) of Buddhism in Mongolia (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Although the ornate script never achieved widespread adoption, an emblem called the *soyombo* derived from the script became a symbol of Mongolia and is featured on the flag today (Photo: 1925 coin showing both the *soyomo* symbol and Uighur script).

Following Mongolia's adoption of communism and close alignment with the USSR in the early 20th century (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*), its leaders began to consider alternatives. In the 1930s, Latin alphabets for several Mongolian varieties were developed and used for several years. However, Soviet leader Stalin abruptly reversed this course in the 1940s, ordering the abandonment of both Latin and the Uighur scripts and the use of a Cyrillic-based alphabet instead. Experts subsequently devised a modified Cyrillic alphabet for Mongolian with 35 characters (Photo: A Mongolian Army officer cadet next to a sign for the Armed Forces Training Center in Mongolian Cyrillic script).

Following the 1990 birth of democracy (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*), the government initially supported Mongolia's return to the Uighur script. However, the move was unpopular and required changes viewed as too costly, leading officials to abandon the effort. In 2015, a new law mandated the inclusion of the Uighur script alongside Cyrillic on street signs and government documents, while requiring its instruction in public schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Today, the Uighur script is not used extensively but is popular as a symbol of Mongol culture and language.

Other Languages

The most widely-spoken non-Mongolic languages are Kazakh (120,000 speakers) and Tuvan (40,600), both Turkic varieties. Although they have no official status, both languages are recognized and protected by Mongolian law. In most Tuvan- and Kazakh-majority areas, the two languages are used in local government and schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Kazakh was written with the Arabic script before the introduction of a modified Cyrillic alphabet in the 1940s.

Around 11,300 ethnic Khoton speak a form of Mandarin Chinese, and some 5,300 Mongolians speak Russian as a first

language. Due to decades of Russian influence, about 37% of the population today speak Russian as a second language.

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Mongolia requires not only knowledge of Mongolian but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Mongolian communication patterns reflect the value placed on hospitality and respect. Though Mongolians may seem reserved compared to Americans, especially during greetings, they are typically welcoming and generous. Formality and deference to authority figures are considered essential to successful communication, particularly during initial meetings (Photo: A US Alaska Air National Guardsman speaks with members of the Mongolian National Emergency Management Agency).

Due to their emphasis on courtesy and a desire to save “face” or avoid embarrassment to themselves or others, Mongolians prefer indirect communication, especially in public. Further, they often talk around contentious issues or avoid them entirely in an effort to evade malevolent spirits or bad luck in the same way Americans sometimes “knock on wood.” Consequently, they may avoid conveying bad news or keep negative opinions to themselves. They also tend to refrain from using definitive “yes” and “no” responses, preferring more ambiguous language such as “maybe.”

Greetings

On formal occasions or during religious celebrations and festivals (see p. 2-3 *of Aesthetics and Recreation*), Mongolians

perform a traditional greeting called ***zolgokh***. To initiate the greeting, two people approach with outstretched arms, then engage in a loose embrace, with the younger or lower-status person grasping the forearms and elbows of the other in a symbol of support. The two then touch cheek-to-cheek, while saying ***Amar mend üü*** ("Are you well and peaceful?").

Sometimes the greeting is performed with the younger person holding or presenting a ceremonial scarf. Other traditional greetings include the ceremonial exchange of snuff tobacco (Photo: A Mongolian woman in traditional dress presents a ceremonial scarf to then US Secretary of State Kerry in 2016).

In urban areas, handshakes are common and are usually accompanied by the formal ***Ta sain baina uu*** ("How do you do?" or more informal ***Sain baina uu*** ("hello") or ***Sonin yu baina*** ("What's new?"). In rural regions, handshakes are uncommon, and greetings are typically verbal inquires like "Are you wintering well?" or alternatively, wordplay.

Names

Mongolian names traditionally comprise an ***ovog*** (clan name), followed by an ***etsgiin ner*** (patronymic), and then a ***ner*** (given/first name). Historically, the clan name indicated place of origin. By contrast, the patronymic denotes male lineage and is formed by adding a possessive ending to the father's name. For example, the name Borjigin Sükhiin Ganbold, Borjigin is the clan name and Ganbold the given name. The patronymic Sükhiin indicates that Ganbold is the son of a man named Sükh.

Banned by the communist regime in 1925, clan names were reinstated in 1996. Today, Mongolians may choose among some 1,300 official clan names. Notable clan names include Borjigin, the clan name of ancient Mongol ruler Genghis Khan (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*) and Sansar (meaning "cosmos"), the chosen clan name of cosmonaut Jügderdemidiin Gürragchaa (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Mongolians

typically use only their given name, or at the most, patronymic and given name, reserving their clan name for formal occasions and documents. Women do not change their names upon marriage.

Forms of Address

Mongolians use formal titles to demonstrate respect. Titles vary in their placement before or after the given name. For example, ***noyon*** (Mr.) precedes the given name, while ***khatagtai*** (Mrs.) and ***guai*** (a non-gendered title of respect) follow it. Mongolians typically refer to government and business leaders only by their title, such as President or Chairman, though their full name may be added to the title on formal occasions. As a gesture of politeness, Mongolians avoid using names with older relatives, preferring terms like ***ax*** ("older brother") and ***egch*** ("older sister")

(Photo: Then-US Secretary of Defense Hagel meets with Mongolian Prime Minister Norovyn Altankhuyag in Ulaanbaatar in 2014).

Conversational Topics

Common conversation topics include sports, hobbies, travel, and regional cuisine. In rural areas, conversations tend to focus on family, weather, and livestock. Foreign nationals should avoid potentially sensitive topics such as Mongolia's historic relationships with Russia and China.

Gestures

To beckon, Mongolians face a palm down and wiggle the fingers. Mongolians consider pointing with the index finger impolite and indicate direction using the entire hand. Yawning, touching someone's hat or head, rolling up sleeves, and exposing the soles of the feet, especially to elders or towards the north while in a ***ger*** (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), are also offensive.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Mongolian	Mongolian Cyrillic
Hello	Sain baina uu?	Сайн байна үү?
Good afternoon	Ödriin mend.	Өдрийн мэнд
Good evening	Oroin mend.	Оройн мэнд
Goodbye	Bayartai	Баяртай
My name is ____	Minii neriig ____ gedeg.	Миний нэрийг гэдэг
What is your name?	Tanii neriig khen gedeg ve?	таны нэрийг хэн гэдэг вэ?
How do you say….in Mongolian?	Mongoloor ...g yaj khelekh ve?	Монголоор .....г яаж хэлэх вэ?
Do you speak English?	Ta angliar yaridag uu?	та англиар ярьдаг уу?
Sorry / Excuse me	Uuchlaarai	уучлаарай
Thank you	Bayarlaa	Баярлалаа
Yes / No	Tiim/ ügüi	Тийм/Үгүй
I don't understand	Bi oilgokhgüi baina.	Би ойлгохгүй байна
I'd like to buy…	Bi … avmaar bain.	Би авмаар байна
How much does it cost?	En yamar üntei ve?	Энэ ямар үнэтэй вэ?
I'd like to have this (to eat)	Bi en khooliig avi.	Би энэ хоолыг авья
How can I get to…?	… rüü bi yaaj ochikh ve?	… рүү би яаж очих вэ?
Can you show me on the map?	Ta gazriin zürag deer zaaj ögnö üü?	Та газрын эүраг дээр зааж өгнө үү?
Call a doctor!	Emch duudaarai!	эмч дуудаарай!
Help!	Tuslaarai!	Тусламаарай!

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98.4%
- Male: 98.2%
- Female: 98.6% (2015 estimate)

Early History of Education

In the centuries following the mid-16th-century resurgence of Buddhism (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), monks established monastic schools to educate boys in Buddhist teachings and Mongolian and Tibetan languages. Some sons of Mongolia's elite also studied subjects like medicine, philosophy, and art. Additionally, some local government offices taught administrative skills to boys. Nevertheless, most Mongolian children received no formal education.

Instead, they traveled across the steppe with their herder families, learning survival, animal husbandry, and other skills, values, and historical knowledge from their relatives (Photo: Mongolian child with a coloring book provided by participants of Khaan Quest, a multinational peacekeeping operations exercise).

Early 20th Century Education: At the beginning of the 20th century, around 10% of Mongolians were literate. After the 1925 establishment of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR – see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*), the communist government prioritized education. It established the nation's first free, compulsory public schools for both genders and inaugurated an adult literacy campaign.

Education in the MPR

Dependent on financial aid from the USSR (see p. 10 *of History and Myth*), the MPR's education system was highly centralized and designed to produce graduates with the requisite skills to meet the needs of Mongolia's economy. Consequently, the

authorities expanded technical and vocational education, opened some mobile schools, and ensured curricula emphasized Russian language studies (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*). In 1942, Mongolia's first university, The National University of Mongolia, opened, though many Mongolians seeking higher education continued to travel abroad to study at Soviet and Eastern European universities.

Through the 1970-80s, Mongolia invested heavily in schooling, routinely spending some 10% of GDP on education. All-in-all, the MPR's efforts were successful. Literacy increased to 73% by 1963 and 93% by 1979, and the number of students enrolled in secondary education nearly quintupled between 1969-89.

Modern Education System

A severe economic crisis followed Mongolia's 1990 transition to democracy (see p. 13 of *History and Myth* and p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Consequently, the government was forced to make major education budget cuts that led to widespread school closures. Unable to afford the remaining teachers' salaries, the authorities sometimes arranged payment in commodities like meat or flour. The closing of state-run manufacturing and industrial concerns disrupted vocational education, with enrollment declining some 75% by 1994.

As the economy improved over the next decade, the government prioritized education investment and reform. By 2003, Mongolian school enrollment rates had returned to pre-1990 levels, a rebound supported by the efforts of international development organizations and Mongolians' high respect for education (Photo: A US Marine interacts with Mongolian children).

Today, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science oversees public education. In 2017, the educational budget accounted for about 4.1% of GDP, significantly higher than neighboring Kazakhstan (2.8%) but lower than Kyrgyzstan (6.1%). All Mongolian students are entitled to 9 years of free, compulsory

education, and Mongolian is the official language of instruction. While the Cyrillic script is still the primary writing system, since 2015, schools also provide instruction in the traditional Mongolian ***Uigjarin*** script (see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*) beginning in the 6th grade.

In Kazakh- and Tuvan-majority areas (see p. of 13 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 2 of *Language and Communication*), the authorities support some instruction in those languages. For example, in 2014, new primary-level educational materials were developed for Tuvan-speaking students.

In Kazakh-speaking areas, primary students may choose between Mongolian- and Kazakh-medium schools, though the Kazakh schools typically lack appropriate and equivalent instructional materials and resources. Consequently, Kazakh-speaking students are handicapped when they transfer to Mongolian-only schools at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Kazakhs demonstrate lower educational attainment and higher drop-out rates than the Mongol majority.

The educational system faces several challenges. Due to a lack of standardized teacher training requirements, instructional quality varies dramatically across the country, resulting in large disparities in educational attainment. Overall, Mongolian students' scholastic achievement is low, with students scoring poorly on standardized tests (Photo: Mongolians await healthcare in a secondary school in Ulaanbaatar).

Pre-Primary: Most children aged 3-5 attend optional state-subsidized pre-primary programs that provide students with a foundation in numbers, letters, music, drawing, and physical education.

Basic: Consisting of 9 grades starting at age 6, compulsory basic education consists of primary school (grades 1-6) and lower secondary school (grades 7-9). The primary school

curriculum includes Mongolian language, mathematics, environmental studies, natural sciences, history, social studies, music, art, and physical education. Lower secondary offerings also include Mongolian literature, foreign languages (English or Russian), informatics (information science), and geography, though local schools have some autonomy to adjust curricula. In 2017, 98% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in basic education. To graduate, students must pass final exams (Photo: Mongolian schoolchildren in Ulaanbaatar).

Upper Secondary: This level (grades 10-12) is optional, and few secondary schools operate outside of urban centers. The curriculum includes Mongolian language and literature, foreign languages, mathematics, natural sciences, history, music, art, physical education, and information technology. Some specialized secondary schools prepare students for post-secondary studies in education and medicine. To graduate and qualify for university, students must pass final exams.

Vocational/Technical: The educational system also provides vocational and technical training in specific trades relating to agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. Offerings include a 2-year basic vocational program after lower secondary school and a technical degree-granting 1 or 2-year program following upper secondary.

Post-Secondary: Before 1990, the communist government regulated access to post-secondary education, determining the number of students allowed to enroll as part of its centralized economic planning (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). After 1990, the lifting of these quotas led to a significant increase in post-secondary attendance, with university enrollments doubling between 1998-2008.

Today, almost 70% of university-aged Mongolians are pursuing post-secondary studies. Women enroll in higher education at higher rates than men, accounting for some 60% of post-

secondary students in 2018. Mongolia is home to nine public and dozens of private colleges and universities, most located in Ulaanbaatar. Some 25,000 Mongolians per year travel abroad for post-secondary studies, primarily to China, Korea, Australia, Japan, and Russia.

Nevertheless, as of 2018, some 40% of university graduates in Mongolia were unemployed. Observers note that many graduates are ill-prepared for the workforce primarily due to a mismatch between their skillsets and job requirements. Consequently, the government is working to implement reforms that increase the quality of post-secondary programs and better align them with employers' needs. Further, an international-funded initiative has opened distance learning centers to broaden the reach of post-secondary education through online programs. In 2014, Japan opened three technical colleges with the aim of training Mongolian engineers to work in Japan.

Herding Lifestyle and Education: Mongolia's traditional pastoral lifestyle (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*) continues to present some challenges to the delivery of formal education. While most schools offer dormitories, where students of herding families can board if necessary, long-term separation from family is often difficult for younger children. Consequently, Mongolia historically struggled with low pre-primary and primary school attendance rates.

To ensure early education access for the one-third of the population following a pastoral lifestyle, authorities offer mobile kindergartens, summertime early childhood programs, online offerings, and "toy and book libraries" that lend educational resources so parents can teach their young children at home (Photo: US Marines, Soldiers, and Sailors build a school dormitory in Zuunmod in Mongolia's Töv province).

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Mongolians tend to have a casual attitude towards punctuality and time management. Aside from handshakes and traditional greetings, Mongolians usually avoid physical contact with strangers and new acquaintances.

Time and Work

Mongolia's work week runs from Monday-Friday, with business hours typically 9am-6pm. While hours vary by shop size and location, most urban stores are open Monday-Saturday from 9am-10pm. Major shopping centers typically also open on Sunday. By contrast, rural shops generally open Monday-Saturday from 9am-6pm and usually close for a lunch hour (Photo: Ulaanbaatar skyline).

Most banks are open Monday-Friday from 9am-6pm, though major branches typically also open on Saturdays. Restaurants generally open Monday-Saturday from 10am-8pm. Most museums and tourist attractions significantly reduce their opening days and hours during the winter.

Working Conditions: Mongolian labor laws establish an 8-hour workday/40-hour workweek, with at least two rest days per week. Labor laws also guarantee 8 national holidays and 15 vacation days. After 6 years, Mongolians accrue additional vacation time, with a maximum of 14 additional days after 32 years of work. Despite laws establishing minimum wages and overtime limits, violations are common, particularly in the informal sector. Child labor is also a problem, with underage employees often working long hours for little pay in dangerous circumstances (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

Time Zone: Most of Mongolia adheres to Ulaanbaatar Time (ULAT), which is 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 13 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Mongolia's western provinces adhere to Hovd Time (HOVT), which is 1 hour behind ULAT. Mongolia does not observe Daylight Savings Time.

Date Notation: Like the US, Mongolia follows the Western (Gregorian) calendar, typically recording day first, followed by the month and year. Mongolians use the lunar calendar to track some holidays. Lunar cycles determine each month, which results in 11 fewer days per year than the Western calendar. Leap months are added approximately every third year to keep the lunar calendar synchronized with the seasons. Some life events, such as weddings and funerals, are timed to coincide with favorable times on the lunar calendar.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January/February: Lunar New Year
- March 8: International Women's Day
- June 1: Mother and Children's Day
- July 11-15: National Holiday/Naadam (see p. 8 of *History and Myth* and p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*)
- October/November: Genghis Khan's Birthday
- December 29: Independence Day

Any holiday that falls on a weekend is observed on the following Monday.

Time and Business

Business in Mongolia tends to move at a slower pace than in the US. While Mongolians often expect foreign nationals to be punctual, few consider significant tardiness to be rude. Mongolians prefer to build trust and develop personal relations in business, often starting meetings with prolonged conversation about shared hobbies or interests (see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*). Most Mongolian businesses are strictly hierarchical, with subordinate staff rarely making business decisions or reaching agreements without management's

approval. Consequently, negotiations may go on for an extended period as information is conveyed between management levels.

Personal Space

As in most societies, the use of personal space depends on the nature of the relationship. Generally, Mongolians tend to maintain an arm's length when conversing with strangers. With family and friends, the distance is often smaller. People waiting in lines and passengers on public transportation may stand and sit quite close.

Touch: While strangers and members of the opposite sex rarely touch during conversations, close friends and family members often touch to convey affection. Mongolians in rural areas tend to engage in more conversational touching that their urban counterparts. Mongolians tend to use the right hand when eating and gesturing and the right or both hands when passing and accepting items. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is important during greetings and business meetings to convey interest, respect, and honesty, though some rural Mongolians consider direct eye contact with an elder impolite.

Photographs

Photography is typically prohibited inside religious buildings and discouraged in military areas and border crossings. Foreign nationals should acquire a Mongolian's permission before taking his photo.

Driving

While paved highways connect most urban areas, poorly maintained dirt roads remain common in rural areas, where lack of lighting, livestock, wildlife, and extreme weather can make driving hazardous. In 2016, Mongolia recorded 16.5 traffic-related deaths per 100,000 people, lower than the rate in neighboring China (18) but higher than the US rate (12.4). As in the US, Mongolians drive on the right side of the road (Photo: A bus in Ulaanbaatar).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Mongolia's traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the nation's pastoral history, foreign influences, and modern global trends.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: This style of Mongolian clothing was designed to withstand the rigors of pastoral life on the country's vast steppe, notably its frequently harsh winter conditions (see p. 3 *Political and Social Relations*). Today, many rural Mongolians continue to wear traditional clothing in their everyday lives, while urban dwellers tend to wear it only on special occasions such as religious rituals, theatrical performances, and funerals.

Mongolia's traditional garment for both men and women is a ***deel***, a flowing tunic tied at the waist with a sash. The *deel* features long sleeves and a high collar and is fastened at the throat and down the right shoulder by small cloth flap or silver or stone buttons. The sleeves and collar serve to protect the wearer's hands and neck from the cold, while the *deel's* front flap repels wind. The *deel* may also serve as a sleeping cover and a canopy that offers privacy when getting dressed on Mongolia's flat, treeless steppe.

Summer *deel* are made of brightly colored silk, while the winter version features more muted colors, is constructed from heavier materials like cotton or wool, and may be lined with fur or sheepskin for added warmth. Many Mongolians also own special, ornate *deels* adorned with delicate embroidery and silk stitching that are reserved for special occasions (pictured). Common colors include red, orange, green, and blue, though specific color combinations and embroidery patterns vary by ethnic group (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*) and may feature details that indicate a person's social status.

Over the *deel*, Mongolians traditionally wear a short, thick coat (***khurim***) and beneath it heavy trousers tucked into knee-length boots (***gutul***). Stitched by hand from stiff leather, *gutul* traditionally feature upturned toes and colorful, stenciled designs. The outfit is complemented by a fur hat.

Modern: Western-style clothing is popular in urban areas, particularly among younger generations. Styles tend to follow trends in the US, Europe, Japan, and South Korea. Popular items include jeans, patterned t-shirts, and form-fitting jackets. By contrast, older urban Mongolians tend to prefer more conservative clothing. At work, most Mongolians dress formally, with men wearing pants and a collared shirt or suits and ties and women wearing dresses, skirts, or pantsuits (Photo: Residents of Dalanzadgad in south-central Mongolia).

Recreation and Leisure

Mongolians' leisure activities reflect their herding traditions and historical connection to the natural environment. For example, Mongolians typically enjoy spending their free time outdoors engaging in activities like picnicking, hiking, camping, traditional sports (see below), skiing, and ice skating on frozen rivers and lakes in the winter. The hunting of rabbit, deer, wolves, and marmots (a large ground squirrel) is also popular. In urban areas, common pastimes include watching TV, going to the cinema, opera, or theater, attending concerts, playing card games, and shopping, often with friends and family.

Holidays and Festivals: Mongolians celebrate several holidays as well as regional and national festivals that mark important historical and cultural events. Many festivals are rooted in religious traditions and incorporate shamanistic and Buddhist rituals (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Many ethnic Kazakhs (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) celebrate Islamic holidays.

Particularly popular are ***Naadam*** festivals that celebrate the traditional sports of wrestling, archery, and horseracing (see

below). While the largest *Naadam* is held every summer in Ulaanbaatar, smaller, local versions occur at other times of the year. ***Tsagaan Sar*** (Lunar New Year) celebrates the coming of spring and marks a time of renewal. Over several days, families gather to honor their elderly and extended kin, with some engaging in religious rituals to honor deities and spirits of deceased ancestors (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Another prominent event is the annual Golden Eagle Festival held in the Altai Mountains of western Mongolia in October.

During the festival, Kazakhs demonstrate traditional hunting methods using trained golden eagles to capture foxes, rabbits, and other small game. Hunters compete to showcase their bird's accuracy, speed, agility, and connection with its trainer. The festival also features Kazakh folk music and dance.

Sports and Games

The "Three Manly Sports": Wrestling, horse racing, and archery were skills historically considered vital for men following a pastoral way of life. Today, some women also participate in these sports. Of the three, wrestling is the most popular. Children learn basic skills from a young age, and young athletes with promising talent train in special camps. Using simple grips and holds, while standing on their feet, wrestlers (***bokh***) win matches by throwing their opponents to the ground (Photo: Mongolian Armed Forces soldiers compete in a wrestling competition).

Mongolian wrestling competitions have no weight categories or time limits, so larger and more conditioned wrestlers tend to be among the sport's best. Since 1964, Mongolians have won 19 medals in the Olympic Games, 13 in freestyle wrestling and judo (a Japanese combat form that shares some similarities with Mongolian wrestling). Mongolians wrestlers have become successful Japanese sumo wrestlers and are among the most admired athletes in both Mongolia and Japan.

Mongolian horse riders typically begin riding at an early age, becoming skilled equestrians. Occurring over the open steppe, long horse races (between 10-20 mi) are popular social events. Archery is Mongolia's third traditional sport. Equipped with double-curved bows made of wood, sheep's horn, and sinew (a tough, fibrous tissue), archers shoot targets made of cork wrapped in strips of leather that are positioned at varying distances (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Kerry tries traditional archery in 2016).

Other Sports and Games: Other popular sports include soccer, basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics, among others. Mongolian youth enjoy several traditional games. In an ancient game similar to marbles, players flick sets of 8 or 12 sheep anklebones at targets about 10 ft away using a wooden paddle. In "Catching Horses," a group of boys separate a wild horse from the rest of the herd, then chase it at a high speed toward a second group of boys. When it gallops by, the second group tries to lasso it. Checkers and chess are also popular. Mongolian chess is unique, with the king, queen, pawn, knight, castle, and bishop pieces replaced with a ***khan*** (historical Mongol ruler – see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), lion or dog, boy, horse, cart, and camel, respectively.

Music and Dance

Traditional: Mongolia's early inhabitants used folk songs to preserve history and legends. During the Mongol Empire era (see p. 2-5 of *History and Myth*), Mongol rulers employed troupes of poets and dancers to provide entertainment at court. Common forms included short, lively songs describing life's everyday challenges, often with improvised or satirical lyrics, and longer ballads that told of the heroes and warriors of Mongol history. Today, folk music is an integral part of many theatrical performances, festivals, and religious rituals. It also features prominently at ceremonial events such as weddings,

celebrations after childbirth (see p. 2-3 of *Family and Kinship*), livestock brandings, and inaugurations of new homes.

Popular in western Mongolia, ***khöömei*** (throat singing or overtone singing) is a distinctive style in which singers carefully manipulate their throat, larynx, and diaphragm to generate two tones simultaneously. Another traditional style is ***urtiin duu*** (which roughly translates to "long song"), a 32-verse vocal performance featuring a complex rhythmic pattern and sweeping melody that involves a large octave range, peaking at a falsetto.

Folk instruments include the ***morin khuur*** (two-stringed fiddle with a neck shaped like a horse head), ***shudraga*** (three-stringed lute with a long neck and a round wooden body encased in sheep or snakeskin), ***limbe*** (bamboo flute), and ***yoochin*** (a dulcimer with 2 rows of 14 metal strings that are struck with hammers to produce a light clashing sound), among others (Photo: Mongolians sing and play a *morin khuur* at the opening ceremony for Khaan Quest, a multinational peacekeeping operations exercise).

Folk music often accompanies traditional dance. In the ***bielgee***, a musician playing the *morin khuur* accompanies a young female dancer who moves her hands, arms, and upper body in fluid circular motions to imitate a bird's flight or an animal trapped by a circle of hunters. Recently, Buddhist monks have revived the ancient ***tsam*** dance, which became extinct with the suppression of Buddhism in the 1930s (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In the dance, Buddhist monks wear colorful costumes and elaborate papier-mâché masks to represent gods and demons (Photo: The Mongolian Military Dance and Song Ensemble perform a traditional Mongolian dance).

Modern: Mongolia is home to a growing domestic music scene, with artists composing and performing rock, pop, and hip-hop (called "Mongolian Bling"). In Ulaanbaatar, music festivals and nightclubs showcasing performers from around the world have grown in popularity.

Literature

Mongolia has an ancient and rich tradition of oral storytelling. Historically, travelling poets recited folktales and epic poems, often featuring animals with human qualities and praising traits like honesty, kindness, and wisdom as the key to triumph over greed, evil, and injustice. Today, professional storytellers are still admired for their expertise in passing along myths, stories, legends, and history.

The earliest written Mongolian literature includes the 13th-century four-volume work *The Secret History of the Mongols* (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Compiled by an unknown author, the text comprises over 30 stories and some 200 poems and songs that combine history with myth. The 16th-century revival of Buddhism (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) brought the introduction of religious poems, plays, and stories exploring Buddhist themes, many composed as teaching materials for use by Buddhist monks.

In the early 20th century, Mongol nationalism and revolutionary themes became predominant (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). Poet, playwright, and author Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj explored Mongolia's natural beauty in famous poems like "My Homeland" and "Four Seasons of the Year." Considered the father of contemporary Mongolian literature, Natsagdorj also wrote the lyrics to *Three Sad Hills*, an opera exploring the 1921 revolution (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*) that is still performed regularly today (Photo: Statue of Natsagdorj in Ulaanbaatar).

For much of the 20th century, communist ideals and Soviet trends influenced literature, with the government promoting "Socialist Realism," an artistic tradition glorifying the industrial worker and agriculturalist. The 1990 collapse of communism

(see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*) ushered in a revival of interest in Mongolian history, the significance of Genghis Khan (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), Buddhist texts and teachings, and traditional folktales. While most works are inaccessible to readers outside the country, Oyungerel Tsedevdamba has achieved some international success, notably a nomination for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2009.

Arts and Crafts

Mongolia's arts and crafts blend local traditions with Chinese and other foreign influences encountered by Mongolians throughout the centuries. Many sculptures, paintings, and ceramics feature religious imagery similar to items found in Tibet and other regions of China which have a history of cultural and religious exchange with Mongolia. Mongolia's 17th-century Buddhist leader Zanabazar (see p. 6 of *History and* Myth and p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) was also a prolific artist, best known for his bronze casts of Buddhist deities. The late 19th century saw the rise of ***zurag***, a form of painting characterized by its two-dimensional style, use of certain colors, and portrayal of simple, daily life on Mongolia's steppe. One of the nation's most prominent *zurag* artists was Balduugiin Sharav, who also painted portraits of prominent Mongolians (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*).

Today, Mongolians are known for the embroidery, ornate carvings, and painted designs that are featured on an array of everyday items. For example, woodcarvers create geometric designs on the doors of ***ger*** (traditional homes – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), furniture, musical instruments, tools, and weapons. Leatherworkers craft saddles, stirrups, and other equestrian items. Other handicrafts include delicate ceramics, jewelry, stone and metal work, and rich textiles (Photo: Mongolians in traditional dress welcome a visiting US dignitary).

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Gathering to share meals is an important part of Mongolian life. Meals are generally simple, with dishes typically high in fat and featuring lightly seasoned meat or dairy products. Some dishes reflect Chinese and Russian culinary traditions.

Dining Customs

Most Mongolians eat three meals daily, with the largest in the afternoon or evening. Traditionally hospitable, Mongolians welcome unexpected visitors. When invited to a Mongolian home, guests usually present the host with a small gift, such as sweets or alcohol, while the men traditionally exchange snuff tobacco. Hosts typically offer light snacks paired with tea, alcohol, or other beverages, which guests should consume immediately. Visitors should avoid stepping on the threshold when entering a traditional ***ger*** (tent – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

In rural areas, many people eat with their hands, only using knives to cut large pieces of meat. In urban areas, families typically use chopsticks for noodles and cutlery for other dishes. Mongolians accept and pass food with their right hand, only using their left to support the right elbow if the dish is heavy. In a *ger*, a meal is typically eaten while seated on the floor or on stools at a low table. Urban families living in apartment buildings or houses commonly eat at a table with chairs (Photo: US Department of Agriculture representatives enjoy a pot of cooked sheep organs alongside dried cheese in northern Mongolia).

Alcoholic beverages accompany most afternoon and evening meals. Before drinking, some Mongolians perform a ritual to honor the sky gods and the four cardinal directions. They dip a fingertip into the liquid and flick the air four times before wiping the finger across their forehead. Slowly sipping and leaving an

alcoholic drink unfinished is acceptable. If a guest finishes his drink, the host assumes he wants more and provides a refill.

Diet

Mongolian cuisine reflects the nation's pastoral heritage, with meat and dairy the predominant components. Dishes are typically bland, incorporating few seasonings or spices beyond salt and pepper.

Mongolians use milk from their horses, camels, sheep, goats, and cows, traditionally referred to as the nation's five "snouts" (***tavan khoshuu***) to produce a variety of dairy products such as yogurts, creams, and cheeses. Mongolians typically refer to the summer months as the "white season" because herders spend their days preparing dairy products to last through the winter.

Most dishes incorporate meat, particularly mutton or beef. Pork and chicken are generally served only in urban areas. Mongolians consume all parts of the animal including the lungs, heart, intestines, and liver which are boiled, dried, stewed, fried in pancakes, or served in dumplings (Photo: Mutton soup with dumplings).

With crop harvests limited by the lack of arable land and the region's long, cold winters (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*), the Mongolian diet traditionally includes just a few fruits and vegetables, such as salads consisting of potatoes, cabbage, and carrots and the use of onions, leeks, and garlic in meat dishes. In the summer, popular fruits include plums, apples, and local berries, notably raspberries, strawberries, and sea buckthorn berries. In rural areas, families often pickle or preserve vegetables and fruits for consumption during the winter months.

Popular Dishes and Meals

Breakfast tends to be a light meal featuring yogurt or other dairy products, bread, and tea. Both lunch and dinner typically consist of heavy meat dishes, often served with ***bortzig*** (fried, unleavened bread).

Popular dishes include ***buuz*** (small, steamed meat dumplings filled with ground mutton, onions, and cabbage); ***tsuivan*** (pictured – steamed flour noodles mixed with vegetables and mutton chunks); ***mantuu*** (a variation of *buuz* made with plain steamed buns); ***borts*** (air-dried meat cut into long, thin strips); ***bansh*** (meat-stuffed dumplings boiled and served in soup); and ***guriltai shul*** (noodle soup made with meat and vegetables).

Khorkhog is a barbecued dish made by placing hot stones into a container with chopped mutton, vegetables, and water, and setting the whole container on fire. On special occasions, Mongolians eat ***boodog***, a dish prepared by stuffing a goat or marmot (a large ground squirrel) with seasoned meat and hot stones and roasting it over a fire. Typical snacks are ***aaruul*** (sweet, dried cheese curds) and pine nuts. As dessert, Mongolians enjoy ***boortsog*** (fried, sweet butter cookies); ***ul boov*** (layered cake shaped like a shoe sole); ***öröm*** (clotted cream); and ***gambir*** (savory or sweet fried pancakes).

Beverages

Mongolians drink tea throughout the day, both ***suutei tsai*** (green or black tea with milk, salt, and butter) and ***khar tsai*** (black tea with sugar). Common alcoholic beverages include ***airag*** (fermented mare's milk), ***arkhi*** (distilled, fermented mare's milk), vodka, and beer. Laws forbid the sale of alcohol on certain days in some districts.

Eating Out

Mongolians who can afford to eat out at urban restaurants and cafes, particularly on special occasions. Restaurants range from upscale establishments serving regional, national, and international foods to small casual eateries. Street vendors in urban areas sell snacks such as ***khuushuur*** (flat, meat-filled, fried pancakes) and meat skewers. While Mongolians traditionally do not tip, some wait staff in tourist areas expect a 10-20% tip.

Health Overview

The Mongolian population's overall health has improved in recent decades. Between 1980-2018, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased dramatically from 111 to 14 deaths per 1,000 live births. From 2000-17, maternal mortality reduced from 155 to 45 deaths per 100,000 live births yet remains significantly higher than the US rate in the same year (19). Life expectancy at birth increased from about 57 to 70 years between 1980-2017, yet it remains lower than the US (79) and the East Asia and Pacific regional averages (76).

While Mongolians have access to free basic healthcare, health services fail to properly prevent, detect, and treat diseases, leading some Mongolians to seek healthcare abroad. Experts estimate that over 80,000 Mongolians spend up to $150 million annually on overseas medical treatment (Photo: Mongolian medical personnel with patients in Ulaanbaatar).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Mongolian medicine uses herbal and other remedies rather than surgical methods to treat illness. Mongolians have practiced traditional medicine for thousands of years to treat both minor ailments and major illnesses. Many of these practices incorporate Tibetan and Chinese traditional medicine.

Today, many Mongolians continue to supplement modern treatments with traditional therapies such as bloodletting (the removal of blood from a patient for therapeutic purposes), acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into a patient's skin), and moxibustion (a process in which a practitioner burns or massages herbs into acupuncture points). Others utilize medicinal herbs, animal products, and minerals as natural forms of treatment.

Modern Healthcare System

While Mongolia's Ministry of Health oversees the national healthcare system and develops health policy, it delegates the implementation of health services to regional health departments. Primarily funded by the national budget and a mandatory social health insurance (SHI) scheme, Mongolia's healthcare industry divides into three levels of service: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Primary healthcare – which includes services like basic medical and surgical care, immunizations, and maternity care – is financed by the national budget and free of charge for all Mongolian citizens. Mongolians access primary care through family health centers (privately-run, state-owned entities) in urban areas, while government-owned and operated health centers provide care to rural-dwellers.

By contrast, major inpatient services at both secondary and tertiary level facilities are just partially covered by the government budget and the SHI, requiring a 10-15% out-of-pocket payment by patients. In 2017, Mongolia had over 4,000 health facilities, both public and private (Photo: A Mongolian Armed Forces cardiologist prescribes medication for a patient during a home visit).

Healthcare Challenges: Most significantly, medical infrastructure is lacking in many rural areas. Seeking to bridge this gap in services, the government introduced mobile health units in 2016 to provide primary care to Mongolians in rural areas. Still, rural-dwellers are often forced to travel long distances and incur significant costs to receive proper care for serious illnesses.

Moreover, while the government subsidizes health insurance contributions and medication costs for low-income and vulnerable populations, families without this support tend to incur high out-of-pocket expenses. Other challenges include low government health expenditures and an aging population that is

expected to increasingly strain the healthcare system in the future (Photo: US military members receive a tour of the Mongolia Military Medical Center in Ulaanbaatar).

Introduced in 2016, the government's "Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030" plan includes provisions to improve the overall health of Mongolians, with a goal of extending life expectancy to 78 years. Initiatives include promoting healthy lifestyles, strengthening disease prevention, increasing preparedness for communicable disease outbreaks, and decreasing maternal and child malnutrition and mortality.

As in most developing countries with aging populations, non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, such as cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses, cancer, and diabetes accounted for about 80% of deaths in 2016. By contrast, rates of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis have fallen in recent years and accounted for about 10% of all deaths in 2016. Preventable "external causes" such as accidents, suicides, and drug use also resulted in about 10% of deaths in 2016 (Photo: Mongolian first responders during a training demonstration).

In urban areas, air pollution resulting from the burning of coal for heat or fuel (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*), industrial emissions, automotive exhaust, chemical releases, and the region's geography elevate the risk of illness. This pollution especially affects children, causing pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, inhibited brain development, and even death. Experts estimate some 50% of Mongolian children suffer from an air pollution-related illness.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most regional inhabitants relied on breeding and raising livestock for survival. As pastoralists, they moved with their animals seasonally from one pasture to the next, while growing some crops to meet their families' immediate needs. Following the founding of the communist state in the 1920s (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), Mongolia's leaders followed Soviet guidance in modernizing and diversifying its simple subsistence-based economy.

The 1930s brought significant economic changes. Following the Soviet central-planning model, the government instituted a series of 5-year plans that diversified industry to include mining, timber, and limited manufacturing. Nevertheless, agriculture still accounted for 61% of national income and employed some 90% of the labor force in 1940 (Photo: 1966 USSR stamp featuring a Mongol horseman and the Mongolian and Soviet flags).

Subsequent decades saw increased industrialization and the collectivization of herding. In 1962, Mongolia became a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), an economic cooperation group of Soviet bloc countries. Membership provided Mongolia with a market for its goods, more foreign investment, and other economic assistance. In subsequent years, some 90% of Mongolia's foreign trade was with other Comecon countries. Further, the founding of Baganuur, Choibalsan, Darkhan, and Erdenet as new "industrial towns" facilitated a significant increase in industrial output. However, despite GDP growth averaging 6.5% between 1980-88, Mongolians became

increasingly discontent with the rigid Soviet-style economic system.

The transition from a centrally-planned economy to a free-market system in the 1990s was difficult. During the transition, the government initiated a “shock therapy” that froze wages, removed price controls, privatized state-owned enterprises, and eliminated many social protections, just as Mongolia lost access to its regular markets. The end of Soviet aid equivalent to 30% of GDP was particularly damaging (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Between 1990-94, income levels, employment, and output decreased, while poverty and inflation rose.

By 1994, the economy began to recover slowly as GDP grew by about 2%, primarily due to stabilization policies, favorable weather conditions, and increases in the international prices of copper, gold, and cashmere, important Mongolian exports. Further, international aid totaling about $766 million contributed to the recovery. Despite slowed growth during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, GDP had returned to pre-1990 levels by 2000, though extreme winter weather in 1999-2001 (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*) caused the deaths of some 25% of Mongolia’s livestock, pushing many pastoralists into poverty (Photo: A Mongolian with his livestock).

The 2008-09 global financial crisis ended GDP growth temporarily before the economy rebounded, primarily due to a mining boom. At the boom’s height, Mongolia had the world’s fastest growing economy, with GDP growth over 17% in 2011. In 2014, Mongolia experienced an economic contraction due to slowing growth in China, its main trading partner, decreased exports, and reduced foreign direct investment (FDI). Between 2014-16, the country faced mounting debt and increasing poverty rates. In 2017, international donors provided a $5.5 billion bailout package to stabilize the economy.

In 2018, the Mongolian economy once again rebounded, and GDP grew by 7%, largely due to increased private consumption, FDI inflows, and mineral exports. Before the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, Mongolia's outlook remained positive, with experts predicting GDP growth of 5-6% through 2024. The effect of the pandemic on the economy remains unclear as of spring 2020.

Today, Mongolia faces several challenges. In 2018, some 28% of Mongolians lived below the poverty line of 166,580 ***tögrög*** (₮), about $60 per month. Child laborers are sometimes subjects of abuse – particularly in construction, mining, and horseracing – (see p. 3-4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), and unemployment rates are high for youth and the university-educated (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Because growth is tied to its mining exports, the economy is vulnerable to changes in commodity prices and levels of FDI in mining enterprises. Other challenges include dependence on China as a trade partner, widespread corruption, geographic isolation, and vulnerability to extreme winter weather (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Services

Accounting for 50% of GDP in 2017 and employing about 52% of the labor force in 2018, the services sector is the largest component of Mongolia's economy. Key subsectors include tourism, trade, real estate, financial services, transport, and education.

Tourism: In 2017, tourism contributed some $330 million to GDP and directly supported some 34,000 jobs. Almost 530,000 foreigners visited Mongolia in 2018, primarily from Russia, China, Korea, Japan, and the US. Tourists enjoy the country's varied landscapes and unique cultural events, riding camels through the Gobi Desert, visiting local families in their ***gers*** (tents – see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), and participating in traditional festivals, such as the Golden Eagle Festival (pictured – see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Industry

Industrial activity accounted for some 38% of GDP in 2017 and employed 19% of the labor force in 2018. While mining dominates the sector, manufacturing and construction are also major components.

Mining: Mongolia's mineral wealth is estimated at $1–3 trillion. In 2017, the extraction of coal, copper, gold, uranium, tungsten, and dozens of other minerals accounted for 22% of GDP, although the mining industry directly employs just 4% the workforce. The Oyu Tolgoi deposit in the South Gobi region (pictured), currently undergoing a $7 billion expansion, is the world's second largest copper deposit. Further, the Tavan Tolgoi mine, also located in southern Mongolia, is one of the world's largest coking coal mines with an estimated deposit of over 6 billion metric tons.

Oil: Mongolia produced 7.6 million barrels of oil in 2017, most exported to China. Construction on the country's first oil refinery began in 2018 and is expected to meet the country's entire demand for gasoline, diesel, aviation fuel, and liquefied petroleum gas by 2022.

Manufacturing: Mongolia's manufacturing sector primarily processes raw materials to create food products and garments made of cashmere, yak (long-haired ox) hair, sheep wool, and camel hair. In 2015, Mongolia's production of almost 9,000 tons of raw cashmere comprised about 30% of the world supply.

Construction: Mongolia's commercial and residential construction sector comprised some 13% of GDP in 2016 and employed over 80,000 people. To address the lack of affordable housing in Ulaanbaatar (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*), international funders, private investors, and the government are developing new apartment complexes and other public housing.

Agriculture

The agriculture sector comprised 12% of GDP in 2017 and employed about 29% of the labor force in 2018. Because only

0.4% of Mongolia's land is arable and the long winters result in a short growing season, crop yields are low. Common crops include wheat, barley, oats, potatoes, cabbage, and carrots.

Livestock: Animal husbandry has historically been the focus of the economy and today accounts for over 80% of agricultural production. Mongolian livestock traditionally includes the five "snouts" or ***tavan khoshuu***: goats, sheep, cattle, horses, and camels (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*). In 2015, Mongolia had some 56 million head of livestock, of which goats and sheep comprised 42% and 45% respectively.

Currency

Mongolia's currency (pictured) is the ***tögrög***, also called the ***tugrik*** (₮). It is issued in five coin values (20₮, 50₮, 100₮, 200₮, 500₮) and 11 banknote values (1₮, 5₮, 10₮, 20₮, 50₮, 100₮, 500₮, 1,000₮, 5,000₮, 10,000₮ and 20,000₮), though the 1₮ note rarely circulates. Between 2015-20, US$1 has fluctuated between 1,859₮ and 2,728₮.

Foreign Trade

Mongolia's imports, totaling $4.3 billion in 2017, primarily consisted of machinery and equipment, fuel, cars, food products, industrial consumer goods, chemicals, building materials, tobacco products, appliances, and soaps primarily from China (33%), Russia (28%), Japan (8%), the US (5%), and South Korea (5%). In the same year, exports totaled $5.8 billion and comprised copper, apparel, livestock, animal products, cashmere, wool, hides, fluorspar, other metals, coal, and crude oil destined for China (93%) and the United Kingdom (3%).

Foreign Aid

In 2017, Mongolia received some $840 million in official development assistance, primarily from Japan ($354 million), the International Development Association ($75 million), the Asian Development Bank ($35 million), and Korea ($34 million). In 2018, the US provided some $4.73 million in foreign assistance, primarily for foreign military financing; nonproliferation, antiterrorism, and demining programs; and international military education and training.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Beyond urban areas, Mongolia generally lacks physical infrastructure, paved roads, and public transportation systems. While free speech and press are constitutionally protected, those freedoms are occasionally restricted.

Transportation

Ulaanbaatar is the only urban area served by public transportation, consisting of a network of trolleys and busses. To journey beyond urban areas, Mongolians typically travel by plane, privately-owned vehicle, train, or bus. Another option is a “share jeep” or “share truck,” whose driver offers unoccupied space to paying passengers traveling in the same general direction. In some rural areas, transport by horse, yak (long-haired ox), and camel remains common (Photo: A Mongolian with his camels).

Roadways: In 2017, Mongolia had some 70,330 mi of roads, of which 9% were paved. While major highways increasingly connect regional capitals, most roads are poorly maintained and accessible only to four-wheel drive vehicles.

Railways: Mongolia has just over 1,127 mi of railways that connect its cities and towns with neighbors Russia and China. Jointly owned by the Russian and Mongolian governments, Ulaanbaatar Railway (UBTZ) operates two domestic lines, while the Trans-Mongolian Railway bisects Mongolia on its route between Beijing and Moscow (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Trains offer passenger service but predominantly transport cargo (Photo: UBTZ dining car).

Ports and Waterways: Mongolia has some 360 mi of inland waterways that are navigable between May-September. Transport on Lake Khövsgöl and the Selenge River is limited due to environmental concerns.

Airways: Mongolia has 44 airports, 15 with paved runways. Given Mongolia's large size and poorly maintained roads, air travel provides efficient transport to remote regions. Aero Mongolia and Huunu operate domestic flights, many via Ulaanbaatar's Chinggis Khaan International Airport (pictured). Mongolia's flag carrier, MIAT Mongolian Airlines, offers connections to international destinations in Asia and Europe.

Energy

Mongolia relies heavily on fossil fuels, with coal and oil accounting for about 71% and 26% of energy generation, respectively. Just 4% of energy is generated from renewable sources like biofuels, wind, solar, and hydropower. Coal-burning powerplants contribute to air pollution with significant environmental and health burdens (see p. 7 of *Sustenance and Health*).

Aiming to increase its use of sustainable energy sources, Mongolia in partnership with the Asian Development Bank invested some $66 million in renewable energy infrastructure in 2018. To reduce pollution in Ulaanbaatar, where residents in informal settlements burn some 600,000 tons of coal for heating and cooking annually, the government banned raw coal in 2019, subsidizing instead a coal by-product that burns longer and emits less fumes.

Media

Mongolia's constitution protects freedoms of speech and press, and the government generally respects those rights. Nevertheless, broad libel laws lead many journalists to self-censor to avoid retaliation in the form of defamation suits brought by influential business and political leaders. Further, media ownership is concentrated in a few hands, and most outlets are affiliated with a political party, hindering the emergence of an independent media.

Print Media: Following Mongolia's 1990 transition to democracy (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*), the media market expanded significantly and today includes hundreds of local and national periodicals. The most widely-circulated dailies include *Ödriyn Sonin* (Daily News) and *Önöödor* (Today). *Ünen* (Truth), a communist party publication dating to 1921, also remains popular. Publications in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and English are also available. Mongolia's main English-language newspapers include *The Mongol Messenger* and *UB Post*

(Photo: Mongolian Armed Forces soldiers and Mongolian media participate in a media engagement event during Khaan Quest, a multinational peacekeeping operations exercise).

Radio and TV: The state-owned Mongolian National Broadcaster network airs many of Mongolia's most popular TV and radio programs. Given the availability of solar-powered satellite dishes, watching television is a common pastime, even in rural areas. Many urban households subscribe to cable services, and Russian and Chinese broadcasts are also popular. For herders (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*), some 72 radio stations remain a critical source of news and entertainment. Radio Ulaanbaatar also broadcasts English-language music and programming.

Telecommunications

With fixed-line systems largely restricted to urban areas, Mongolia relies on mobile networks for its telecommunications. In 2018, Mongolia had 12 landline and 133 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people. In recent years, mobile phone coverage across the country has improved significantly.

Internet: Internet users tend to concentrate in urban areas. While two-thirds of Mongolians had access to the Internet in 2017, just 24% were regular users. Many Mongolians access the Internet through their mobile phones. The government neither restricts Internet access nor censors online content.

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