

Unit 12 b: Mongolia

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Prevalence of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia
- Naadam celebrations--horse racing, archery, wrestling
 - Historical trend of Mongol nomadic lifestyle

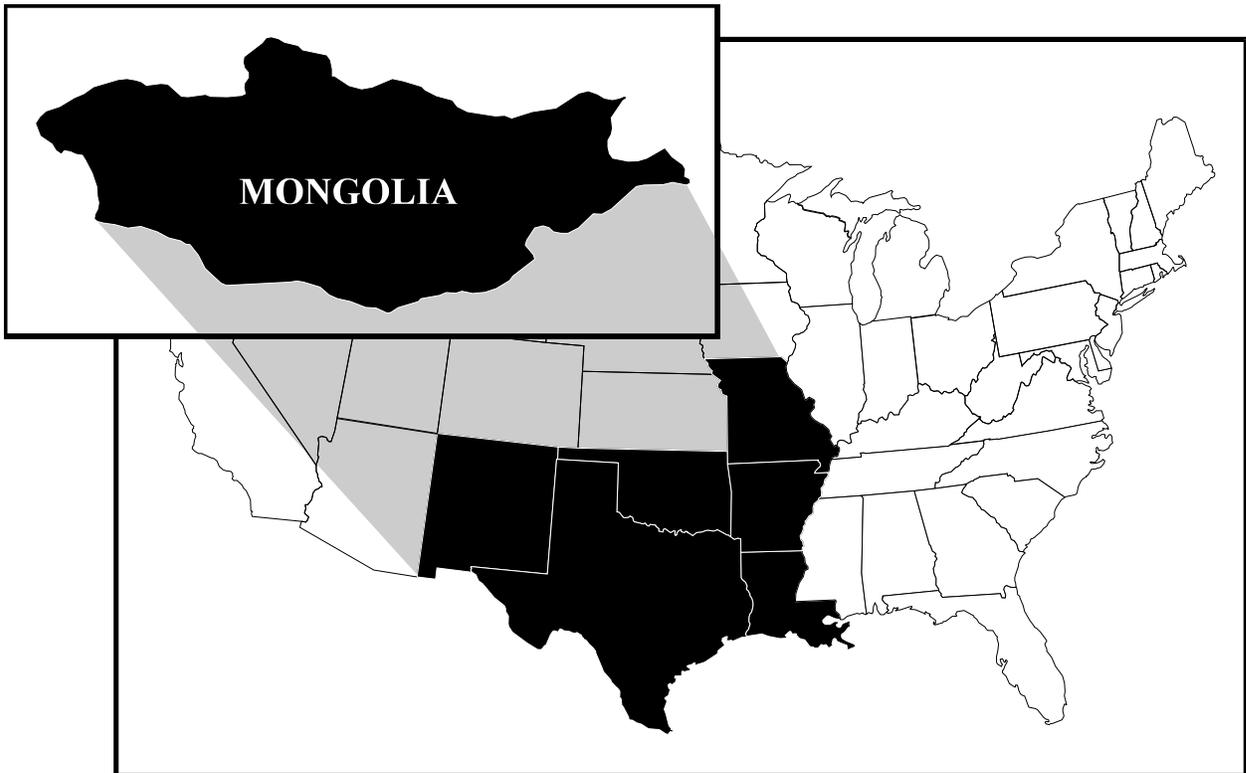
Identify

- Khalkha Mongols
- Naadam celebrations
- Dalai Lama
- Altan Khan
- Lama
- Kazakh
 - Gobi Desert

Realize

- Relatively high status given women in traditional Mongolian society
- Soviet and Chinese influence on Mongolia
- Shaman practice in Mongolia
 - Traditionally high social status accorded Mongol women

Mongolia



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|----------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Population</u> | 2,493,615 |
| % under 15 years | 38% |
| <u>Commo</u> | |
| TV | 1:19 |
| Radio | 1:11 |
| Phone | 1:31 |
| Newspaper | 74:1,000 |
| <u>Health</u> | |
| Life Expectancy | Male 64/Female 69 |
| Hospitals | 1:83 |
| Doctors | 1:340 |
| IMR | 42:1,000 |
| <u>Income</u> | \$1,200.00 per cap |
| <u>Literacy Rate</u> | 98% |

1. Religious Groups

a. Tibetan Buddhist 94%

"Traditional Mongols worshipped heaven (the 'clear blue sky') and their ancestors, and they followed ancient northern Asian practices of shamanism, in which human intermediaries went into trance and spoke to and for some of the numberless infinities of spirits responsible for human luck or misfortune." (Unless otherwise stated, all quotes come from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbooks--Mongolia.)



Altan Khan

"In 1578 Altan Khan, a Mongol military leader with ambitions to unite the Mongols and to emulate the career of Chinggis, invited the head of the rising Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism to a summit. They formed an alliance that gave Altan legitimacy and religious sanction for his imperial pretensions and that provided the Buddhist sect with protection and patronage."

Dalai Lama *"Altan gave the Tibetan leader the title of Dalai Lama (Ocean Lama), which his successors still hold. Altan died soon after, but in the next century the Yellow Sect spread throughout Mongolia, aided in part by the efforts of contending Mongol aristocrats to win religious sanction and mass support for their ultimately unsuccessful efforts to unite all Mongols in a single state."*

Monks *"Tibetan Buddhism is monastic. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Outer Mongolia had 583 monasteries and temple complexes, which controlled an estimated 20 percent of the country's wealth. Almost all Mongolian cities have grown up on the sites of monasteries."*

Monasteries were built across Mongolia, often sited at the juncture of trade and migration routes or at summer pastures, where large numbers of herders would congregate for

shamanistic rituals and sacrifices. Buddhist monks carried out a protracted struggle with the indigenous shamans and succeeded, to some extent, in taking over their functions and fees as healers and diviners, and in pushing the shamans to the religious and cultural fringes of Mongolian culture.

The basic Buddhist tenet of reincarnation was combined with the Tantric idea that buddhahood could be achieved within a person's lifetime to produce a category of leaders who were considered to have achieved buddhahood and to be the reincarnations of previous leaders. These leaders, referred to as incarnate or living buddhas, held secular power and supervised a body of ordinary monks, or lamas (from a Tibetan title bla-ma, meaning 'the revered one').

The monks were supported by the laity, who thereby gained merit and who received from the monks instructions in the rudiments of the faith and monastic services in healing, divination, and funerals.

Buddhism and the Buddhist monkhood always have played significant political roles in Central and Southeast Asia, and the Buddhist church in Mongolia was no exception. Church and state supported each other, and the doctrine of reincarnation made it possible for the reincarnations of living buddhas to be discovered conveniently in the families of powerful Mongol nobles."

Buddhist cultural impact *"By the twentieth century, Buddhism had penetrated deeply into Mongolian culture, and the populace willingly supported the lamas and the monasteries. Foreign observers had a uniformly negative opinion of Mongolian monks, condemning them as lazy, ignorant, corrupt, and debauched, but the Mongolian people did not concur. Ordinary Mongolians apparently combined a cynical and realistic anticlericalism, sensitive to the faults and the human fallibility of individual monks or groups of monks, with a deep and unwavering concern for the transcendent values of the church.*

Buddhism survives among the elderly, who pray and attend services at the Gandan Monastery; in the speech of the people, which is rich in Buddhist expressions and proverbs; and in the common practice of including statues or images of the Buddha on families' special shelves with photographs of relatives and other memorabilia."



b. Muslim 6% (Primarily in the southwest)

c. Shamanism *"Studies done among the Buryat Mongols of Siberia by Soviet ethnographers in the 1960s and the 1970s found that elimination of the complex and conceptually sophisticated culture of Tibetan Buddhism had led to a growth of the decentralized and flexible folk practice of shamanism."*

2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

a. Mongol 85% *"Mongolia's population is ethnically quite homogenous; about 90 percent of the populace speaks one of several dialects of the Mongol language. Mongol is an Altaic language, related to the Turkic languages, such as Uzbek, Turkish, and Kazakh, and more distantly to Korean and perhaps, in the opinion of some linguists, to Japanese."*

Khalkha (KAHL-kah) *"The Khalkha Mongols are the largest element of the population. According to the 1979 census, they made up 77.5 percent of the population."*



The term khalkha, which means 'shield,' has been used at least since the mid-sixteenth century to refer to the nomads of the traditional Mongol heartland of high steppes and mountains. They have been the most thoroughly pastoral of all the Mongol tribes or subethnic groups, the nomads' nomads, and the least affected by foreign influences."

Dialects "Another 12 percent of the population in 1979 spoke a variety of western or northern Mongol dialects, such as Dorbet, Dzakchin, Buryat, or the southeastern Dariganga. Speakers of these dialects were concentrated in their ancestral territories in far western or northwestern Mongolia in Hovd, Uvs, and Hovsgol aymags, or along the Chinese frontier in the southeast.

Ethnic distinctions among the various Mongol subgroups have been relatively minor; they have been expressed in oral traditions of historical conflicts among the groups, in such ethnic markers as women's headdresses or the shapes of boots, and in such minor variations in pastoral technique as placement of camels' nose pegs. Apart from immediate adaptation to different environments, Mongol culture has been relatively uniform over large areas, and dialect or tribal differences have not become significant political or social issues."

b. Turkic (Kazakh) (kah-ZAHK) 7% "Mongolia's largest minority, accounting for 5.3 percent of the population in 1979, is the Kazakh people of the Altai. The Kazakhs, who also live in the Soviet Union's Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and in China's Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region, are a pastoral, Turkic-speaking, and traditionally Muslim people who live in Bayan-Olgii Aymag in extreme western Mongolia. Bayan-Olgii is a largely Kazakh administrative unit, where the Kazakh language is used in the primary schools and in local administrative offices.

There is a fairly high level of contact with the Kazakh Republic, which provides textbooks for the schools. Kazakhs of the Altai traditionally have hunted from horseback with trained golden eagles on their wrists and greyhounds slung across the saddle--both to be launched at game--and pictures of eagle-bearing Kazakhs are common in Mongolian tourist literature.



Mongol is taught as the second language and Russian as the third in Kazakh schools, and bilingual Kazakhs appear to participate in the Mongolian professional and bureaucratic elite on an equal footing with Mongols. Kazakhs also make up a disproportionate number of the relatively highly paid workers in the coal mines of north-central Mongolia; this situation may indicate either limited opportunities in the narrow valleys of Bayan-Olgii Aymag or government efforts to favor a potentially restive minority, or both."

c. Tungusic (toon-GOOS-ihk) 4.6% Tungusic-speaking hunters and reindeer herders in the northeast.

d. Others (including Chinese and Russian) 3.4% *"Historically, the Gobi served as a barrier to large-scale Chinese settlement in what was, before 1921, called Outer Mongolia; the unsuitability of most of the territory for agriculture made southern settlement less attractive. The small Chinese population in the early 1920s consisted of merchants or peddlers, artisans working for Buddhist monasteries or Mongol aristocrats, and a few market gardeners near Ulaanbaatar and the smaller population centers of the Selenge region."*



Chinese *"Many of the Chinese married or formed liaisons with Mongol women. Their children, who spoke Mongol as a first language, were regarded as Chinese by the rules of patrilineal descent common to both Chinese and Mongols. In the early 1980s, Ulaanbaatar was reported to have a small Chinese community, which published a Chinese-language newspaper and which looked to the Chinese embassy for moral support."*

In 1983 the Mongolian government expelled about 1,700 Chinese residents, who were accused of 'preferring an idle, parasitic way of life' to honest labor on the state farms to which they had been assigned. At the same time, ethnic Chinese who had become naturalized citizens were reported to be unaffected.

Because the presence and the status of Chinese residents in Mongolia were politically sensitive subjects, Mongolian sources usually avoided mentioning the Chinese at all."

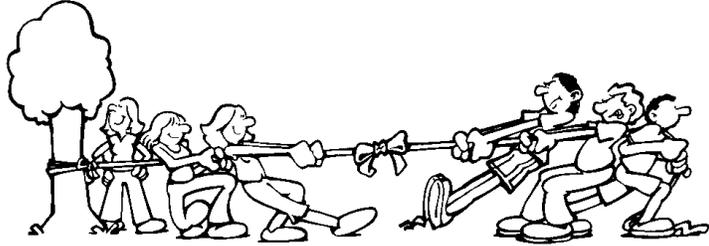
Russian *"The same sources frequently referred to the Soviet residents of Mongolia, but they always described them as helpful foreigners who would return to their proper homes when their terms of service were over. Most presumably were not included in the Mongolian census figures. There were small numbers of descendants of Russian settlers along the border, and the 'national' status of Buryat Mongols, Tuvins, or Kazakhs who at some point had crossed the border from their home territories in the Soviet Union was not clear.*

Thousands of Soviet nationals were working in Mongolia as technical experts, advisers, and skilled workers; they were a noticeable presence in Mongolian cities in the late 1980s. Erdenet, which was built around a joint Mongolian-Soviet copper-molybdenum mining and processing complex in the late 1970s, had a 1987 population of 40,000 Mongols and 10,000 Soviet workers on three-year contracts.



In the 1980s, an estimated 55,000 Soviet troops were based in Mongolia, and some of them worked on construction projects in cities. Although since 1920 many Russians have settled in the Tannu Tuva and Buryat Mongol regions of Siberia across the border from northern Mongolia, there has been no Russian migration to, and settlement in, Mongolia."

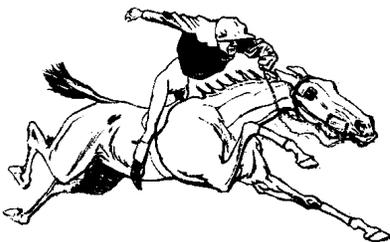
3. Gender Issues



a. Traditional subordination

"Leading Western scholars agree that Mongolian women traditionally have had relatively higher social positions and greater autonomy than women in the Islamic societies of Inner Asia or in China and Korea. Women herded and milked sheep, and they routinely managed the household if widowed or if their husbands were absent to perform military service, corvée labor, or caravan work."

Mongols valued fertility over virginity and did not share the obsessive concern with female purity found in much of Southwest, South, and East Asia. Women, however, although not shy, remained subordinate to men and were restricted to the domestic sphere. It is characteristic of Mongolian attitudes toward male and female contributions that the care of sheep--which provided Mongolians with their basic, daily sustenance--was the responsibility of women, while the care of horses--which contributed much less to subsistence but more to prestige, war, and sport--was the prerogative of men.



Traditional Mongols combined firm notions of female subordination with a flexible attitude toward female participation in male-associated tasks, and women ordinarily filled in for men when no males were available for such activities as milking horses or even riding them in races.

Archery contests, one of the 'three manly sports' (the others are racing and wrestling), always included a female round.

The 1921 revolution began efforts to bring women into public life and into the extra-domestic labor force. The state's constant efforts to promote population growth also have led to a strong emphasis on women's reproductive capacities; bearing large numbers of children has been considered a civic duty. Possible contradictions between women's productive role in the economy and their reproductive role in the population have been glossed over in public rhetoric. The tension had existed, however, and frequent childbearing, state-mandated maternity leaves, as well as caring for young children probably have affected the sorts of jobs women hold and their commitment to their occupational roles."

b. Abuse *"There is increasing public discussion of domestic violence, including spousal and child abuse, after many years of government and societal denial. Although there are no reliable or exact statistics as to the extent of such abuse, human rights groups believe that it is a common phenomenon.*

The large economic and societal changes under way have created new stresses on the family, including loss of jobs, inflation, and lowered spending on social and education programs. These factors, coupled with the serious problems caused by extremely high rates of alcohol abuse, have led to increased instances of abuse and abandonment and have added to the ranks of single-parent families, most of which are headed by women.

Although women's groups are advocating new statutes to cope with domestic violence, at present there is no known police or government intervention in cases involving violence against women beyond prosecution under existing assault laws when formal charges have been filed." (U.S. State Department Human Rights Report, 1996--Mongolia.)

c. Equality *"The Constitution provides men and women with equal rights in all spheres, and, both by law and practice, women receive equal pay for equal work and have equal access to education. Women represent about half of the workforce, and a significant number are the primary earners for their families. Although many women occupy midlevel positions in government and the professions and many are involved in the creation and management of new*

trading and manufacturing businesses, women are almost completely absent from the highest leadership ranks of both the public and private sectors. There is no government agency overseeing women's rights, nor are there any notable efforts by the Government to encourage greater representation by women in policymaking positions."

4. Holidays/Observances

a. Naadam (11-13 July; 20-26 July)

- Mongolian term referring to celebrations honoring the Mongolian people's freedom year.
- History goes back to the thirteenth century when Marco Polo described a gathering of 10,000 white horses. Mongolian chieftains compete in horse racing, archery, and wrestling.



b. Tsagaan Sar (ZAH-gahn sahr, Lunar New Year)

- Celebration of "white month," marking an important time for traditional family gatherings.

c. Other Mongolian holidays

- (1) Children and Women's Day (1 June)
- (2) New Year's Day (1 January)

5. Customs

a. Gestures

- The pastoral nomad tradition values freedom. Expect Mongolians to express a great love for the environment and wildlife.



