

Mongolia

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Exploring Our World

In the remote, harsh land of western Mongolia, a centuries-old tradition continues. Hunters train eagles to bring their kill back to the human hunter. The people say that female eagles make the best hunters. Because they weigh more than males, they can capture larger prey. Like all eagles, they have superb vision—eight times better than a human's.



Mongolia

Landlocked Mongolia is a large country about the size of Alaska. Rugged mountains and high plateaus rise in the west and central regions. The bleak desert landscape of the **Gobi** spreads over the southeast. The rest of the country is covered by **steppes**, the dry treeless plains often found on the edges of a desert.

Known as the Land of the Blue Sky, Mongolia boasts more than 260 days of sunshine. Yet its climate has extremes. Rainfall is scarce, and fierce dust storms sometimes sweep across the landscape. Temperatures are very hot in the summer. In the winter, they fall below freezing at night.

For centuries, most of Mongolia's people were nomads. **Nomads** are people who move from place to place with herds of animals. Even today, many Mongolians tend sheep, goats, cattle, or camels on the country's vast steppes. Important industries in Mongolia use products from these animals. Some factories use wool to make textiles and clothing. Others use the hides of cattle to make leather and shoes. Some farmers grow wheat and other grains. Mongolia also has deposits of copper and gold.

Mongolia's History and People

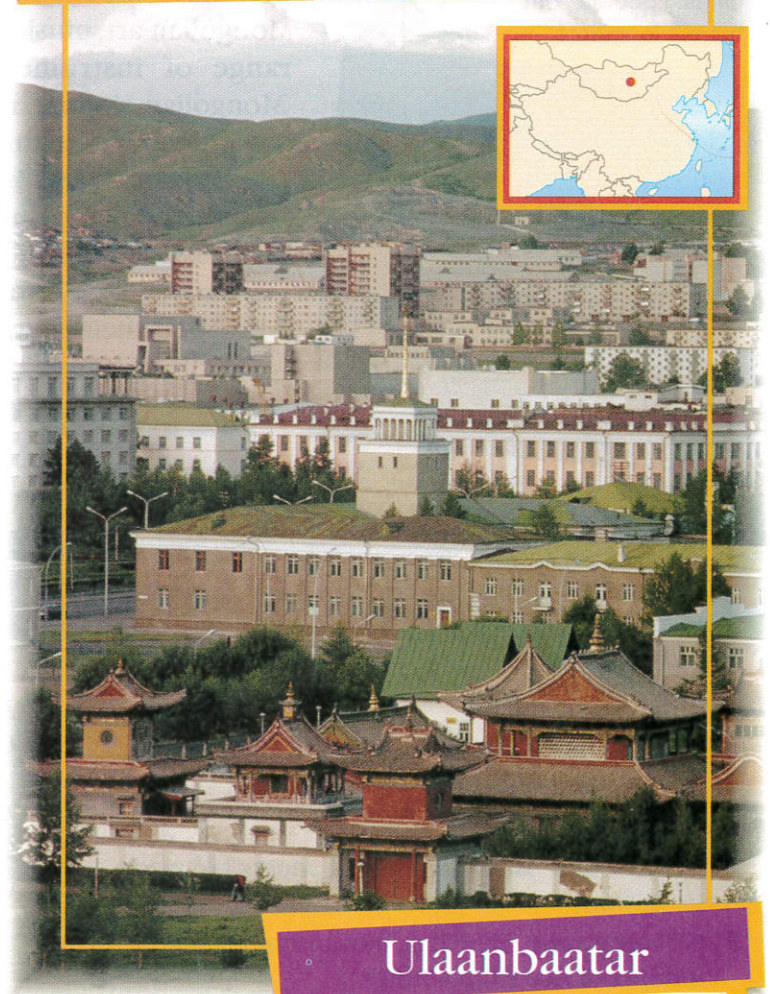
Mongolia's people are famous for their skills in raising and riding horses. In the past, they also were known as fierce fighters. In the 1200s, many groups of Mongols joined together under one leader, Genghis Khan (JEHNG•guhs KAHN). He led Mongol armies on a series of conquests. The Mongols eventually carved out the largest land empire in history. An **empire** is a collection of different territories under one ruler. The Mongol Empire stretched from China all the way to eastern Europe.

During the 1300s, the Mongol Empire weakened and fell apart. China ruled the area that is now Mongolia from the 1700s to the early 1900s. In 1924 Mongolia gained independence and created a strict Communist government. The country finally became a democracy in 1990. Since then, the Mongolian economy has moved slowly from government control to a free market system.

China

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On Location



Ulaanbaatar

Ulaanbaatar began as a Buddhist community in the early 1600s. Today it is a modern cultural and industrial center.

Place Why is Mongolia known as the Land of the Blue Sky?

Teen Scene

The Race Is On!

Magnai races his older brother across the Mongolian steppes. Magnai learned to ride horses when he was three years old. "You should visit my country. It's a Mongol tradition to welcome all visitors with hot tea, cheese, fresh cream, and candies. Even in the cities, people offer their homes to visitors."



About 90 percent of Mongolia's 2.4 million people are Mongols. They speak the Mongol language. More than 60 percent of the people live in urban areas. The largest city is the capital, **Ulaanbaatar** (OO•LAHN•BAH•TAWR). Mongolians in the countryside live on farms. A few still follow the nomadic life of their ancestors. These herder-nomads live in **yurts**, large circle-shaped structures made of animal skins that can be packed up and moved from place to place.

Mongolians still enjoy the sports and foods of their nomadic ancestors. The favorite meal is boiled sheep's meat with rice, washed down with tea. The biggest event of the year is the Naadam Festival, held all over the country in mid-summer. It consists of a number of sporting events, including wrestling, archery, and horse racing.

Since before the days of the Mongol Empire, most people in Mongolia have been Buddhists. Buddhism has long influenced Mongolian art, music, and literature. Traditional music has a wide range of instruments and singing styles. In one style of Mongolian singing, male performers produce harmonic sounds from deep in the throat, releasing several notes at once.

For centuries, Buddhist temples and other holy places dotted the country. Under communism, religious worship was discouraged. Many of these historic buildings were either destroyed or left to decay. Today, people are once again able to practice their religion. They have restored or rebuilt many of their holy buildings.

 **Reading Check** What religion do most Mongolians practice?

Section

4

Assessment

Defining Terms

1. **Define** high-technology industry, steppe, nomad, empire, yurt.

Recalling Facts

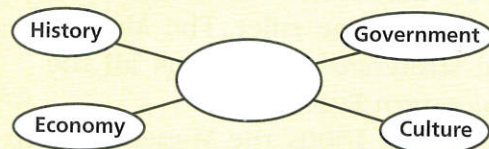
2. **Economics** What kinds of products are made in Taiwan?
3. **Government** Why has Taiwan not claimed independence from China?
4. **Place** What kinds of landscapes cover much of Mongolia?

Critical Thinking

5. **Understanding Cause and Effect** Why did many people flee to Taiwan from China in 1949?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** Why do you think Communist leaders discouraged religious worship?

Graphic Organizer

7. **Organizing Information** Draw a diagram like this one. Then write either *Taiwan* or *Mongolia* in the center oval. Write at least one fact about the country under the headings in each of the outer ovals.



Applying Geography Skills

8. **Analyzing Maps** Look at the physical map on page 671. What mountains rise in western Mongolia? What desert is found in southern and southeastern Mongolia?