

# MONGOLIA



KNOWN AS OUTER MONGOLIA BEFORE 1911, MONGOLIA IS STRUGGLING TO RE-ESTABLISH ITS IDENTITY. NOW INDEPENDENT FROM RUSSIA AND CHINA, THE COUNTRY STILL FACES FEARSOME ODDS.

## population

- Population: 2.83 million
- Density: 1.8 per sq km
- 94.9% Khalkh Mongolian
- 5% Turkic
- 0.1% Other [Chinese, Russian]

There is also a large Mongolian minority in northern China, where Mongolian-Altaic peoples outnumber ethnic Mongolians in Mongolia.

Population growth towards the end of the 20th century was rapid. Today two-thirds of the population is aged under 30.

Mongolia is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries. Much of it is rural, but very little is used for arable farming.

## religions

- Buddhism/Shamanism 53.7%
- Non religious/other 41.6%
- Muslim 4%
- Christian 0.7%

Buddhism was vigorously suppressed by the Communists, but there has been a resurgence and monasteries have multiplied from one to over 100 since 1990.

Marxist ideology has been renounced and the constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

## language

The official Mongolian language is Khalkh Mongolian. Russian, English, Chinese, Japanese, German and other languages are also taught in schools.

## geography

Mongolia is about the size of Western Europe. It is completely landlocked, with Russia in the north and China in the south.

There are mountains in the north and west, the Gobi desert in the south and steppes [grassy plains with rolling hills] in the central part of the country.

Inner Mongolia is a province of China located between the Gobi Desert and the Great Wall.

## climate

The climate is extremely harsh. Temperatures range from -40°C [-40°F] to 40°C [104°F]. Winters are very long, lasting from October to April.

## history

Once a proud and mighty nation, the Mongolian empire of the 13th century stretched from China to Central Europe under Chinggis Khaan [Genghis Khan, ruler from 1206-1227]—a kingdom larger even than those of Alexander the Great and the Roman caesars. With some difficulty, these nomadic Mongol tribes were suppressed and came under the control of the Manchu dynasty in China in the 17th and 18th centuries. Japan and Russia also encroached on the territory.

During the Chinese Revolution of 1911 Outer Mongolia [excluding the Tuva region claimed by Russia, now the autonomous Tuva Republic within

Russia] declared itself independent of China. Inner Mongolia was made an integral part of China.

A revolution supported by the Soviet army in 1921 installed a repressive Communist government and Mongolia became the first Communist country in Asia.

Communism was renounced in 1990 and a multi-party democracy instituted in the 1992 constitution. In the subsequent elections in 1996, the young Democratic Party won a two-thirds majority in the Parliament.

In 2000 the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, the former Communist party, gained control again with a large majority and later also won a big victory in local elections. Nambaryn Enkhbayar, parliamentary speaker and the candidate of the ruling party, won the presidential elections in May 2005.

Mongolia was traditionally home to nomadic herding peoples. Now a third of the population live in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. The nomadic lifestyle is gradually becoming less common and only half the population continues to herd livestock in rural areas. There is enormous potential mineral and oil wealth.

The collapse of the USSR provided Mongolia with the opportunity to change peacefully from a satellite of the USSR to a democracy with a free-market economy. The huge size of the country and the associated costs of developing and maintaining roads, schools,



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hospitals and local governments pose a significant financial and logistical challenge to the sparse population.

Climactic changes over the last decade have affected Mongolia drastically. Heavy snowfall and low temperatures in winter are followed by dry summers, leaving the 26 million domestic animals weak and vulnerable. Over eight million animals perished during the “dzud” [harsh winter, literally “white death”] which struck Mongolia in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. A significant percentage of the rural population were left impoverished and many herders have since migrated to Ulaanbaatar.

## christianity

Christianity entered Mongolia with the eastern expansion of Nestorian Christianity as early as the 7th century.

However, most of the Mongol tribes continued to follow their native shamanism [a form of animism, with a variety of beliefs and practices, in which a shaman is sometimes involved].

During the time of Kublai Khan [ruler, 1260-1271], Lamaistic Buddhism was introduced from Tibet and became the principal religion, picking up elements of shamanism.

In the 20 years following the Soviet Union takeover in 1921, Communist persecution slashed the ranks of the Buddhist clergy from 150,000 to 200.

Before the 1990s there had been no permanent missionary work in the country, although CIM/OMF and other societies did have mission stations in Inner Mongolia and sought to extend their witness into the state of Mongolia.



In 1990 only four believers were known in Mongolia. Then the country began to open up. In 1993 there were as many as 1,500 believers and the

government passed measures requiring all churches to be registered. Today the Christian population is around 20,000. Many church members are

young people. The churches have sent out a very small number of missionaries to work in Mongolia and neighboring countries cross-culturally.

There is an urgent need for trained church leaders, pastors and teachers. The church needs a solid biblical foundation.

With Mongolia's rising nationalism has come a resurgence of Lamaistic Buddhism. This was vigorously suppressed by the Communists, but since 1990 monasteries have multiplied from a few to more than 200. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution, some segments of the population want a special status for Buddhism.

OMF is working in Mongolia with several other Christian agencies under an umbrella organization called JCS [Joint Christian Services], in development work and theological training.

## OMF's strategic priorities

- To encourage the planting, growth and development of churches
- To disciple Christian leaders
- To meet the needs of the people of Mongolia with skills in education, health and economic and community development

## opportunities

- Animal husbandry management
- Environmental projects
- English teaching
- Teaching in Bible college
- Medical work

## how to pray

- Pray that the government will continue to uphold justice and religious freedom and the social welfare of the people.
- Economic problems have led to suffering, exploitation and social upheaval, with crime and alcoholism. Pray for effective Christian work.
- Further economic problems have faced many people after the harsh winters of recent years when huge numbers of livestock died.
- Younger Mongolians hanker after material riches which is a big challenge for the church.
- Pray for the Mongolian church:
  - Maturing leaders who will be deeply rooted in the word of God and oriented on the servant leadership model of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Wisdom and courage in living the Christian life on an everyday basis.
  - Unity and genuine love for each other.
  - An unquenched desire to reach the unreached, especially in the suburbs of the three major cities, in the countryside and beyond the border to the north and south.
- The opening of Mongolia for Christian ministries is an answer to prayer; pray that this may continue. Pray for their integration into the culture, adaptation to harsh living conditions and spiritual effectiveness. Pray for more workers.
- For the translation and production of Christian literature, commentaries, devotional and teaching books, and the revision of the Bible. Pray that individuals will become more willing to cooperate with others so that efforts can be optimized and materials more widely available.
- Pray for the spiritual effectiveness of Western and Korean Christians; for the ability to fit into the Mongolian culture and adapt to harsh living conditions.
- Pray for UBTC [Union Bible Training Centre], where many of the future leaders of the Mongolian church are being trained, and for Mongolian missionaries sent out to other countries.