



MONGOL SURVEY

A Publication of The Mongolia Society

Number 46, Fall-Winter, 2023



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Some of the participants of the Annual Meeting at the Univ. of Pittsburgh, October 2023: (From the left) Dr. Vera Kuklina, Michael Allen Lake, Prof. Christopher Atwood, Ambassador Batbayar Ulziidelger, Tserenchunt Legden, Susie Drost, Dr. Uranchimeg Tsultem, Andrew Duff, Dr. Dotno D. Pount, Ankhbayar Ganbold, Ambassador (retired) and incoming president of the Mongolia Society Michael S. Klecheski. Story on Page 3.

The Mongolia Society Welcomes Its New President: Michael S. Klecheski

The Mongolia Society is delighted to welcome its next president Ambassador (retired) Michael S. Klecheski.

Michael Klecheski retired after serving for over three-and-a-half years as U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia. That was the final assignment of his over 35 years as a Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. Department of State, during which he served abroad in Russia, Kazakhstan, the Philippines and Iraq, inter alia, and served in Washington D.C. on the Department's 24-hour Operations Center and the NATO Desk. He also served as Director (and for a time, Acting Senior Director) for Russia at the National Security Council. He received numerous awards in the course of his career, including the Presidential Rank Award.

Michael received a M.A. and M.Phil in Political Science from Columbia University and a B.S. in Foreign Service from Georgetown University. He also received an Honorary Degree from Mongolia State University. In 2022, Mongolian President Khurelsukh bestowed on him the Polar Star, the highest award Mongolia can grant to a foreign citizen.

Mongol Survey

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Publisher:

The Mongolia Society, Inc.

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The *Mongol Survey* is a vehicle for the exchange of ideas, news, and information about Mongolia and the Mongol peoples. It is distributed free to all members of the Society.

Much of the material needed to make the *Mongol Survey* a success comes from our members and we encourage all to send information about themselves and their interests as well as any material they think others might be interested to know.

The publications of The Mongolia Society are governed by an Editorial Committee appointed by the Board of Directors.

If you wish to contribute to or advertise in this publication, please request submission guidelines at email:

monsoc@indiana.edu

ISSN: 1081-5082

Michael is married to Eloisa de Leon Klecheski, and they have three adult children, all of whom have visited Mongolia repeatedly and are enthused by that country.

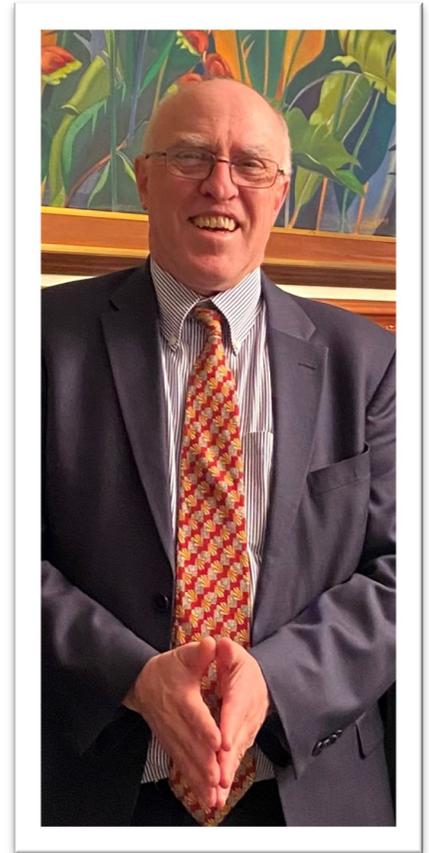
Amb. Klecheski shared his thoughts and goals for the position—I feel honored and excited to become The Mongolia Society's new president, and will aspire to continue the superb work of my predecessor in that position, Ambassador (ret.) Pamela Slutz, and the previous presidents of this venerable institution. I am well aware of, and somewhat daunted by, the Society's over sixty years of playing a vital role in promoting the study of Mongolia and bringing together the Mongolian studies community. Working with, and getting guidance from the Society's distinguished Board, I hope to build on that record.

Although I had read about Mongolia previously, it was when I learned of my proposed appointment as U.S. ambassador to that country that I began to focus on it more intensely. (One of the joys of Foreign Service life is learning all one can about one's next overseas assignment and then reveling in the countless new aspects one encounters while serving there.) In preparing, and then in serving in Mongolia, I saw how much we know and how much we have yet to learn and to understand more deeply. Mongolia - the uniqueness of its history, language, culture, and no less significant from the perspective of an ambassador to the country, its contemporary political, social and economic development - fascinated me.

I also came to see to what extent Mongolia has yet to achieve the profile it deserves, including among much of the Western public. While the Society is focused on academic work, one of my aspirations will be to also make its members' research more accessible to the broader public so that this fascinating country becomes more widely known. Expanding the Society's social media presence could be one way of accomplishing this. Another would be to broaden The Society's ties with academic and related institutions. Over the decades of its existence, the Society has forged valuable ties with numerous such organizations but there is room to broaden these ties.

Among the organizations with which the Society has excellent ties is the Mongolian embassy in Washington, DC, and through it with the Mongolian government. Continuing the strong relationship with Ambassador Batbayar and his team will be another of my foci. Similarly, Indiana University has been a gracious host to the Society office and an invaluable partner in many other ways; continuing that relationship is of prime importance. Fundraising has long been a challenge for The Society, as it is for many organizations, and will be another of my priorities.

When I learned that I would become ambassador to Mongolia, many people told me the country would become a source of fascination. They were right, and I am thrilled to become part of The Mongolia Society, which advances the study of that fascinating country.



Announcements

Summer 2024 Mongolian-U.S. National Civic Engagement Program

The US-Asia Institute has announced the **Summer 2024 Mongolian-U.S. National Civic Engagement Program** (MUNCEP) in collaboration with the Embassy of Mongolia in Washington, DC. This is a nine-week program that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for individuals of Mongolian descent aged 18-25 years old who are U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or F-1 visa holders to come to Washington D.C. to gain a firsthand look at the American government and political system and engage civically and reflect on the role they, as future leaders, might play in strengthening U.S.-Mongolia relations.

The program is open to candidates who are:

- Currently enrolled as a full-time undergraduate or graduate student in good academic standing OR recently completed degree;
- A U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or F-1 visa holder;
- Of Mongolian descent.

Please note that the application deadline is **January 31, 2024**. To learn more, please see the [program information page](#) or contact Communications & Special Projects Manager Keely Thompson at

The Mongolia Society Annual Meeting and Panels, 2023

Dr. Peter Marsh



His Excellency Batbayar Ulziidelger, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the USA giving his opening remarks.

The Mongolia Society held its 2023 Annual Meeting on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh, Saturday, October 21, 2023. The meeting was organized in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS), and was co-sponsored by the Mongol American Cultural Association and the Center for Governance and Markets at the University of Pittsburgh.

Nearly 80 people attended the event, which included opening remarks by His Excellency Batbayar Ulziidelger, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the USA.

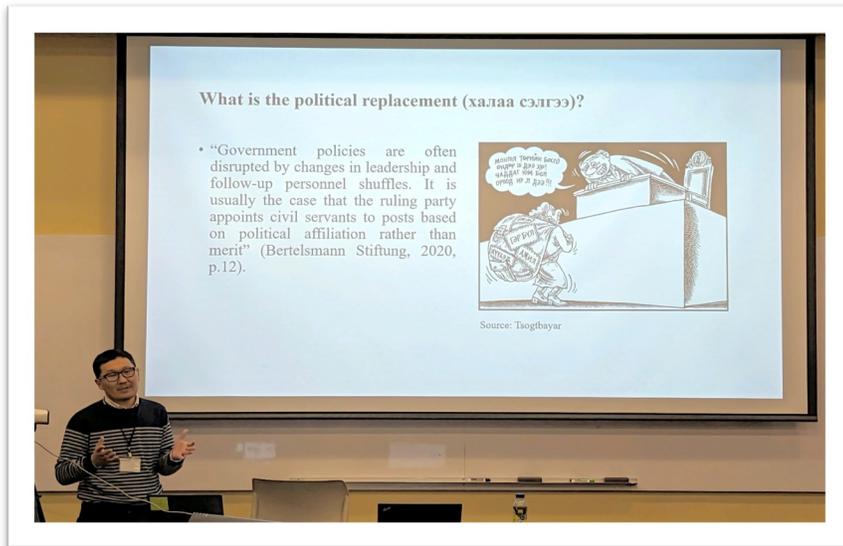
The Society's Chairman of the Board, Professor Christopher Atwood (University of Pennsylvania) led the Annual Business Meeting, which highlighted the organization's achievements over the year and included the presentation of the Society's financial statement.

The annual panel presentation included papers delivered by scholars highlighting their research in a number of areas related to Mongolian Studies. Panel titles included "Ritual and Language in Mongolia," "Modern Mongolia: Causes and Effects," and "Individual Papers in Mongolian Studies," which included topics in art, history, music, and the effects of climate change on nomadic peoples of northern Mongolia. Presenters included Mongolians and non-Mongolians, and a number of the former participated by Zoom from their homes in Ulaanbaatar.

The Mongolia Society Annual Meeting and Panels, 2023 (continued)

The presentations ended with a discussion about the documentary film *Golden Skies*, about the Kazakh eagle hunters of western Mongolia, by the film's executive producer, Xiaoyu Yang.

The Mongolia Society sends special thanks to CESS for its collaboration in organizing this second consecutive, joint annual meeting and conference.



Above: Bat-Orgil Altankhuyag (University of Bonn) presented "Khalaa Selgee: Politicization of Administration in Mongolia."



Above: Ambassador Batbayar Ulziidelger (left) honoring Dr. Dotno Dashdorj Pount (2023 PhD, University of Pennsylvania), whose paper won first prize in the 2022-2023 Best of the Next Generation of American Mongolists Competition.



Above: Tyler Whisnand (Independent scholar, US) shares his story about his great-grandfather's early 20th-century trip to Mongolia (see his article on Page 6);



Right: Dr. Krisztina Teleki (Eotvos Lorand University, Hungary) shares her research on ancient Mongolian ritual texts.

Ms. Tserenchunt Legden Awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor

Ms. Tserenchunt Legden, senior lecturer of Mongolian language in the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University (IU) and the Treasurer of The Mongolia Society, received the Order of the Red Banner of Labor from the Mongolian Government during the Society's annual meeting in Pittsburg. The *Mongol Survey* sat down with Ms. Legden to talk about this award and her career.

Mongol Survey: Congratulations on receiving this award. Could you tell us what this honor means to you and your career?

I was honored and humbled to receive the Order of the Red Banner of Labor at the Mongolia Society's Annual meeting last October from Batbayar Ulziidelger, the Mongolian Ambassador to the USA. I believe this award was given to me for my devotion to teaching my native language and culture to foreigners and more broadly to Indiana University in recognition of its world-renowned [Mongolian Studies program](#).

MS: Could you tell us a few of the highlights of your career as an educator and scholar?

My enthusiasm for sharing Mongolian language and culture with foreigners has shaped my entire career and, therefore, any opportunity to do so has been the highlight of my career. I was born and raised in a nomadic family in the Mongolian steppe tending to livestock during my school vacations. After I received my BA degree in Irkutsk, I taught at the current Academy of Management in Mongolia for over a decade. Then Mongolia started its transition to democratic political and liberal economic systems, which opened an opportunity for me to start teaching Mongolian to foreigners in 1993. I co-founded Bridge International College in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the first private college in Mongolia to teach Mongolian language and culture programs to foreigners, and worked as its director until I arrived at IU. While there, I developed proficiency-oriented programs of Mongolian language for foreigners in collaboration with Sharon Luethy, an American English language specialist. Sharon and I co-authored a series of three *Сайн байна уу?* Mongolian language textbooks for non-native speakers. In 2004, I joined IU's Department of Central Eurasian Studies as a visiting lecturer of Mongolian language. Now I am a senior lecturer. I first taught intensive summer Mongolian in 2007 and have been teaching it annually since then. In addition to teaching three or four courses in person and online each semester, I, with Dr. Uvsh Purev, have been developing new Mongolian language textbooks with Indiana University's Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR). We finished the Elementary Mongolian Textbook last summer and are now working on the Intermediate Mongolian textbook.

MS: Can you please tell me more about the new textbook?

Our Elementary Mongolian textbook was funded by CeLCAR and the Title VI Language Resource Center. The textbook was designed using the backward design method of curriculum development. Lessons are designed to meet the needs of adult language learners. It follows the principles of the Communicative Approach of developing speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, supplemented with online audio-video materials. We are grateful to the colleagues of the CeLCAR and the Department of Central Eurasian Studies for providing methodical, and linguistic expertise, as well as to the Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies at Indiana University for securing financial and logistical support. Our most sincere appreciation goes to the late Professor György Kara. Prof. Kara, a distinguished linguist and eminent professor of Mongolian studies. His comments on the Mongolian language and corrections to the early versions of the manuscript were invaluable. May his memory live on in all of us who were lucky enough to know him, learn from him, and work alongside him. We would like to thank the many Mongolian language students, past and present, who provided invaluable feedback during the piloting process. The Elementary Mongolian textbook is currently submitted to Georgetown University Press for review.



Amb. Batbayar Ulziidelger and Ms. Ts. Legden in Pittsburgh, October 2023.

The Third Morin Khuur Festival in the USA

Dr. Peter Marsh

The Morin Khuur Center in North America (MKCNA, based in Shoreline, Washington) held the “Third Morin Khuur Festival in the USA,” October 27-29, 2023, at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia, USA. The organization describes these festivals on its website (www.mkcna.org) as opportunities “to promote the contemporary development of the *morin khuur*, or horsehead fiddle, through a meeting of amateurs and professionals interested in this Mongolian musical instrument.”

This year’s festival included a variety of activities, such as a performance contest for amateur *morin khuur* performers, which this year included children (ranging in age from 8 to 18) coming from Mongolian diaspora communities from across the United States; scholarly presentations that featured Mongolian and non-Mongolian scholars, based in Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and the West, presenting reports about their research on this instrument, its music, history and cultural importance; master classes led by senior professional performers of the *morin khuur* working and living in Mongolia, Europe, and the United States; and panel discussions about the current state of the instrument, new developments in its construction, particularly the rise in popularity of the skin-faced fiddles, and possible future directions of tradition’s development.

A highlight of the festival was the gathering of all festival participants on the National Mall, in front of the nation’s capital, for an early morning performance of famous Mongolian compositions by the composer Natsagiin Jantsannorow. Videos of the event are available on the internet, including the group’s performance of “Uulen Bor,” a popular song in Mongolia that some consider to be “a Mongolian second national anthem.” See the performance of this song here: “[Uulen Bor](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UulenBor)” (YouTube.com).

Urtnasan Gantulga, a professional *morin khuur* teacher and performer, based in the state of Washington, was one of the organizers of this year’s festival. He stated his hope that these events will further introduce the instrument and Mongolian culture to American audiences and encourage Mongolians living in this nation to protect their cultural heritage.

The festival ended with a gala concert featuring all of the participants in concert and ending with the presentation of awards to the competition winners and closing remarks by His Excellency Batbayar Ulziidelger, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to the USA. The Ambassador hosted a post-concert reception for all of the participants in the Mongolian Embassy to the United States, in Washington, DC.



Left: Jigjiddorj Nanzaddorj, of the Mongolian State Morin Khuur Ensemble, leads Festival participants in performance on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Bottom: Festival organizer Urtnasan Gantulga (in the grey deel) with winners of the amateur fiddle competition.



Into Outer Mongolia, and Beyond

Tyler Whisnand

A convoy of Buicks lines up on a wide, expansive flat, heading into the unknown. Men in fur coats, wearing goggles and driving gloves, pose proudly on a barren tundra. Officials assemble in distant towns, awaiting an arrival. These vivid moments have forever drawn me to the photographs my great-grandfather took during his time living and working in early 20th century China and Mongolia.

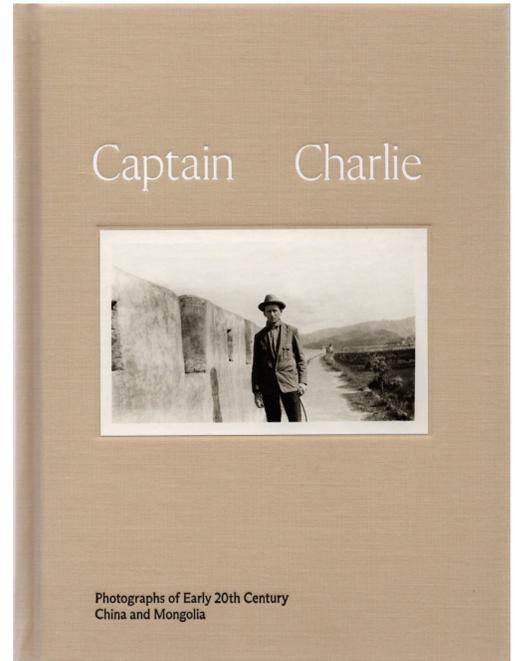
As a kid, I always asked to see these strange and wonderful photographs when visiting my grandmother. She kept them in envelopes and boxes tucked away, waiting to be seen. I knew little of their significance, and only in time, did I commit myself to their safe-keeping. All I knew was that these photographs were remarkable, and that one day I would do something meaningful with them.

My great-grandfather, Charles Augustus Leonard was from Hingham, Massachusetts. I knew him as Captain Charlie, not because of any service rank, but because he was nicknamed for his bossy demeanor. Captain Charlie studied mechanical engineering, and took a job after college with a subsidiary of Stone & Webster in China.

From roughly 1915 to 1925, Captain Charlie worked out of Tientsin (Tianjin), China. His office was located in the French Concession, and imported heavy machinery from the United States for excavation and engineering projects. It was there he met, and married my great-grandmother, made several trips through the interior of China, and took part in a great expedition from Peking (Beijing) to Urga (Ulaanbaatar).

He took photographs wherever he went. During the 2020 pandemic, I took the time to scan all of his images. This gave me the chance to really look at each picture and wonder about Captain Charlie's life and work. I began doing research by reaching out to professors at universities in the Bay Area. Each of them was kind enough to look at the images, and pose some theories. Through their advice, I was introduced to the Mongolia Society.

Captain Charlie. Photographs of Early 20th Century China and Mongolia is a photography book in 12 chapters. The images embark on a number of journeys both epic and personal.



Left: "In Mongolia in 1915"; Right: "Officials from Mongolia and China during the time of the Treaty of Kyakhta"

One major chapter covers a trip to Mongolia and Siberia at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Kyakhta. I am still wondering if it's possible to identify the official Captain Charlie photographed. Only basic details exist in the notes he wrote on the back of the photograph prints. (If you recognize anyone, please let me know.) What you will see, quite dramatically, is a line of Buick motorcars, most likely Buick C25's or Sixes. At the time, this was the most advanced mode of travel between Peking and Urga, and I believe the convoy was escorting diplomats to sign treaties and agreements.



Clockwise from top left: "Line of Buick motorcars"; "Cars during a trip"; "Officials with the flags of Mongolia and the Republic of China"; "Two drivers"; Middle left: "A Mongolian friend."

I have yet to identify the buildings in the photographs, and if they are still standing. What strikes me every time is the environment and the clothing that frame these moments. The drivers look so confident, even though they must have faced incredible challenges. For a time, I thought this expedition was some kind of test for the cars themselves. Only later, did I discover the treaty of Kyakhta and the time period —so much more significant than any publicity stunt.

Other chapters in the book include a river trip through the interior of China, an expansive railroad project, and a wonderfully hand-painted album.

While the book is a look at history, it is also a celebration of photography. For this reason, I wanted to make sure more people saw what Captain Charlie saw. I feel that's the great purpose of taking photographs: to share your experiences with the world.

I am pleased to offer "Captain Charlie" to the Mongolia Society. If you would like a copy, please email me at twhisnand@mac.com for details.



Clockwise from the top left: "Church along the expedition"; "A building"; "The chief mechanic"; "Cigarette break."

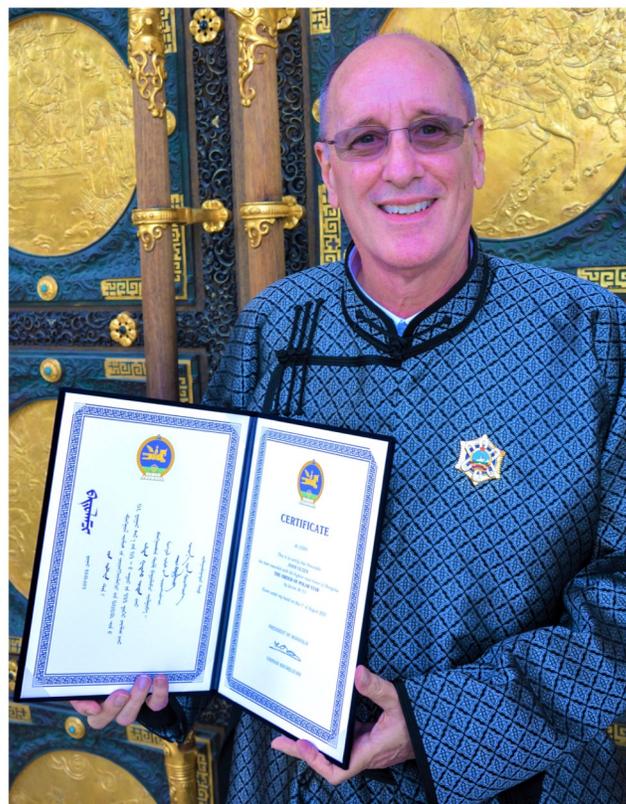
John Olsen's Research Leads to Mongolia's Highest Honor

Dr. John W. Olsen, University of Arizona Regents' Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Mongolia Society lifetime member, has received the Order of the Polar Star (Mongolian: Алтан гадас одон or *Altan Gadas Odon*), the highest civilian award Mongolia can present to a foreign citizen. Created in 1936, the Order was bestowed upon Olsen in acknowledgment of his contributions to Mongolian science and society extending back over three decades.

Olsen first visited Mongolia in 1991 and, since 1995, has co-directed the Joint Mongolian-Russian-American Archaeological Expeditions that have conducted excavations at many sites, especially Tsagaan Agui Cave in the Gobi Desert where several hundred thousand years of human cultural evolution are recorded in the cavern's layers.

On accepting the award at a ceremony in Ulaanbaatar on August 25th, Olsen said: "I am delighted and humbled to have received this recognition of my efforts to work collaboratively with Mongolian colleagues to advance archaeology in the country."

Former Mongolian Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Yondongiin Otgonbayar, noted the award was equivalent to the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom and is not often given to non-Mongolians. Previous American recipients of Mongolia's Order of the Polar Star include President Barack Obama, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Arizona Senator John McCain.



*Dr. John Olsen with the Order of the Polar Star award.
Photo credit: Johannes Setzer.*

Mongolia in the News

News stories about Mongolia and Mongolians regularly appear in international news sources. Below are links to some of the most interesting recent stories you may have missed that report on important issues, ideas, and developments related to Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and the Mongolian global diaspora. Select the links to take you to each full story.

Country's culture minister calls for research into artefacts held by British institutions and also announces a Royal Academy show (By Gareth Harris, *The Art Newspaper*, 12.29.2023)

"Nomin Chinbat, Mongolia's culture minister, recently visited the UK Minister of Culture for Mongolia. The Mongolian government says it has drawn up a list of hundreds of objects held by universities and museums in 34 countries, including the UK and Russia, that belong to the central Asian country and could be repatriated. A statement issued by the Mongolian government said that hundreds of artefacts, many dating from the early years of Mongolia's nomadic empire over two millennia ago, are now known to 'sit beyond the nation's borders.' It adds: 'Mongolia's culture ministry is leading the effort to identify and explore the history of Mongolian artefacts, compile details of those which currently lie outside of Mongolia, and make arrangements for their repatriation.'" **Read the full article:** [The Art Newspaper \(UK, USA\)](#)

Mongolia in the News (continued)

The Mongol Hordes: They're Just Like Us (By Manvir Singh, The New Yorker, 12.25.2023)

This long-read article from The New Yorker magazine examples the changing image of the Mongols in the global imagination. Manvir Singh begins his article by documenting the ways in which “The image of Mongols as brutes outlasted their conquests.” But he focuses on the work of American and European historians who, over the past decade or so, have sought “to overhaul narratives about the barbarity of the nomad, and especially Mongols,” creating what he calls “a kind of steppe restoration”: “The steppe restoration typifies what historians call the global turn, a larger project of shifting histories away from nation-states and colonialist defamations and toward the peoples and processes that have knotted us together. It’s a survey of shadows, a tracing of negative space. It focuses on peoples who, in [Anthony] Sattin’s words, ‘have long been confined to the anecdotes and afterthoughts of our writers and histories.’ These are some of the most maligned groups in historical chronicles: the uncivilized; the barbarians at the gate; the tribes who seem to appear from some demonic portal, destroy everything in sight, and then recede back into darkness. The steppe restoration repositions them. It treats them as subjects in their own right—as peoples who have their own histories, who formed societies no less complex than the sedentary states they confronted, and who helped craft the world we inhabit.” **Read the full article:** [The New Yorker \(USA\)](#)

‘The Mongol Khan,’ Mongolia’s ‘soft power’ drive arrives in London (By Lana Lam, CNN.com, 11.24.2023)

“The Coliseum in London’s West End is used to staging epic theatrical productions. But even for the capital’s largest theater, this was unique. With a cast of more than 70 actors, dancers and musicians, ‘The Mongol Khan’ is a riot of color and sound. But the political backdrop to the production is even more complicated than the sets.’ This is the first Mongolian production to tour internationally, an ‘example of soft power’ according to one expert, that saw it banned in China earlier this year.” **Read the full article:** [CNN \(USA\)](#)

Mongolians Are Circus Stars All Over the World, Except at Home (By David Pierson, New York Times, 12.25.2023)

The author visited the Mongolian Circus School in Ulaanbaatar. He writes: “The dexterity and determination of youngsters like these help explain why Mongolia churns out some of the most coveted circus performers in the world for marquee names like Cirque du Soleil and Ringling Brothers. This, despite a lack of government support and a dearth of training facilities. The 83-year-old Mongolian Circus School building is one of the only places where professionals and students can still prepare. ‘We are wanted all over the world, but we can’t even properly train in our own country,’ said Gerelbaatar Yunden, a former acrobat and circus director who estimates there are currently about 1,300 Mongolian performers working in North America and Europe.”

Read the full article: [New York Times](#) (USA)

We end with a two-part series examining the hardship that nomadic herders face in a fast-changing Mongolia:

- ◆ **Part I: This Country Is Responsible For Less Than 1% Of Global Emissions. Climate Change Is Tearing It Apart Anyway** (By Alexander C. Kaufman, Huffpost.com, 12.22.2023).

Read the full article: [Huffpost](#) (USA)

- ◆ **Part II: For Mongolia’s Displaced Nomads, City Life Brings Broken Hearts And Burning Lungs** (By Alexander C. Kaufman, Huffpost.com, 12.23.2023).

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 Estate of Sam Savitt
 Mr. Mark and Dr. Nancy Tokola●

THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FEES

Regular (US)

___ \$50 for one year
 ___ \$90 for two years
 ___ \$125 for three years

Student (US)

___ \$35 for one year
 ___ \$60 for two years
 ___ \$80 for three years

Senior Citizen (age 67 or older, US)

___ \$40 for one year
 ___ \$70 for two years
 ___ \$95 for three years

Regular (Foreign)

___ \$65 for one year
 ___ \$120 for two years
 ___ \$170 for three years

Student (Foreign)

___ \$50 for one year
 ___ \$90 for two years
 ___ \$125 for three years

Senior Citizen (age 67 or older, Foreign)

___ \$55 for one year
 ___ \$110 for two years
 ___ \$140 for three years

Mongolian Ethnic (non-US citizen living inside the US)

___ \$35 for one year
 ___ \$60 for two years
 ___ \$80 for three years

Mongolian Ethnic (non-US citizen living outside the US)

___ \$50 for one year
 ___ \$90 for two years
 ___ \$125 for three years

Library Membership (US)

___ \$75 for one year
 ___ \$130 for two years
 ___ \$180 for three years

Library Membership (Foreign)

___ \$90 for one year
 ___ \$160 for two years
 ___ \$225 for three years

Sustaining Membership

___ \$500 per year

Life Membership

___ \$2500 or more

Corporate Membership

___ \$125 for one year
 ___ \$230 for two years
 ___ \$325 for three years

The Society wishes to thank those who paid their 2024 membership dues.

It is your support that makes the work of the Society possible!

*To renew your membership or become a member, please visit our
 Membership and Donations page on on Society's webpage:*

<https://www.mongoliasociety.org/membership>.

You may also send a check or money order to the Society's office:

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