

DANISH-MONGOLIAN SOCIETY

Jan Koed¹

Dear participants of the conference

May I start by introducing myself. My name is Jan Koed and I have the honour to be vice-chairman of the Danish-Mongolian Society in Copenhagen. I used to be a professional architect for many years, starting my own business in 1986. Now I am retired, age 63.

The chairman of our society, Rolf Gilberg, asked me to send his warm greetings to all the participants in this meeting. He sincerely regret that he is not able to come to Mongolia at this time because of another appointment earlier arranged in United States.

Talking about the history of the relations between our Mongolia and Denmark you can not avoid mentioning the young Danish pioneers that in the early 1920'es decided to establish an experimental farm in the far north-west of Mongolia nowadays known as Erdenebulgan Sum.

Head of the group was a doctor, Carl Krebs, who had fall in love with the beautiful landscape east of the Khövsgöl lake on an earlier trip from Siberia to Beijing.

Although the farm experiment didn't turn out to be very succesful and the farm only eksisted a few years, the reputation of the men succeeded to stay alive until today. Not least because of the doctor's achievements in curing the local people various diseases. Because of the political situation at that time he was forced out of Mongolia 1n 1936.

We are in the extraordinary position, that the doctor's two sons - one of them born in Mongolia in 1932 - are still very much aliveamong us and are both members of the Danish-Mongolian Society.

Another of the agricultural pioneers was Henning Haslund-Christensen, whoes son, Søren, to day is Mongolias consul to Denmark with office in Copenhagen. He has been a member of our board since the foundation of the Danish-Mongolian Society.

Another step forward in the development of the Danish-Mongolian relations was the visit in 1986 by the then very young Danish Royal Highness Crownprince Frederik, who visited Mongolia in company with Søren Haslund-Christensen to make a documentary of the people and life in Erdenebulgan and Mongolia.

Our Crownprince became so fond of Mongolia that he later made antother visit. The last time he visited Mongolia was on an official visit in 2008 commemorating 40 years of diplomatic relations

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between Denmark and Mongolia. On this trip he got the opportunity to meet the staff of DAMOST, our partnership projects in Mongolia. We are proud to have the Crownprince as honorary member of our society.

I also want to mention the Danish explorer Jørgen Bitsch, who started as early as in the 1950'ths to bring tourist to the »Unknown Country« as was the title of his book from 1962 about his travels in Mongolia. Until his death in 2008 he went back to Mongolia year after year, to the country he loved so much.

I myself had the opportunity to participate in one of his tours to Mongolia in 1988. At that time I knew nothing at all about Mongolia, but I immediately lost my heart to the country and its people and since then I have been in Mongolia several times.

In 1990 the Danish public interest for Mongolia had reached a certain level, that it was time to establish a Danish Society for people interested in Mongolia, its people, culture and nature. The first general meeting was held June 17., 1990.

Members of the first board was prof. Rolf Gilberg from The Danish National Museum, who was appointed chairman, which he still is. He is now retired, but at that time he was responsible for the collections from Central Asia with over 3000 artefacts from Mongolia mainly collected by Henning Haslund-Christensen in 1930-thies.

The other founding members of the board were Søren Haslund-Christensen, Jørgen Bitsch, prof. Klaus Ferdinand, Bulgan Njama who many of you know very well, Leif F. Petersen and myself.

The purpose of the new society was expressed briefly as followed:

- 1) to promote and spread out knowledge about Mongolia and the Mongolian culture in Denmark, with emphasis on the Mongolian core areas in Mongolia, China and Russia.
- 2) to be a common ground for everybody interested in Mongolia.
- 3) to further and develop the relations between the populations in both countries.

Right from the beginning the society started publishing its journal called Ger with Rolf Gilberg as editor-in-chief. Since then 80 issues has been published with a frequency of 4 numbers a year. Each issue is now comprising 28 pages and is printed in full color.

Another core activity is our regularly meetings 4-6 times a year, where our 220 members has the opportunity to meet and listen to interesting lectures about all aspects of Mongolia. A special highlight is our »Spring-celebration« held after the general meeting, where the members are offered good food and drink in a cosy and friendly atmosphere.

In 1995 our Society made an important decision to become an NGO. The Danish development organization DANIDA had been very active in helping Mongolia's first steps in developing new democratic institutions after the peaceful revolution to a parliamentary democracy in 1990.

In the society we saw the possibility to expand and further develop the Danish assistance to social areas, because the new market economy had very serious consequences to the social status of a lot of ordinary families. The first task was to help many children in the streets to get a decent life.

This first effort was later expanded to a wider scope to help and strengthen poor families. This effort is still going on in various forms.

Another of our cooperation partners have contributed widely to promote education in the rural districts. Last but not least we have been active in distributing hay and fodder and new animals to families suffering from the harsh zud-winters.

The next turning point of our society is our 25th anniversary in 2015. Until then we will try our best to serve and support the good and friendly relations between Mongolia and Denmark.

Thank you!