

What Do Mongolian Children Read?

One of those wonders that come in childhood is a book. Heroes of books invite little readers into their magical worlds and help them to become good people. They present bright ideas and good character and teach them how to live. Thus it is impossible to imagine childhood without books.

Every Mongolian school has its own library. The most reliable and the closest friend and teacher of herdschildren is the book. Our children are never apart from books even when they ride horses or camels, and herd sheep and goats in the countryside.

Like people of other nations, Mongolians have preferred to bring up their children with oral and literary arts since ancient times. For thousands of years Mongols have been teaching their children the tender poetry of cradle lullabies from a very young age, and sharpening their minds with tales, puzzles and blessings.

The teaching of Genghis, the Great Khan and founder of the Mongolian State, to his four children and younger brothers, has been inherited as "Genghis' spirit" and became the "Alphabet" by which Mongolians educate their children even now.

The main types and forms of ancient Mongolian literature include tales, epics, blessings, praises, proverbs, puzzles and songs. Mongolia is very rich in tales and epics and heroic epics like "Geser" and "Jangar" are as famous as the western "Chanson de Roland", "Nibelungen Lied" and "El Cid".

Children's contemporary literature started to develop from the very beginning of the 20th century, when talented writers specializing only in children's writings appeared. Many writers such as D. Natsagdorj, Ts. Damdinsuren, D. Tsevegmid, Ch. Lodoidamba, Ch. Lkhamsuren, L. Tudev, M. Chimid, P. Khorloo, B. Baast, D. Sodnomdorj, J. Dashdondog and S. Nadmid created and are still creating various books, poems, narratives, novels, dramas and movies for children.

Since H. C. Andersen's fairy tales were interpreted at the beginning of the last century, books of globally well-known children's writers including the Grimm brothers, Charel Perro, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Selma Lagerlef, Seton Thompson, Astrid Lindgren, Matsutani Miyoko, Agnia Barto and Samuel Marshak have already taken their places among children's reading in Mongolia.

Today the process of shifting into the democratic system and market economy is continuing in Mongolia. State-



Mongolian children enjoying a reading programme with Mr. Dashdondog (right)



Natsag Bagabandi

owned publishing companies have been privatized. Business-oriented people are establishing new publishing and printing companies, but they are not interested in publishing books for children since the cost of those books is high and it is also necessary to publish them in good-quality colour and pictorial covers. As people cannot afford expensive books nowadays, this less profitable sector is not of interest to publishers, though recently a number of books were published on volunteer initiative.

The Mongolian Writers' Union has decided to publish a series of 50 books as a "Children's Library" and has delivered the first edition to the readers. Children's writer Jamba Dashdondog has initiated "Golden Tales" and published 108 volumes containing the best stories for children. Meanwhile, children's reading books travelled over 20,000 kms in the form of a mobile library.

The organization of the "State Competition on Best Creation" by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was a great step towards the enrichment of children's books.

It was decided to turn one branch of the State Library into a "Children and Youths' Library" and it is now in the process of organization. However, for Mongols it is necessary to establish a system comprising companies and publishing offices that publish high quality books professionally just for children, as well as distributors. Children and youths constitute half of the population, therefore, we support any initiative to cooperate with international children's publication offices. New types of publications including sound books, illustrated books and electronic books are being diversified and developed. For our sparsely populated country, it is necessary to find a way of distributing children's books through a network.

A book for children consists not only of writing and but also of pictures. Over 40 writers specialize in children's literature, though it is essential to train professional painters that specialize in illustrating children's books. It is to be appreciated that young Mongolian painters took part in the International Noma Concourse for Picture Book Illustrations which was recently held for illustrators of Asian, African and Latin American countries.

Our children are attracted to both western and eastern children's literature. We consider that it will be of great significance if our country takes part in the Asian/Pacific Co-publication Programme (ACP) that has been implemented successfully for 30 years by the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU). It is sure that books, co-published by this Programme, would contribute to creating friendship among Asian and Pacific children and bringing up an entire generation with the proud maxim: "We are from the Peace Continent".

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