When and How Mongolia was grouped into R.I. District 3450?

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

1 February 2015

January 2015 marked the 20th year of Rotary in the democratic nation Mongolia (Монгол Улс). However, for the first 5 years, the only Rotary Club in this country---The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar (Улаанбаатар Ротари клуб)---was non-districted. Until 1 July 2000, this land-locked country was grouped into Rotary International District 3450, and the Club became the 49th member in the District.

Twenty years ago in the fall of 1994, the Shatin Rotary Club (沙田扶輪社) in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港) initiated to sponsor and to organize the ever first Rotary Club in the capital city Ulaanbaatar of Mongolia. Few months later, the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar was admitted to Rotary International on 10 January 1995. However, the new Club was not yet grouped under any district as determined by Rotary International. Without the supervision of a district governor, in the same year, Franklin Sham (沈佑陽), Charter President of Shatin Rotary Club, Hong Kong, (R.I. District 3450) was appointed Presidential Extension Administrator (PEA) to help the fledgling Club, as well as development of more new clubs in the country. Franklin Sham held the office until 30 June 1998 before passing it to Past District Governor Dato' Dr. Mustapha Ma, of Kuala Lumpur DiRaja, Malaysia (R.I. District 3310). From 1999-2000, the Club was under the direct supervision of Rotary International Director Mario P. Grassi, of the Rotary Club of Lugano, Switzerland (R.I. District 1980).

The Lonely Land-locked Rotary Mongolia

For 5 years have gone, there was not much development in Rotary Mongolia. As in January 2000, there was still one lonely Rotary Club of multi-nationalities membership speaking English, sitting in the centre of the vast piece of land of six hundred thousand square miles.

Practically speaking, this lonely Club had 2 neighbouring Rotary districts but of thousands miles away: (1) the R.I. District 5010 in the northern Pacific Rim communities, and (2) the R.I. District 3450 at the southern coast of the People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國).

The District 5010 then was Rotary's largest in area, across the Bering Strait spanning 2 continents and 3 countries, which encompassed with clubs in the entire state of Alaska, U.S.A, Yukon Territory of Canada, and the Russian Federation east of the Ural Mountains.

For the District 3450, the total 48 clubs were located within the 2 special administrative regions Hong Kong and Macao of China---42 in Hong Kong and 6 in Macao, while the Rotary Club of Hong Kong was also operating a Beijing Fellowship Group in the nation's capital.

Here comes the story of change

During the early months of the Year 2000, Club Secretary Barrie Evans of Ulaanbaatar was discussing some project ideas with his good friend Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) in Hong Kong. Barrie Evans is a Briton who is a former Club President in England before he migrated to Mongolia in the 1990s. He is the Managing Director of Churchill's Co., Ltd., a premier ISO standards consulting and auditing firm in Mongolia. The Rotary positions held by Lau in 1999-2000 was the District 3450 RYLA chair, concurrently the Deputy District Rotary Information Coordinator. The Charter President of the Tolo Harbour Rotary Club (吐露港扶輪社) in Hong Kong, Lau was an insurance broker who was providing advisory service to the Mongolian insurers. On the other hand, Lau has sufficient knowledge about the Mongolian culture because he is for decades the honorary citizen of these 3 territories in the northeastern Inner Mongolia of China: (1) the City of Manchuria (滿洲里); (2) the Left Banner of the New Baraq Mongols (新巴爾虎左旗); (3) the Right Banner of the New Baraq Mongols (新巴爾虎右旗).

Suddenly on 24 March 2000, Barrie gave Lau a message in an upset tone:

"I have had a mail from representative of President Nominee Rick King. He is considering visiting Mongolia later in year – Herbert, do you have any information as to the plans? -- thinking re-districting of Mongolia – the PN rep says they are looking at putting us in Alaska – this would surely be crazy – the direction must be South East – I have suggested they should ask our Club – so you can see I am pretty fed up with RI the Kingdom.

We battle on, blooded, but not down."

The next day on 25 March, Barrie further wrote:

"I have recently sent an email letter to Evanston for RI President Carlo Ravizza, requesting a Disaster Appeal for Mongolia – it was nearly FOUR weeks before I finally received acknowledgement that the communication had been passed to him – surely this is not acceptable.

The RI request to us here always is for development, club extension – yet ever recently we have been unable to charter our new Rotaract Club because of RI administration difficulties – we have been in a new young democracy, and we watch RI work and treat our Club like the old Soviet system.

I would appreciate your wisdom on this matter."

Though Barrie did not ask Lau for any assistance, it was in Lau's mind that something must be done to alter the situation immediately, say, "to request the decision be changed in allowing the Club and the country be grouped under District 3450." Without hesitation, Lau passed on this urgent message to the senior leaders in Hong Kong, for discussion, consideration, and action. Participated in the discussion on-line circle were: District Governor Dipo Sani (*Kowloon Golden*

Mile) (辛迪寶–九龍金域社); Governor-Elect John Wan (*Kingspark Hongkong*) (溫頌安–港京社); past governors Peter Hall (*Hong Kong Island East*) (賀錦平–香港東區社), Raymond Wong (*Kowloon East*) (黃志偉–九龍東區社), Arthur Au (*Peninsula*) (區錦源–半島社), Moses Cheng (*Hong Kong Northeast*) (鄭慕智–香港東北社), Liu Lit-Mo (*Hong Kong Island West*) (廖烈武–香港西區社), and Y. K. Cheng (*Hong Kong Island East*) (鄭恩基–香港東區社).

After several rounds of opinion exchange, the first positive response came from Hong Kong to Ulaanbaatar. John Wan wrote to Barrie Evans on 27 March in the afternoon:

"Things have developed fast. If you are serious about being part of District 3450, you must, as soon as possible, prepare a petition in writing, stating in unequivocal terms your desire (and the desire of the Rotarians in Mongolia) to be included within District 3450, and the reasons. It need not be a long letter, but make those points you have made before un-emotively, and provide statistics and facts such as travels and contacts between Ulaanbaatar and Hong Kong, and so on.

I suggest the submission should be addressed to RI President-Elect through me (Governor-Elect) so that I can send it to Evanston with my submission and endorsement.

Remember, you must act fast, and don't circulate your submission beyond Herbert and myself, if you trust me."

The next day on 29 March, Raymond Wong also gave his encouragement to Barrie:

"Yesterday, incoming DG John Wan asked me … … to leave it to him. … … Please remember that your Club is a direct descendent of my Club in family tree and if there is anything we can help we will. Also note that the Board of Directors of RI had already decided to group your Club into a district before 30 June."

The Petition

Having the support from Hong Kong, Ulaanbaatar Rotary Club called for an extraordinary general meeting to make the decision and to provide points of petition. President R. Samdandobji was authorized to write the request to District 3450. By profession, "Samdan" Rabdan Samdandobji was the Secretary General of the Mongolian Red Cross Society.

The letter was duly signed and was sent to Hong Kong on 31 March 2000. However, Lau was away from the city to conduct a week of Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) Camp where Internet access was not available and he was not able to check the mails in his office. After John Wan had read the letter, he commented to Barrie:

"I have your fax. It is a good start. What I would have liked in your President's letter is 'a clear and unequivocal request to join District 3450 and no other Districts'. The letter I received said 'a strong desire to join'. That is not strong enough. Could you send me another fax to clarify this issue? I would send out my letter to RI early next week.

I am working with PDG Y. K. Cheng and Herbert Lau on this matter. No others are involved."

It was already 7 April. Time was running short. Lending helping hands, upon his return from the RYLA Camp, Lau immediately drafted another letter based on the decisions of the Ulaanbaatar Rotarians but to enrich with more convincing reasons. The draft was faxed to Ulaanbaatar in the mid-night of 10 April. On the leading sheet, Lau wrote:

"I have drafted herewith a request letter for your reference and considerations. You may re-write the letter based on your own points of view. The letter should be sent to John Wan directly by fax, with a copy to your advisor R.I. Director Mario Grassi."

The next morning on 11 April, the letter was duly re-written and signed by President Rabdan Samdandobji. Here below is the full text excerpted:

"Following a communication, which indicated that Rotary International is planning to group The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, into District 5010, our Club held an Extraordinary General Meeting on 29 March 2000 to discuss the matter.

The membership unanimously concluded that there will be serious problems in this proposal, for the following reasons:

(1) District 5010 is composed of Yukon Territory of Canada, Eastern Russia, and Alaska of the United States. For citizens of Mongolia, traveling to these territories is extremely difficult. Invitation letters are required for supporting the application of visa entering these countries.
(2) In the event of travel to Canada, visas can only be applied from the Canadian Embassy located in Beijing, The People's Republic of China.
(3) Traveling time to these northern territories are long, and the flights are not frequent---to Moscow, direct flying time is 8 hours; to Yukon Territory of Canada or Alaska of the U.S.A., there is no direct flight from Ulaanbaatar. The time spent as well as the costs are even more and more.
(4) The time zones of the said territories are different. That will create communication difficulties.
(5) For these reasons, it would be clear that attendance at district events, and communication between clubs of the district would be discouraged.

During the Extraordinary General Meeting, members present unanimously expressed the strongest request that The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, should be part of the R.I. District 3450 (Hong Kong/Macau), and no other districts.

The following supporting points were raised by the members:

(1) The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, was formed with the assistance from members of District 3450 in general, and The Rotary Club of Shatin in particular.
(2) During the past years, the Club has built up a number of project partnership with clubs in District 3450, including Shatin, Kowloon East, Tolo Harbour, Queensway, Kingspark Hongkong, etc.
(3) Rotaract clubs and Interact clubs are also actively linked up and have developed very good relationship.
(4) Rotarians and Rotaractors did attend Rotary events of District 3450 in the past: like zone institute, district conference, etc. On 9 April 2000, the charter president of The Rotaract Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mr. L. Boldbayar, attended the Rotaract District Assembly held in Hong Kong.

(5) For citizens of Mongolia, travelling to Hong Kong and Macau is very convenient. There is no visa requirement. Six days a week, there are flights to Hong Kong and Macau, respectively, via Beijing. The total flying time is just 5 hours. Travelling costs are much lower.
(6) The Rotary Club of Hong Kong has established a Beijing Fellowship Group which has been meeting regularly on a weekly basis with 50 plus members. The coming June will be her 200th meeting. The governor of District 3450 regularly visits the Beijing Fellowship Group of The Rotary Club of Hong Kong, and can easily spend 2 more hours flying to Ulaanbaatar to look after our Club.
(7) Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Macau share a strong cultural and historical heritage with China. The time zone is the same. There will not be communication difficulties.
(8) The Honorary Consul of Mongolia in Hong Kong, Mr. Danny Yung, is a member of The Rotary Club of Kowloon Northwest, Hong Kong.

Taking these into account, I have been requested by the Club members to seek your agreement to accept The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, into District 3450 from 1 July 2000."

Enclosed with the Mongolian petition letter, District 3450 Governor-Elect John Wan wrote to Rotary International President-Elect Frank Devlyn on 13 April 2000:

"This letter seeks your agreement to place the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar within District 3450 from 1 July 2000. ... ...

Recently, the Club was caught in a few mishaps that almost threatened its RI membership. These events inevitably have dampened the morale of the membership, and the leadership of the Club has seen it fit to take proactive steps to insure the future well-being of Rotary in Mongolia in general and of the Club in particular. Specifically, there is a perception among the membership that if the Club was part of a district, the Club and the membership would have received the care and attention they badly needed.

Meanwhile, words have gone around that a proposal is being developed to group the Club under District 5010 which includes Alaska. The news has spurred the Club into action, at which point I was asked whether I would consider having the Club as part of District 3450 from 1 July 2000.

I responded positively, but stressed that any proposal must be fully supported and properly endorsed by the membership, and very importantly, subject to approval of the RI Board. They went away and held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM).

At the EGM, the membership listed the reasons why the Club should not be part of District 5010 and argued strongly that the Club should be part of District 3450. This brings us to the present, and I enclose a copy of the letter from the President of the Club seeking to join District 3450.

The Club's Case

I submit that the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar has a strong case in their petition. Let me summarize the Club's case as follows:

First, we are related from the start by Rotary. The Club can be looked upon as having been sponsored by the Rotary Club of Shatin. Franklin Sham, Charter President of Shatin, took care of the Club as PEA for three years. During those years, there were active exchange visits between members of the Club and the District. One can in fact argue that District 3450 has a moral obligation to look after the Club, which is indeed what I am trying to do.

Secondary, we have close ties. The Club has since developed close ties with clubs in District 3450. Rotarians from the Club regularly attend our District Conference and major events. Many Rotarians from the District regularly visit Mongolia on business. More importantly, senior Rotarians of the District had conducted Rotary Information sessions for their members in Ulaanbaatar at no cost to either the Club or to RI. In the process, they have concluded Rotary projects, including some involving matching grants from the Rotary Foundation. Mostly recently, the President of their Rotaract Club attended our Rotaract District Assembly for training.

Thirdly, we have a lot in common. Mongolia, Hong Kong and Macau are on the same time zone. We have the same common culture and historical heritage. We speak the same languages.

Fourthly, it makes sense logically. There is no visa requirement for travels between Mongolia, Hong Kong, Macau and Beijing. Travels between these cities are simple, direct and relatively economical, compared with travels between Mongolia and other places such as Canada or Alaska.

Lastly, both sides are now willing. This is vital. We believe now is the best time to join the Club with District 3450, to the advantage of both parties, and indeed to RI in that it would help promote and extend Rotary in Mongolia once the Club becomes part of District 3450 and once we are responsible for extension in Mongolia.

Action Plan

Subject to your agreement that the Club will be part of District 3450 from 1 July 2000, I would appoint Past District Governor Moses Cheng (RC of Hong Kong Northeast) as my Special Representative to Mongolia with responsibilities to assist me in membership development and extension in Mongolia in general and in the administration of the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar in particular. He would be assisted by Past President Herbert Lau (RC of Tolo Harbour) who travels regularly to Mongolia."

Decision by Rotary International

Roger Staedtke, Manager, Club and District Administration, sent the official reply on 28 April 2000 to District 3450 addressing both Governor Dipo Sani and Governor Elect John Wan:

"District 3450 Boundaries and the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

The letter from District Governor-Elect John Wan to RI President-Elect Frank Devlyn regarding the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, has been received and was shared with me for reply.

The background information concerning the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and the historical relationship with District 3450 is appreciated. It is obvious that many personal,

professional and cultural ties have been established between Hong Kong an Ulaanbaatar since the Club's admission to membership in RI in 1995. As John's letter and the letter from the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar indicate, there are many factors that would favor the addition of the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar to District 3450.

The addition of the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar to District 3450 would require Board approval. The Bylaws of RI, Section 15.010 authorizes the Board to approve district territory modification. As petition for such a district boundary modification, however, can only be submitted by the current governor, with the concurrence of the governor-elect.

Because of the potential for further extension of Rotary in Mongolia, it is suggested that your petition include the entire country of Mongolia, and not just the territory of the Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar. By adding all of Mongolia to your district at this time, future extension to other cities in Mongolia, such as Erdenet and Darkhan, would be simplified, and any such new clubs would avoid the feeling of isolation that Ulaanbaatar has endured these past five years.

New clubs in Mongolia would immediately enjoy the warm fellowship and other benefits of belonging to a dynamic district such as yours. Of course, the pace of further extension into Mongolia would be entirely at your district's discretion.

In order to petition the Board for consideration of a change to your district's boundary, to become effective 1 July 2000, the following needs to take place:

(1) District Governor Dipo Sani needs to inform all of the clubs in District 3450 of the proposed plan to add the country of Mongolia to District 3450, and ask each club to submit to him its approval or disapproval of this plan.
(2) After receiving approval of the plan at least a majority of clubs in the district, Governor Dipo needs to prepare a statement address to the Board of Directors of RI that:
    (a) Summarizes the proposed plan, including the benefits of this change;
    (b) Provides a newly worded district boundary description and illustrated map of the boundary of District 3450 (both current and proposed), and
    (c) Indicates approval of the plan by a majority of clubs in the district-

The statement should be addressed to the Board of Director of RI, but to expedite the handling of the matter. The governor is requested to send these materials to me. Upon receipt of the above statement and map, I will submit them to the Board, and will advise Governor Dipo when approval has been given.

It is hope that your petition could be received in time to be considered by the May meeting of the Board. Accordingly, you are asked to have your petition and supporting documentation forwarded to me no later than Friday, May 12."

Upon the advices by Roger Staedtke, there were only 2 weeks before the deadline. Without hesitation, Dipo Sani took action effectively in preparing the petition statement along with all documentation required. No doubt, the answer was very clear. The petition met the approval at the May 2000 meeting of the Rotary International Board of Directors.

The country of Mongolia became a member of R.I. District 3450 with effect on 1 July 2000.

88°
92°
96°
100°
104°
108°
112°
116°
120°
50°
46°
42°
RUSSIA
Irkutsk
Hanh
Ulaangom
Hatgal
HÖVSGÖL
Sühbaatar
UVS
Ölgiy
Tes
Mörön
Hutag
Darhan
BAYAN-ÖLGIY
Erdenet
SELENGE
Ereen
Tosontsengel
Bulgan
Dzüünharaa
Batshireet
Hovd
DZAVHAN
BULGAN
Batsümber
HENTIY
Choybalsan
Uliastay
ARHANGAY
Dashinchilen
Ulaanbaatar
Berh
DORNOD
Nalayh
HOVD
Dzuunmod
Öndörhaan
Tümentsogt
Tsetserleg
TÖV
Baruun-Urt
MONGOLIA
Altay
Arvayheer
Chovr
SÜHBAATAR
Bayanhongor
ÖVÖRHANGAY
GOVÏ-ALTAY
Mandalgovï
Har-Ayrag
Dariganga
DUNDGOVÏ
Saynshand
BAYANHONGOR
DORNOGOVÏ
Dalandzadgad
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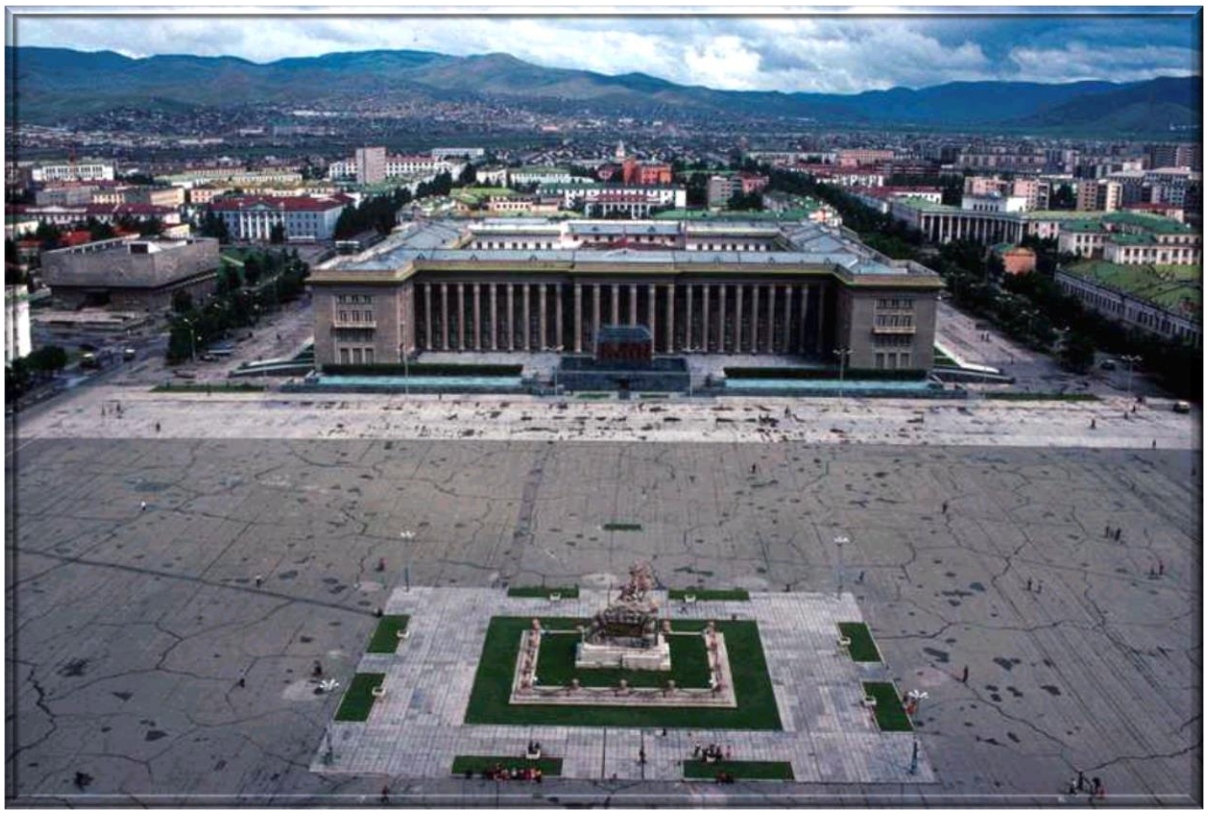
ULAANBAATAR CITY MAP
Legend
Embassy
Bank
Museum
Monastery, temple
Hotel
Restaurant
Antique, art shop
Petrol station
Monument, sculpture
Theatre, Cinema
Travel company
Internet cafe
Police
Hospital, pharmacy
Street fast food cafe
Shopping mall
Chinggis Khaan International Airport
AMICUS
MONGOLIA TRAVEL COMPANY



The Mongolian Government Palace and Sukhbaatar Square as in 2000.

The First District Governor's Official Visit to Mongolia

As warmly expected, on 1 July 2000, the Rotary International District 3450 was newly compiled with 49 clubs located within 2 neighbouring countries: (1) the entire country of Mongolia with one club located in the capital city Ulaanbaatar, and (2) 48 clubs in the People's Republic of China but all located at the southern coast within the 2 special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao. This change in boundaries gave District 3450 the ever largest territory in history, in terms of 604,000 square miles.

In August the same year, District 3450 Governor John Wan performed his official duty to visit the "new member Club" in Ulaanbaatar. He and his team were in their good luck flying on the round trip Hong Kong-Ulaanbaatar direct flight operated by the Mongolian national carrier MIAT, Mongolyn Irgenii Agaaryn Teever (*Mongolian Civil Air Transport*). Normally, there were only international transits in Beijing (北京), if not via Seoul of South Korea. The Hong Kong and Macao delegation enjoyed a wonderful week of cultural tour after the official Rotary events, followed by a mini Naadam (Наадам) (the three games---archery, wrestling, and horse-racing). Another special program was a hands-on field lesson on "How to erect a Mongolian gher?" Members were then served with a wild meal of *khorkhog* (made by placing hot stones from an open fire into a large metal pot with chopped mutton, potato, carrot, some water and sometimes vodka---the container is then sealed and placed on fire). (*see photos on Pages 11-12*)

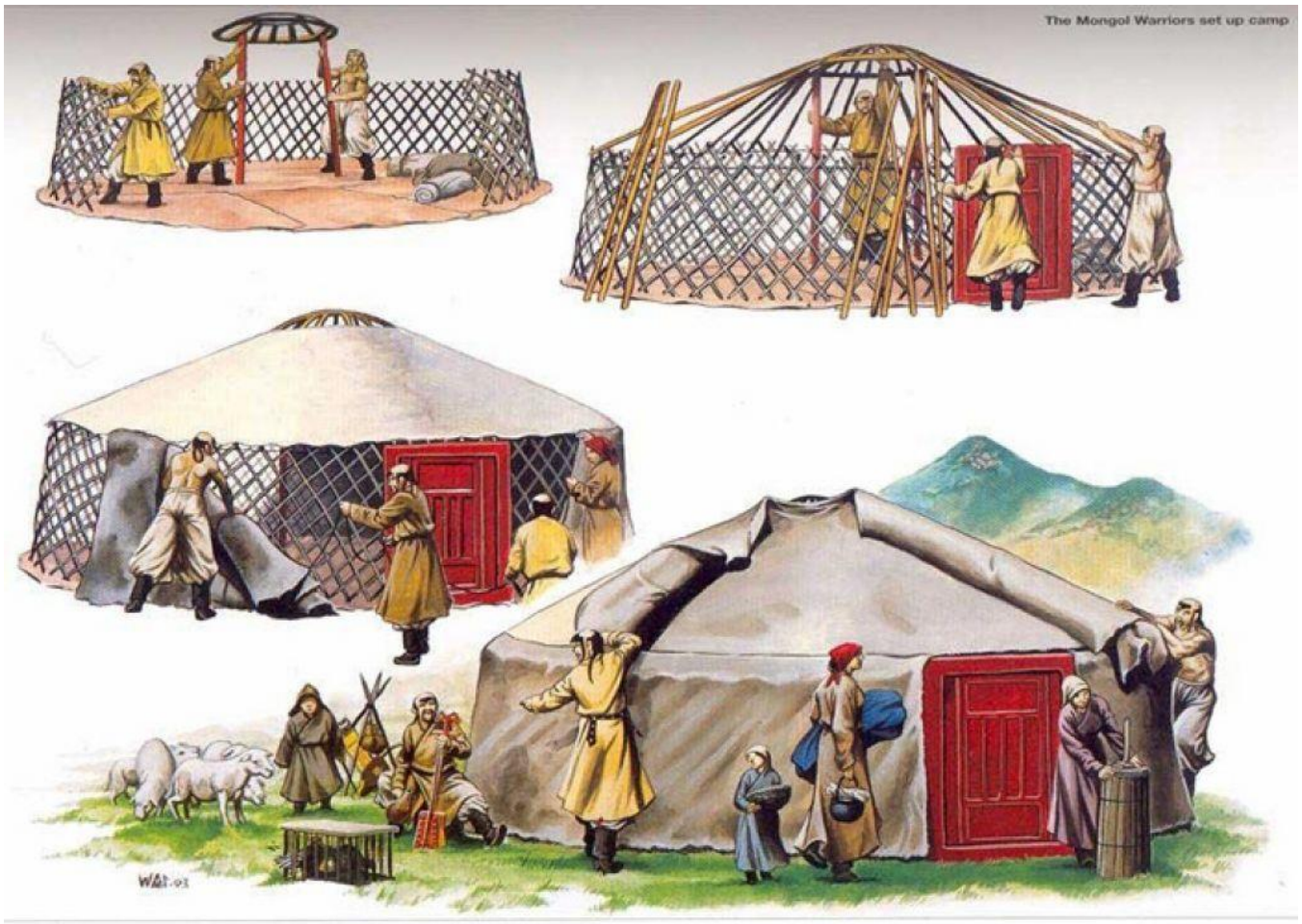
Joining the tour were 3 special Taiwanese guests invited by Herbert K. Lau. They were District 3480 Governor 1992-1993 "Hy-Line" Wang Kuo-En (汪國恩) (Taipei Northwest Rotary Club 台北西北區扶輪社) and Mrs. Wang, as well as "Bob" Robert T. Yin (尹彤) (Taipei Rotary Club 臺北扶輪社). Hy-Line was then Chairman of The Rotarian Publication Committee (扶輪出版委員會) and Bob was the Secretary, while Herbert K. Lau was a Committee Member in 1999-2003 representing District 3450.

This MIAT direct flight was actually nothing related with Rotary but merely a commercial business that gave the chance for the Rotarians and friends caught the good luck. It was originally the commercial idea of Herbert K. Lau several months earlier. He attempted to organize the first ever direct flights between Hong Kong and Ulaanbaatar. After a successful lobby with Thomas Cook AG (通濟隆), this global travel operator agreed to charter MIAT with an AirBus A320 of 220-passenger-seats. The one way traffic time was less than 5 hours. Unfortunately, this attempt was in a business loss at the Hong Kong side because 80% of the tickets were not sold. However, the Ulaanbaatar side got the enthusiastic support of the Mongolians by full-house tickets sold for Hong Kong tour

2000 -- A panorama view of Ulaanbaatar looking from the Zaisan Memorial

2000 -- The Culture Palace / The State Opera & Ballet Theatre at the eastern rim of the Sukhbaatar Squar

The Mongolian wild cuisine of khorkhog (热石頭罐燜羊塊)



How to erect a Mongolian gher?