THREE MANLY SPORTS
(National Festival Naadam)

The most important celebration for the Mongolian people since ancient times was and is the traditional three manly sports (naadam). During this important celebration there is wrestling among men, which tests men's strength and wit. Archery tests the skills of marksmanship. The horse race tests the racers' swiftness and hardiness. They are performed according to the customary rules.

The Three Manly Sports combine folk art with sportiveness. Therefore, the wrestlers are garbed in sporting uniform. The archers are garbed in specific dress. The manes and tails of racing horses are fastened together with strips as decorations. There is a certain number of ceremonial movements. Every sportive feat is eulogized. These are rooted in very ancient traditions. Every winner in wrestling, archery, and horse-racing has titles and epithets. This national festival has been developed for many centuries, but its form and content are almost intact.

There are no special requirements for participants who want to take part in wrestling, archery and horse racing. The participation is free of choice. This demonstrates its democratic nature and the aspiration of the Mongolian population.

Even though there are various social functions of the Three Manly Sports, including ceremonies, symbolism, merry-making, and sports, the main aim of this competition is to test the prowess of men and to make all people merry, and to manifest the power of nation and state. Thus, this festival has a national significance. This festival was called the ulsün naadam (festival of statehood) or danshig (festival of firm existence). This is sometimes called delger düüren gurvan zuiliin naadam (festival of three objects of immeasurable fullness). There are small community festivals of horse racing, wrestling and archery when the mountain and its cairn worship rituals are performed, along with the celebration of rituals for the new ger, birthdays and so on.

The Three Manly Sports were performed during mountain and river worship rituals, weddings, periods of war, and period of the ascendancy of the moon. But the Three Manly Sports are celebrated in summer when the land is verdant, the animals are fatty, the milk products are abundant, and all the people are calm.

The Victory Day of the People's Revolution has been celebrated on every July 11th of each year since 1921. It became an annual nationwide celebration. As a national event, it fits the mood of the populace of Mongolia. This is the enrichment of the national festival and enhancement of the political ceremony.

The tenor of the Three Manly Sports is the same, but it is enriched with the traditional sport of archery with ankle-bones and other competitions as well as diverse events of modern sports, including exhibitions and shows of national costumes, demonstrations of Mongolian ger construction, and others.
Wrestling is the essential part of the national festival of Mongolia. The functions and rules of Mongolian wrestling are not only meant to test the pair of wrestlers’ strength and prowess, but to link it with national elements of other traditional arts and customs. There are certain physical movements that are performed before and after each wrestling bout as rule.

These functions have been elaborated and developed for many centuries. Everything has deep meaning. One of the peculiarities of Mongolian wrestling is the costume. The epic Erin sain khan kharangui (the best man Khan Kharangui) speaks about a wrestler’s jacket made out of a stallion camel’s hide and briefs made of bull’s hide. The wrestler’s jacket and briefs are the signs of strength. Later on, the costume of wrestlers became more elegant.

At present wrestling costumes consists of a hat, zodog (jacket), shuudag (briefs), boots, stockings and boots’ bindings. The jacket and briefs afford a wrestler the ability to hold his opponent during the wrestling bout. The well-tailored jacket and briefs adapt themselves to the shape of wrestler’s brawny body. This tight costume affords a wrestler’s comfort to move.

The wrestler wears an ancient hero’s helmet-shaped hat. It attests to the fact that the wrestling of Mongolia originated from among strong men who tested the brave deeds of ancient Mongolian warriors. Mongolian wrestlers wear high-boots which keep their footing firmly and prevent their legs from slipping when wrestlers trick each other with their legs. They wear felt stockings which play a role in protecting their legs from injury; the stockings are stitched with auspicious ornaments, which add grace to the wrestler. The bindings of the wrestler’s boots are also kind of a grace to the wrestler.
Mongolian wrestling has no differences of weight and age; if a wrestler’s limb (an elbow, knee, head or other body part) touches the ground, it is considered a defeat.

At the national wrestling competition, 256, 512, or 1024 wrestlers compete. At the local level 32, 64, 128 or 256 wrestlers compete. There are two wrestling sets. One wrestling set consists of eight wrestlers. Another consists of eight wrestlers. There are two lines of wrestlers. One wing is arranged to the eastern side of a wrestler’s ring. Another one is arranged to the western side. 16 wrestlers compete in one bout at the ring of wrestlers. Every wrestler has its own second. The wrestlers are arranged on their line by the sequence of their titles. At the first and second bouts wrestlers can struggle with their opponents on the assignment. At the third and later bouts, a titled wrestler challenges his opponents to wrestle. But recently, the challenging has become less than it was in the past as the result of amendments made to the wrestling rules.

The wrestling coach takes off the hat of wrestler and chants his title and exploits together with his name in a loud voice. The wrestler flaps its hands in imitation of the wing flaps of an eagle, hawk, falcon, or garuda. Only then does he go into the competition ring to meet and begin to wrestle with his opponent.

An ancient chronicle’s description of the wrestler’s fluttering says, “the hands of the wrestlers flap in the shape of the garuda’s fluttering, and his chest bulges out in imitation of a lion’s breast”. The wrestling imitates the tussling of lions or elephants as each tests the other’s might and skill. They skillfully trick each other with hands and legs.

During the wrestling period each wrestler’s coach hints at their own wrestler’s imprudence. These hints are cryptic remarks that resemble a concise poem. The coach of the wrestler should be adept in wrestling and various tricks and be able to chant the wrestler’s title and his exploits in a tuneful voice. There is also a group of referees. They sit on a bench under an erected tent in the south of the wrestling ring and referee the match. These referees are former wrestlers who have much experience at wrestling and are considered fair in umpiring. If there is a dispute concerning wrestlers who have much experience at wrestling and are considered fair in umpiring. If there is a dispute concerning any action and demonstrate their readiness to compete. The melody of the garuda’s fluttering, and his chest bulges out in imitation of a lion’s breast”. The wrestling imitates the tussling of lions or elephants as each tests the other’s might and skill. They skillfully trick each other with hands and legs.

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The course-race of swift horses is one of the main parts of the Mongolian revelry and festivity. From an ancient time, animal husbandry was the main source of our life. Apart from this, it is impossible to imagine the life of livestock-breeders without a horse. Our Mongolian course-race of swift horses is very ancient and very old. There is no doubt about it.

Mongolians accumulated a stock of knowledge to increase, herd, and tend to five kinds of animals and to choose grassy pastures. Among them there is a systematic experience and knowledge to examine and recognize good and swift horses. To train them, our ancestors developed the course-race of swift horses. In such a manner course-racing became the most important part of life and a source of nation-wide enjoyment. All the Mongolians love horse racing. The rule to race swift horses at the national festival is very peculiar. The horse-trainers choose the swiftest horses from his horses and coach them to race for a month before racing. The horse-trainers reduce their horses’ food and race them at the shortest place. Then they race them at a long place. This kind of training continues every day before the national festival.

The race horses are classified by age. The distance of racing depends upon the age. The matured swift horses (ikh nas) can race for 25-30 kilometers. The five-year colts (soyolon) and stallions (azarga) can race for 20 kilometers. Four-year colts (khysaalan) can race 18 kilometers. Three-year colts (shidlen) can race for 15 kilometers. Two-year colts (daaga) can race for 10 kilometers. Our horse race is a course-race. The distance of racing depends upon the mountains or streams and undulating roads. Our jockeys of swift horses in general are children between 6 and 10 years old. Those child-jockeys wear ample, light and vivid-coloured dresses. The patterns of wheels, wish-fulfilling signs, five stars or signs of luck or figures of birds or butterflies are stitched onto the front or back of the jockey’s shirt, and onto the breeches or onto the front of their cap. There are marks that symbolize prowess, fame and promptness. In another word, a figure of a butterfly is a symbol of lightness. The bird symbolizes swiftness of horses.

The forelocks and tails of swift horses are bound with strips. The sweat-scraper and brush are patterned with symbolic designs of the horse’s prowess and promptness. For instance, the sweat-scraper of a swift horse is engraved with figures of four powerful animals and eight signs of luck. The swift horses are recorded at a fixed hour. When the recording of swift horses is completed, a man clad in ceremonial garments with a brocaded sleeveless jacket and gentleman’s mitre robe will mount a light-coloured ambling or trotting horse. He will then hoist a flag and lead the swift-horses around the finishing field. When they go around, the child-jockeys sing a ġiingoo (cheer) in a tuneful voice as a way to encourage their horses. The Mongolian national long-song ‘Tümen Ekh’ is then sung. The lyrics of this song include:

Well, good horse
Which is the most suitable
Fastest at training
Chosen well
From the trained ones
Among the many matured horses

The swiftest horses go to the starting place. All the horses to race stand in one line at the starting place. When the steward waves his flag, the racers start running toward the finishing line. Meantime, the wrestlers continue wrestling and archers continue shooting until the racers come to the finishing line. When the racers appear in a sight, the musicians play a melody and singers sing the song, which goes:

Well, spirit stirring
At the starting line
Exceptional winner
At the finishing line
Is this whose steed
Among the many racers
Well, best racer
Among the many racers
Is this racer, well

As soon as this song is over, the song ‘A horse good at long distance’ is performed with the accompaniment of the national traditional music of the morin khuur (horse-head fiddle). This is traditional. The winner is called as ‘Tümen Ekh’ or best racer. The racer recorded to be rewarded is called as “Büren Jargal” or full happiness.
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE MONGOLS

TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS, RITUALS, CEREMONIES AND FESTIVE EVENTS
ARCHERY

Archery is one essential part of the Three Manly Sports and it is also very ancient. This sport was created to improve the skill of shooting at a distance as far as possible, to hunt as much game as possible, to celebrate a hunting ceremony, and to let the shooters shoot while the hunting-dance is performed.

There is no limit of the participants' number in this sport, but the winner is chosen by their ability to shoot at a great distance. A stone inscription found in a place near the vicinity of the Onon River says, “Esynkhe, grand-son of Chinggis Qahan shot a target of thirty-five feet, when Mongolians gathered and shot at a target at the place Bukh Sochikhai.” This inscription attests to the fact that these Mongolians had great success at shooting arrow-heads at great distances. At the end of the last century, eastern Mongolians called their shooting-match the “arrow-flying.”

The shooting of bows and arrows has traversed many centuries. In these competitions, posts were driven into the ground in a row. Skin-balls were hung from each post. The archer, who rode on his horse at full gallop, shot every hanging skin-ball without missing. This was called ‘ball-shooting’. The sheep skin or cow hide was stretched out. Each archer shot at this stretched skin or hide with twenty arrows. Then the score was reckoned. It was called Sarampai kharvakh (thin worn skin shooting). Eight sheep skins were joined. The figure of a human being was drawn onto the middle of this stretched skin, which was stretched on the square frame. This figure was called the ‘enemy’. Archers shot twenty arrows at it from the behind a hill or ravine. The distance of shooting was forty feet. Whoever got more scores at shooting was the winner. It was called ‘enemy shooting’.

The distance of the contemporary sport of archery is 45 feet or 75-80 meters. We make shooting targets by weaving leather strips into a tub-shape. There are two forms of shooting targets. One is a walled target, another is an individual target. The wall target is the arrangement of targets in a stack. The individual target is the arrangement of targets in row. The archers can use only blunted arrows. Then two shooting teams alternately shoot and test their skills. There are two forms of shooting. One is an individual, the other is a team sport. The amount of shooting for individuals or teams is fixed. Then the result is reckoned.

There is no special poem for shooting. But in various epics heroes say a spell before shooting. Such passages in the literature are very common.

At present our archers say ‘Khurai, khurai, khurai.’ This is an encouragement of archers to shoot. There are three types of encouragement: an encouragement to shoot; congratulations for good marks; and acceptance of congratulations. Our archers chant these khurai’s three times in a tuneful voice at a single turn. The winners can get the title of Mergen or ‘good marksman’ and also an epithet. For instance, winners used to get titles and epithets, such as ‘a very marvelous shooter’, ‘a very bold shooter’, ‘a sharp shooter’, ‘a very accurate sharp shooter’, ‘more prosperous’, ‘graceful shooter’, ‘most trustworthy’, or ‘exceptional shooter’. At present there is a new system to confer titles upon archers.
Mongolians celebrate the Lunar Month as a passing of one year and a welcoming of a new one. The first day of the New Year is traditionally a popular festival. It is celebrated on a broad nationwide scale. This is the celebration of the passing of the severe winter safe-and-sound and the welcoming of a new year. It is also a celebration of getting wiser. It is an occasion of three festivities. The literal meaning of Lunar Month in Mongolia is 'white'. The white colour is the symbol of sincerity and happiness in Mongolian tradition. That is why we call Lunar Month Festival as *Tsagaan sar* or "White Month."

According to historical chronicles and the research of scholars, Mongolians used to celebrate the Lunar Month festival in the autumn, during which dairy products were available. Today, in contrast, the festival is celebrated at the end of winter and the beginning of spring. The vestige of it exists still among the Kalmuck people. They make a ceremonial *zul sar* (ghee lamp). But in the process of history Mongolian solemnly celebrated Lunar Month at the animal birth period, during which we taste the first dairy products.

Traditionally we do cleaning on the 29th of the last month of winter as preparatory work for the Lunar Month festivity. This is a symbol of welcome to the coming year without blemish. On the 30th of the last month (*bitüün*) of winter, we cook a pot of mutton and prepare rendered cream. The cooked molten cakes are piled in three, five, or seven tiers on a big plate. The table is decorated with sweets and other confections. A vessel is filled with fermented mare’s milk. All the members of the family gather together and feast all evening to make wassail.

The order of arrangement of the whole sheep on a plate:
1. A pot of mutton
2. Breast
3. Fore-leg
4. Hind-leg
5. Cervical vertebrae

The mutton includes the sheep’s back together with two pieces of ribs and its tail (*uuts*). The arrangement of sheep’s limbs follows the animals’ limbs. The breast is placed first at a big plate. Then the vertebrae and fore-legs are placed. The front long bones are placed in the wake of the fore-legs similar to how a sheep lies down. The mutton is placed upon the arranged limbs of mutton on the big plate. Then the head and four seared shanks are placed upon the mutton. This is called *ikh yosny uuts* or ‘whole mutton on a plate’. The ears and horns of the sheep are smeared with a skim of milk or ghee. The muzzle of the sheep is placed toward the front of an animal to the west of the mutton. The shinbone is placed toward the vertebrae to the east of the mutton on the plate. The front of the mutton is faced toward the back of the ger.

When we offer the mutton, we follow the above-mentioned pattern. This kind of offering of mutton is performed on the occasion of the Lunar Month festival, new ger warmings, and days of commemoration.

At the end of sunset every family starts making tea and
prepares for wassail. There is a specific ceremony for this ritual. The head of family enters and eats the sheep’s fibula and picks meat off of the bone. Then he asks, ‘can we make wassail?’ All the members of the family answer ‘yes, it is high time to make wassail.’ Then the head of family takes the marrow out of a broken fibula. Then they say, ‘The wassail has started, are you enjoying the wassail?’, according to the precedence of age. The head of family or senior person can carve the mutton and distribute it to everybody who is present. Then all people feast as ceremony.

The person who carves the mutton can follow the traditional way and set aside a piece of mutton as a share for the hearth. First, he carves both sides of the mutton, then he carves small pieces from both sides and eats them. He then distributes the carved pieces of mutton with his stretched hands to all the members of family and others as their share of the mutton. Those who are present stretch out their hands and receive them with honour.

As soon as wassail is made at home, they visit their neighbours and ask each other, “Are you enjoying the wassail?” In such manner they share their joy and celebrate to see off the passing year. This means that they treat their neighbours with their animals’ products. At the earlier morning of next day, every member of every household is in holiday array.

All the members of the household defer to the most senior person, but the precedence of age is significant. The head of family, then his wife, then their son or daughter, according to the sequence of age, stretch out their both arms with open palms while holding a *khadag* (sacred scarf) un-
der the arms of senior person to prop up his or her elbows. He or she can say ‘Are you well?’ The senior person can place his or her arms with open palms on the greeter and answer, ‘I am well. Are you well? Live long and be happy.’

This propping up of the senior person’s elbow by a junior person signifies that the junior person shall always treat elders with deference.

After doing their greetings, everyone can sit and exchange their snuff bottles, saying:

Did your animals pass the winter well?
Are your yearling colts fattening nicely?
Are your calves muscled?
Are your sheep tailed?
Are your yearling camels’ humps upright?

In this way we talk in a rhythmical manner and ask each other’s ages. Then we taste dairy products or steamed rice products. After this, the senior person carves two sides of a saddle of mutton and distributes the carved pieces to all gathered at the feast. The greeters are treated with tea and food and fermented mare’s milk or milk-vodka. The enjoyment continues for a while.

During the Lunar Month festival we not only visit our neighbours, but also visit our close relatives, even those who live far away. Presents are exchanged. If possible, children who live separate from their parents, endeavor to greet their parents in person within the days of the Lunar Month celebration. Grandsons, granddaughters, and cousins try to greet their paternal and maternal uncles and aunts within the days of this celebration.

There is a view that if your Lunar Month celebration is abundant, your life shall be prosperous in the coming year. So, some of us try to celebrate this festival extravagantly. During it we play a certain number of games. Children, especially, like to play dibs. There is a certain number of games, such as Дөрвөн бэрх (four dibs). This game is played by casting four dibs or game pieces. The games are Арван хойор жил (twelve years), Малын зуягаа бодох (calculation of animal destiny), Сүүний ясаар хотох (to draw by caudal vertebrae), or a sign of luck, wheel and üichüür. These games are devoted to test one’s luck. The games range from shooting balls, to wrestling, to shooting ankle-bones, to breaking off thoracic vertebrae or straining the cervical vertebrae of a sheep, and to wrench a patella as a way of testing one’s strength and ability.

Children play games under the guidance of the adults at the night of making wassail. The name of one game is Алаг мөлхий (multicoloured tortoise). This is played with ankle-bones, in which the players cast dice in order to capture bones set out in the shape of a tortoise. This game has strict rules of play. The players sit in a semi-circle. The dice is cast. According to spots a player can take off pieces of stacked ankle-bones. The player who collects the most ankle-bones is the winner, and this person is considered to be lucky in the coming year.

After the ceremony of greeting, Mongolians cast four ankle-bones (four dibs) at the morning of the first day of lunar month festival.

The children play the game called race dibs (ankle-bones) and adults play a game of twelve dibs (ankle-bones).

The Lunar Month festival was called as livestock-breeders’ feast” because the national tradition had been neglected in Mongolia for 70 years during the twentieth century. On the occasion of Lunar Month festival, the wrestling match is arranged and other contests are held in Mongolia.

On the days of Lunar Month festival today, Mongolians wear ceremonial costumes and ride in modern cars and visit their parents, neighbouring villages, and uncles and aunts, and exchange gifts in modern bindings.
The original birth place for the Bactrian camels was the great Gobi. Mongolians domesticated wild camels and bred them. Since then many centuries have passed. The Bactrian camels of Mongolia are the best of the herd of camels. The chest of the Mongolian Bactrian camel is deep and broad; these animals have two humps and their wool is thick and soft. The hair on the knees and throat (zogdor) of camels and hackle on their napes of necks (del) are abundant. They are hardy in the cold. The best pedigrees of the Mongolian Bactrian are the galbiiin goviin ulaan and khaniiin hetsiiin khuuren camels.

Mongolians use them for riding and pulling carts. In addition, Mongolians have the tradition to race camels. It is a tradition that is celebrated on a camel day festival by the camel herders in the autumn and winter. We traditionally celebrate camel day when the camel population increases and reaches a thousand or ten thousand, and we extol their yields. We also used to celebrate camel day on the occasion of other events. The camel breeders celebrate the “silver peg” festival which is very peculiar. It is particular custom on the camel day. There are gelding camel and yearling camel races. There are competitions to whittle wooden pegs. In winter, camel herders start unhitching camels from their companions and coaching them to race.

On the camel racing day, camel breeders including male and female and young and old people, all of whom dress in their various coloured silk surfaced gowns and tilt their caps made from fox, sable, budge, and baby camel pelt to their foreheads. The camels they ride are festooned with scarves. They are in fine fettle.

The camel breeders mostly race gelding and yearling camels. The yearling camels race within around eight kilometres. The gelding-camels race around ten kilometres.

The racing camels simultaneously start from the starting line. They trot through the knolls and drifted snow and some of them frolic while trotting. They seem like animate objects when you see them. They make you feel exuberant in spirit. Winning camels and their owners are anointed with milk and dairy products. The exploits of winning camels are recited to rhythmical tunes. After the racing competition, other events concerning camels occur. The camel day is one of the rare events for Mongolian camel breeders.