

Jinkhin Mongol / True Mongolian:
Mongolian museums and the construction of
national identity

by
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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
February, 2014



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List of Acronyms

ACMS	American Centre for Mongolian Studies
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
COMINTERN	Communist International
IAMS	International Association of Mongolian Studies
ICOM	International Council of Museums
ICOMOS	International Council of Museums and Sites
MPP	Mongolian People's Party
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
NMM	National Museum of Mongolia
ROK	Republic of Korea
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

NB: the use of acronyms has been minimised for ease of reading throughout the work.

Transliteration

Having sat in the office of eminent linguist, Dr Igor de Rachewiltz one afternoon in Canberra and discussed Mongolia, it became very clear as a non-expert that there was no point in attempting to approach transliteration in a uniform manner. So a practical approach had to be found. Generally, direct transliteration has been used between Mongolian Cyrillic and English, (for example, for ‘МОНГОЛ’ is spelt Mongol) with necessary nuances such as ‘yah’ for я, ‘ch’ for ц, ‘kh’ for х and ‘g’ for г. Where nuances of Mongolian Cyrillic do not permit direct transliteration, spellings employed in the current National Museum catalogue have been adopted.¹ While the catalogue is not the work of a linguist, it is widely referenced in this dissertation so is a logical place from which to source which transliteration. Where direct quotes from other authors are used, the spellings have not been changed. Transliterated words in bibliographic citations and footnotes preserve the spelling under which they were published out of respect for their authors choices. Mongolians generally adopt patronymics but are referred to by their first names. Generally throughout the work, I respect this tradition by using first names, though in the bibliography, surnames are acknowledged as such.

¹ J., Saruulbuyan, Eregzen G. & Bayarsaikhan J.,(eds), *National Museum of Mongolia*, catalogue, National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

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Spanning a period of more than ten years, this research was made possible by the generosity of Mongolian colleagues who constantly shared information and permitted access to their workplace. The three Directors of the National Museum since 2001 – Dr Saruulbuyan J., Dr Ochir A. and the late Dr Idshinorov S. – all gave permission to document collections and exhibitions and granted special access to storage spaces and to staff. Dr Idshinorov's high goals for the Museum and his generosity in supporting my work without reservation contributed to a sense of belonging to the museum community. The support of the Museum has been such that each time I have made a field visit my old desk in the Curators office has been cleared in readiness.

Many professionals at the National Museum have assisted my work and also negotiating life in Mongolia. Dr Bumaa D., Ayush T., Erdmaa D., Ouykhisig T., Enkhmaran S., Dr Eregzen G., Dr Bayarsaikhan J. and Odbaatar T. among many others. I am indebted to Dr Bumaa for her assistance. Erdmaa D. also never hesitated to extend support into after hours and weekends. Colleagues at other museums – Tsedmaa D., Dr Alantugs N. and Bekhbat S. – have also permitted my research and shared their museums and aspirations. Ariunaa Ts., Director of the Mongolian Arts Council, has kindly shared her knowledge of the Mongolian arts scene as it has evolved so rapidly in the past decade. I would also like to acknowledge friends and colleagues from Dadal Soum and Choibalsan who, over the years by sharing their language, homes and knowledge, allowed me to experience countryside culture; Ulaana ecghe, Gankhuyag B., Suvdaa S., Sylvia Hay and Dr Kirk Olson. Mutlu Gunhan-Bozkurtlar and staff of Turkish Embassy were very inclusive my poor Turkish during excavation visits and in permitting visits to conservation labs.

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as well as that of Dr Colin Long, who maintained encouragement and involvement long after his departure from Deakin. Colleagues at the University of Sydney, Dr Chiara O'Reilly and Dr Anna Lawrenson, have both donated much invaluable advice and feedback.

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Preface

Jinkhin Mongol/True Mongolian – Museums of Mongolia Negotiating the Twentieth Century

Museums in Mongolia underwent significant changes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. By investigating activities of the museums as evidence of the reinvention of the normative narrative, it will be demonstrated that museums responded to post-socialism in differing ways, but with similar outcomes. The museums evidence the intersection of political and popular influence from within Mongolia and from abroad that has resulted in revised master narratives which contribute to the construction of a new national identity. The causes for changes in museums offer insight into how the past is mobilised for politics and international relations. In Mongolia's case economic collapse, cultural diplomacy and nationalistic rhetoric surrounding the anniversaries of the founding of the Great Mongol Empire and the birthday of Chinggis Khan have been powerful influencers on how museums have reshaped their meta-narrative.

Chinggis Khan, the core figure in Mongolian history has become the nexus for linkage of the ancient past and traditional culture, legitimising the present as a product of an ancient, ordained continuum. As Uradyn E. Bulag describes it, 'Chinggis Khan is the fantasy structure, the scenario through which each of the countries involved perceives itself as a meaningful being or entity'.¹ Further, the uncomfortable nature of the Manchu and socialist periods in the ongoing political legitimacy debate and in nationalist fervour significantly influence the extent to which and the manner in which these periods have been included in the story.

¹ Uradyn E. Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., Plymouth, 2010, p. 109.

The transition from the mono-ideology of the socialist period to the challenge to official hegemony that post-socialism demanded was a difficult process for museums due to existing museum culture and external influences. The form that the museums of the study take to this day reflect a collision between Mongols desire for self-assertion and the foreign policy interests of near and third neighbours. While Mongolian museums have survived transition, they have done so owing a heavy debt to deploying the ‘traditional heroic display’ while marginalising temporally significant periods of history that remain uncomfortable in the grand narrative.²

Carsten identified the complex interconnectedness between memory and the past and present and the political context in which they exist.³ While international influence has become more regulated in the recent decade in Mongolian museums due to economic stabilisation domestic influences continue to impact on the way museums present history.⁴ In reconstructing culture and history into clusters of meaning and hence value, Mongolian museums have been significantly influenced by the historical dissonance of periods of Mongolian history and by ongoing geopolitical anxiety.⁵ While their physical and metaphorical existence qualifies them for participation in building a revised national identity in the post-socialist period, the level of contribution has been delimited until recently not by a lack of professionalism or expertise, but by a lack of resources and a lack of political support in competition with economics, social issues and the internet and popular media. Without the time and support for sound planning, museums have with a few significant exceptions been forced until recently to take a responsive rather than proactive stance in regards their contribution to debate about history and as follows, national identity. The result has been that museums have been heavily affected by local and international popular and political constructs of what is *jinkhin Mongol* – true Mongolian.

² Timothy Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

³ Janet Carsten (ed.), *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, p.1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2011.

Chapter I

Introduction and the History of Mongolia

A moment on the eastern steppe in Mongolia in 2002 was the genesis of this work. Myself and colleagues from the National Museum of Mongolia (NMM) were touring an exhibition titled *Mongolian History Alive!*, with an associated education program to the eastern provinces. One dusk travelling between towns in our microbus we came across a herder leading his horses back to his *ger* (felt tent) for the evening. He was mounted on a typical stocky pony, wearing a traditional *del* (national dress) and silhouetted between the steppe and vast autumn sky. As a foreigner it was a memorable and romantic moment, but also for my five Mongolian colleagues. They were quiet, peering out the window as we approached to ask him for directions and as they spoke to each other I heard the phrase repeatedly I realised I had heard so often in Mongolia... *jinkhin Mongol* (real or true Mongolian).¹ Back in the city at the conclusion of the expedition, in our Western clothes, behind our laminated chipboard desks, that true Mongolia seemed a very distant place. Yet these highly educated, internationally travelled, apartment dwelling colleagues considered that place real. Revisiting Mongolia over the years and moving into critical thinking and reading widely it became clear that popular Mongol identity is located in a theoretical place somewhere other than the city and is heavily reliant on a sense of connection to traditional nomadic culture – a past that permeates contemporary thought, scholarship, politics and therefore museums.² Recounting this moment leads directly back to the question of the work – how and why have Mongolian museums changed in recent decades and how, if at all have they reflected the reconfiguration of Mongolian national identity? Have museums sought to

¹ Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968.

² See for example Campi, Kaplonski, Bulag, Sneath and Myadar for discussions of identity.

reinforce the notion that true Mongolia is situated somewhere in the traditions and landscapes of the steppe, mountains, forests and desert? Or have they recognised the clear demographic and economic statistics that suggest Mongolia is decreasingly a nation of sparsely scattered nomadic herders and increasingly sedentary, industrialised and urbanised? Ultimately, the question leads to the broader consideration of the influence of society on museums and museums on society and who manages the Mongolian past.

The circumstances that lead to identifying the issues and undertaking this research evolved over time. From 2001 until 2003, I held the position of capacity builder at the NMM, the first ever state-funded position for a foreigner in the NMM. My role was to project manage the creation and implementation of education programs for school aged children and to train staff in project management and education theory. The eventual outcomes of the work were an education program about all Mongolian history with a ninety-page illustrated teacher's resource publication and a travelling exhibition and program that reached remote provinces and trained Mongolian teachers. The education project was a product of funding from the Australian Government through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and more significantly of the Canadian Government through the Canada Fund.³ The chance that lead to securing this funding was that North Korean funding had been curtailed in 2001 and those funds made available for Mongolia.⁴ The then Canadian Honorary Consul had an interest in culture, and so was willing to use these unexpected funds to assist the NMM.⁵ The NMM at that time had not received such a substantial direct grant of funds so the project was unprecedented.⁶

As a staff member located in the shared curators office I had a privileged position from which to observe both activities at the NMM, as well as gather the thoughts and aspirations of Mongolian museum workers. In order to gain a greater level of self-determination by sourcing funding to supplement

³ Author's knowledge.

⁴ Notes on conversations between the author and Canadian Honorary Consul, Mr Christopher Johnstone, 2001-2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

insufficient state funds, the NMM and other museums were taking on projects with foreign partners. The extremeness of the precarious financial situation at the NMM was highlighted one winter day in 2001 when I arrived at work to find colleagues working in their winter coats in close to zero temperatures. The Director, Dr Idshinorov Saundin had elected to turn off the central heating in the NMM earlier than usual to save money. In the unregulated environment of the early 2000s, museums were able to undertake projects and acquire income independently of the Ministry and central Treasury. The NMM was engaged in several unprecedentedly large international projects which had the benefit of bringing substantial income from loan fees as well as up skilling. These projects also raised the profile of the NMM within Government by attracting the attention of media, embassies, ambassadors and tourists. Aside from the benefits, this new enterprising way of working raised the issue of balance between the needs of the funder and the needs of the NMM. The crucial point being that projects generated and funded externally at times grew out of the needs (curatorially, politically and academically) of the partner, rather than out of those of the curatorial and strategic aims of the NMM.⁷ As the NMM was collection rich and resource poor, the power dynamic between it and its partners it seemed was not always one of equality.⁸

Within the milieu of international engagement, Dr Idshinorov was particularly frustrated that the larger non-government organisations, international institutions and foreign government partners were mainly interested in archaeology, the ancient states period and the Great Mongol Empire.⁹ This meant there was scant interest in recent and difficult history and therefore no chance to improve those collections, exhibitions and education programs or draw critical attention to the recent past. While the situation of recent history being underrepresented in museums is not unique to Mongolia, the political transformations in the past century effected

⁷ See discussion in chapter two.

⁸ Author's observations at the NMM 2001-2.

⁹ Mongolians use their first names, yet retain their patronymics as surnames. Throughout this work I generally use first name to respect this tradition. This observation is based on many conversations with Dr Idshinorov during 2001-2.

changes in Mongolian life, economics and culture that rival some of those of earlier famed centuries.¹⁰

Initially this research focused only on the NMM and adopting a curatorial theoretical framework, was to analyse the collections of the NMM in order to understand its nature or essence. Understanding the NMM and the reasons behind how it manifests today would provide a basis for considering how if at all this nature or essence was being reflected in the projects it was undertaking. This would then be considered in relation to contemporary Mongolia in order to discern synergies or discordance with notions of national identity. Considering the lack of funding for recent history in the NMM led to questioning what parts of history were represented in interpretive activities and celebrated and why. Did the uneven emphasis among periods reflect the constitution of the collections themselves and thus be generated from within? Or did the nature of the collections have little to do with what was on display and interpreted? Further, if the latter was the case, then what influences were shaping the NMM and the history it presented?

A field visit to Ulaanbaatar in 2010 changed the focus of the thesis to ask these questions of more museums. It was striking that the socialist period displays in the NMM in 2010 had changed little as all other halls had been renovated. The result was that the socialist period displays still looked socialist and were visually incongruous with other areas. Similarly, at the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum (the Winter Palace) displays in the Palace building itself were also minimally changed since 2001 yet the building housed some objects of highest national significance pertaining to the twentieth century. This illustrated that it was not only the NMM that demonstrated a lack of attention to recent history. Also, governance of the Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression (the Victims Museum) had been devolved from the NMM and the Victims Museum was no longer state-owned or funded. Finally, a new museum was under construction called the Mongolian Statehood Museum (the Statehood

¹⁰ Discussed in chapter three.

Museum) and it was planned to present the entire history of the Mongol territories as a coherent continuum.

Problems crystallised from these observations: first, the NMM is one part of an integrated network of changing, evolving museums in Mongolia and therefore to study it alone would be to negate the complexity of its situation. Second, the conception of the Statehood Museum (in the context of extensive national celebrations related to the 800th anniversary in 2006 of the establishment of the Great Mongol Empire), with its comprehensive historic brief and lack of collections impacted on the hierarchy of existing museums. The question was why were parts of existing museums displays under evolved or under interpreted when the state had the funds to create an expensive new museum? As the under-emphasis on twentieth-century history appeared to be no longer a financial matter as it had been in the previous decade, there must have been other influencing factors.

In considering empirically Mongolia's past in relation to scholarship about national identity it became apparent that some historical periods in Mongolian museums, in particular socialism are 'out in the cold' not due to any thorough demonisation nor deliberate forgetting as has been the case elsewhere in former Soviet states.¹¹ Rather it is due to socialism's ambiguity, the 'not all bad' attitude of many Mongols and also to its outright inability to compete with the grand, mysterious, popular stories of Chinggis Khan and his Empire.¹² In the simplest sense this could be rationalised as reflection of basic human nature. Why *would* a landlocked nation of under three million people in a period of economic and social upheaval and influx of unprecedented change and opportunity decide to soul search a recent period of industrialisation and infrastructure building, gains in education, literacy and medicine punctuated by significant purges? It would of course be more

¹¹ Peter Apor & Oksana Sarkisova (eds), *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums After 1989*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2008.

¹² Christopher Kaplonski, 'Neither Truth nor Reconciliation: Political Violence and Singularity of Memory in Post-Socialist Mongolia', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Routledge, 2008, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14690760802094941>>, retrieved 13 June 2008.

likely to embrace its romantic and grand roots as the earliest and largest ever nomad-ruled world empire.

Methodology and Theoretical Approach

The philosophical framework for assessing the meanings embodied in these museums came into sharper focus when contemplating approaches to material culture studies. The museums themselves and what goes on inside them are primary sources and examined in the manner philosopher H. G. Gadamer suggests: ‘...we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole...’¹³ Susan Pearce, whose work is influential in material culture, proposes a series of logical steps for material culture study.¹⁴ These are ascertaining the history, environment, significance and finally interpretation of the object.¹⁵ While the museums are not artefacts in the traditional sense, the notion of deconstructing them in a step-by-step process in order to draw the meaning of the whole is referenced here as a framework. Though not strictly in Pearce’s order referencing this theoretical methodology focuses on tempering the potential for empirical bias generated out of pure observation. Pearce describes in her article ‘Thinking about Things: Approaches to the Study of Artefacts’:

The obvious starting point is the objects physical body, the components from which it has been constructed and any ornament which may have been added to them and so an artefact study will begin with the physical description of the piece.¹⁶

The physicality of the museums (including architecture, charter, staff, publications, physical layout) as well as their activities, governance, exhibitions and initiatives are all taken to be aspects of the ‘object’ and when considered together and relation to comparative objects, purveyors of complex interconnected *meaning*. The methodological tools of this work

¹³ Quoted in E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 117.

¹⁴ Susan Pearce, ‘Thinking About things: Approaches to the study of artefacts’, *Museums Journal*, vol. 86, no. 4, Museums Association, United Kingdom, 1986, pp. 178–181.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

required an empirical and hermeneutical perspective. The process was to untangle the nexus of objects and interpretive materials across a number of museums in order to identify the imagined history they were collectively attempting to disseminate. While observation cannot be a theory-neutral arbiter, it is the point of engagement between the viewer and museum narratives that is central to the question. As contact zones, museums are places of interaction, thus what occurs semiotically and hermeneutically is an interaction between the tangible messages transmitted by the museum and the ones actually received.¹⁷

In order to collect evidence field work was undertaken in 2005 and 2010. During the first field work of 2005 a survey of all of the collections stored at the NMM was completed via an analysis of the card catalogue, accession registers and a small electronic database as well as by visiting storage rooms (pictured below).¹⁸ As there was no electronic catalogue at the Museum, this was the only record the Museum had, so was very precious and access was rarely granted.



Image 1.1
Card Catalogue at the National Museum of Mongolia, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

¹⁷ James Clifford, 'Museums as Contact Zones', *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford (ed.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 188–219.

¹⁸ Special permission was granted by the then Director, Dr Ochir, for me to thoroughly sift through the actual drawers, cupboards and rooms that contained this material.



Image 1.2
 Revolution Museum catalogue at the National Museum of Mongolia, 2005
 Photograph Sally Watterson

Photographic and written documentation about the collections was gathered from staff and local sources such as publications and by observation. Also the exhibitions of the NMM were documented in photographs, moving image and words. Text of labels and interpretive panels was collected and translated for the entire Museum as there was scant English translation at the time. Published interpretative material such as the guidebook, exhibition catalogues, multimedia and brochures were collected. As the history and collections of the Museum were at the time scantily documented in English, a certain amount of information could only be gained by conversing with knowledge holders. People who had direct association with the collections through their work were interviewed, including the Director, Curators, Registrars, Librarian and Guides as well as foreign and local stakeholders working in the cultural sphere. In particular, where nuances of the history and or practices of the Museum were unclear, not best practice or politically difficult such as the manner in which some past acquisitions took place, the opinions of staff and Mongolian observers are invaluable.¹⁹ Finally recent written sources that appropriated or examined Mongolian history including new scholarly histories as well as contemporary newspapers, political

¹⁹ For example acquired through the confiscations of the purges of the 1930s.

speeches and debates were sourced as indicators of current perceptions of history.

In May 2010 the photographic and textual documentation was repeated and new or altered text panels and labels noted and translated at the NMM. Materials published since 2005 were gathered and again opinions and knowledge of people directly associated with the NMM were recorded. Site visits were undertaken to the Statehood Museum, the Victims Museum and the Winter Palace Museum and their Directors or Curators met and written resources gathered. In 2013, more recent publications, such as statistics books, history books and museum journals and exhibition catalogues, were acquired and photographic documentation of the museums displays were obtained. These materials were sourced in order to ensure the thesis in the final phase of writing involved the most current available information as the situation continues to change rapidly. Data collection ceased in mid-2013. Observations therefore span a period of twelve years which has facilitated both a deep understanding of the museums and is a substantial timeframe that greatly enriches the analysis.

Four of Mongolia's most important museums have been chosen for the case study, and a number of other museums, urban and provincial are referred to in order to contextualise the study and highlight inter-relationships between state collections. The three criteria upon which the museums have been selected are: museum charter and purpose, accessibility and collections. Each museum is (or was) established as a state-owned history museum with a core mission to research, preserve and interpret some aspect of the Mongolian national past. While there are other collections within public institutions (for example the National Library, the National Archive, the Institute of History) and monasteries that deal with national history the study is confined to institutions that are named museums.

The second criterion upon which the museums have been included is pragmatic – accessibility. Each museum has been open regularly in the period of research and is located in Ulaanbaatar and thus able to be observed and recorded over time. A well-developed network of professional

colleagues has facilitated heightened access to published and unpublished information, administrative documents, museum libraries, archival photographs and back of house and storage areas. When combined these elements provide a complex insight into the history of the museums and the issues they have faced over more than a decade. The third criterion is collections; each museum holds and exhibits collections that pertain to Mongolian national history over a considerable period of time, or of notable or contested periods. Mongolia also has art, natural history, hero, military, theatre and religious and provincial museums yet ones that hold and interpret aspects of pure *national* history of the Mongols have been selected as this facilitates an analysis of how, if at all the museums reflect broader narratives of history and identity.

In searching for answers about how and why Mongolian museums have responded to changes brought about by democracy and what has influenced these changes key terms require consideration. The International Council of Museums provides a widely accepted definition of museums which underpins this work:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.²⁰

The museums analysed in this study are all permanent institutions, established in the Western tradition that was imported into Mongolia during the period of Soviet influence.²¹

The term democracy is problematic and multifarious and is a term much scrutinised in Mongolia today. Issues such as the depth of democracy possible with the frequent re-election of the former Socialist Party (Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, or MPRP, now renamed the

²⁰ International Council of Museums, 'Statutes Adopted during the 21st General Conference', Vienna, 2007, <<http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/museum-definition.html>>, retrieved 12 February 2012.

²¹ Discussed in chapter three.

Mongolian People's Party or MPP) and its former cadres, transparency of elections, and corruption and nepotism all appear frequently in popular media.²² The level of controversy surrounding the nature of Mongolia's democracy became international news during riots and burning of the MPP headquarters following 2008 parliamentary elections.²³ The protests themselves remain contested as opinions differ of whether they were truly a reflection of election issues or an amalgam or fermentation of many other, less well-defined socio economic issues or, more conspiratorially some form of incited violence designed to force a change in parliamentary representation.²⁴ To take the most pragmatic definition, the term here has been used to refer to '...a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives...'²⁵ The term is also taken to incorporate the basic philosophy of democracy being the participation of a majority of the population in government via election. The usage of phrases such as 'the arrival of democracy' and 'the democratic period' throughout this work indicates the temporal period from the 1990 elections to the present. By questioning how museum activities reflect influences in contemporary Mongolia two questions arise: what are the *influences* and how do they relate to *Mongolian identity*. Both cannot be defined succinctly, as indicated by the plethora of literature, both domestic and foreign regarding contemporary Mongolia and its people.²⁶ Clearly in asking the question of any person what they perceive as 'influences', the answers will vary. They may for example be political, social, economic environmental, positive or negative, pressing or historic, depending upon the person's situation, knowledge and biases. Considered through the rubric of post-socialist studies Mongolia demonstrates some synergies broadly affecting the nation and national identity with other post-socialist transitioning states, which are a useful

²² Mongolian People's Party, 'Our Party',

<<http://www.mpp.mn/en/page/detail/name/Party+History>>, retrieved 27 June 2013.

²³ These events are described succinctly in G. Delaplace, Kaplonski & Sneath, 'The End Of Post-Socialism? An Account of the 1st of July Riots in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia,' *Inner Asia*, vol. 10, no. 2, Cambridge University, 2008, pp. 353–365.

²⁴ Delaplace, Kaplonski & Sneath, op. cit.

²⁵ Oxford Dictionaries, <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/democracy>>, retrieved 6 June 2013.

²⁶ Discussed in chapter two.

starting point.²⁷ Political readjustment, economic instability and the effects of the free market, social issues such as the revival of religion and ethnicity and the re-assessment of the nation's identity based on historical precedents and contemporary aspirations are common national issues across the post-socialist spectrum and Mongolia is no exception.²⁸

When considering the delimitation of what it is to be true Mongolian, it is not difficult to find a conveniently succinct definition. Building upon Sneath's notion that the extent of Mongolia is the territory bearing that states name, a literal interpretation of what is Mongolian society can be taken to be Mongols who reside within the borders of Mongolia.²⁹ However Mongolia, that is the land of the Mongols has over time had elastic borders both physical and perceived.³⁰ The term Mongolia can relate to a number of geographic historic incarnations, from the areas of Central Asia that tribes of ancient Mongols occupied and are considered the homeland of the Mongols, to the expanding and then retracting borders of the Great Mongol Empire, to medieval Mongol Khanates, to Inner Mongolia now a province of the People's Republic of China and to Russian Buryatia.³¹ People of Mongol ethnicity, race and linguistic connection exist all over the planet, and many are concentrated in areas surrounding Mongolia today such as Inner Mongolia, the Caucasus, Buryatia and Tuva and these lands are considered in some scholarly contexts to be Mongol.³² At the same time, people of varied ethnicity, race and religion exist within the modern Mongolian borders and are considered Mongolian.³³ If 'perceived' Mongolia extends beyond the official geographical borders of contemporary Mongolia, the question of what it is to be Mongol is bound not only in scientific and historical

²⁷ Such as the body of work produced through the SOYUZ Post socialist Cultural Studies Network listed in Bibliography.

²⁸ Bat-Erdene Batbayar (Baabar), *History of Mongolia*, The Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge, Monsudar, Ulaanbaatar, 1999.

²⁹ David Sneath, 'Mapping the Headless State; Rethinking National Populist Concepts of Mongolia', in Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Mapping Mongolia; Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Pennsylvania, 2011.

³⁰ Uradyn Erden Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sechin Jagchid & Paul Heyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1979.

discipline, but in complex notions of identity; collective, national, racial, ethnic, and generational.³⁴ Thus the title of the work *Jinkhin Mongol/True Mongolian*. It is common to hear this term in use when describing a custom or way of life perceived to be old and unique to Mongolia, or a landscape or element of flora or fauna, or climate that Mongols perceive is truly Mongolian. Contemporary notions of *true* Mongolness will be discussed in chapter two as a core tenet of national identity.



Image 1.3
Screen shot from a Mongolian pop video, an example of historic symbolism in use in popular culture Ulaanbaatar, May 2010
Photograph Steven Alderton

Structure

The thesis is in two sections and chapters one to four explore the theoretical and practical contexts of museology in Mongolia as an essential basis for questioning museums today. The second section is a critical analysis of museums as they relate to nationalist narratives and an appraisal of the ways in which museums have changed and why and what that means.

This chapter outlines the research and methodology and proposes the argument that the responses of museums to their new democratic environment have been diverse yet ultimately reflect among themselves

³⁴ Orkhon Myadar, 'Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads', *Inner Asia*, vol. 13, no. 2, Cambridge University, 2011, pp. 335–362; Bulag, op. cit.

similar influences which are generated both domestically and internationally. Museums have been subject to financial instability and the ideological vacuum that the exodus of Soviet influence caused. They have survived through hard work, opportunism and by responding to popular notions of the past. In doing so they have significantly contributed to an unresolved quandary in Mongol identity. That is how to reconcile the darker periods of the past with the perceived glory of ancient steppe culture that culminated in Chinggis Khan and is seen to be embodied in Mongolia's fresh democracy.

The work is written with the underpinning awareness that the reader may be an expert in museums, yet unfamiliar with Mongolia. Therefore the latter part of this chapter includes a brief history of Mongolia up to the twentieth century. This is a simple background as a base upon which to consider Mongolian museums today yet will appear highly simplistic to an expert in Mongol history. In the following very brief general history I explore pre-socialist religious and royal collections demonstrating that a strong, distinct indigenous culture of collecting existed before socialism, regardless of a lack of state support. It also describes some pre-museum collections which were 'museumised' and remain in state control today. By identifying collections and the indigenous keeping culture of *takhilch* (technically a *lama* in charge of sacrificial offerings, although the term is also used in Mongolia today in a broader sense as 'keeper'), I demonstrate that a form of museum did exist in Mongolia before socialism and that this tradition contributed to the socialist museum collections.³⁵

In order to build further upon the foundation of Mongolian history and museum culture up to the twentieth century upon which to consider today's museums, chapter two discusses the multidisciplinary theoretical contexts of this work. I argue that the present-day museums of Mongolia must be considered as products of socialist museology and as contributors to imagining both locally and internationally what is Mongolia. Further, that

³⁵ Charles Bawden, *Mongolian-English Dictionary*, Kegan Paul, London, 1997. Bawden describes *takhilch* as such, yet more recent usages suggest a broader use of the term, for example, Peter Morrow, 'Preserving the Legacy of Danzanravjaa, Lord of the Gobi,' 2002, <<http://danzanravjaa.org/lordofthegobipart1.php>>, retrieved 13 June 2013.

while modern museums have always had pronounced politicisation in Mongolia, it is in recent years that deregulation has led to an influx of soft diplomacy and further political rhetorisation that has significantly impacted the interpretive activities of museums. Though museological, this study is positioned at the intersection of a range of scholarship including post-socialism, national identity and socialist museology. Chapter three completes the foundation for analysis of today's museums by describing and analysing the introduction and proliferation of state museums throughout the twentieth century and couples this with an inventory of historical events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The recent centuries are targeted for two reasons: first because the ancient and middle history of Mongolia have been widely investigated and second because this period corresponds with the arrival and evolution of museums. The historical overview provides a body of knowledge that underpins an understanding of both *museum culture* in Mongolia, as well as the history available to museums as subject matter.

Having laid a foundation for understanding the history and development of museum culture up to the democratic period in chapters one to three, Part Two presents evidence in the form of a case study of four museums' operational and interpretive activities since democracy began. Chapter four explores and analyses the operations and structure of the museums since democracy began and the evolving environment in which they have operated. It argues that the rearrangement of museums themselves, funding precariousness and their unprecedented ability to interact with foreign partners heavily, yet initially haphazardly assisted growth and development, but in areas linked to popular, political and historic themes. The notion of a dichotomy in representation of Mongol identity is extrapolated in chapters six and seven. It is linked to two meta-themes: the imagined place of the ancient states and traditional culture in the legitimisation of contemporary democracy and conversely the place of difficult subject matter as embodied by the Manchu and socialist periods in national identity.

Chapter five critiques recently installed interpretive displays of the NMM and the Mongolian Statehood Museum arguing that ancient and middle history, as well as traditional life and culture are constructed as a unified

continuum deployed to both legitimise Mongolian democracy and underpin a notion of 'true' Mongolian as embodied in the past and alive and reinvigorated in the present. This chapter takes the comparison further and concludes by comparing the National and Statehood Museums with the level and nature of reinterpretation of traditional culture and religion at the Winter Palace Museum. The chapter concludes that in the context of this museum the aestheticisation of religious objects and buildings and the celebration of the culture and religiosity of the successive Bogd Khaans reflects a broader social and political revival of Buddhism as 'true' Mongolian and in so doing concurs with that of its museum counterparts.

Chapter six analyses the way in which museums have revised periods of ambiguous or uncomfortable history from the seventeenth century to the present day. The interpretive activities of the NMM pertaining to the Manchu period, early twentieth-century independence (referred to throughout as the Bogd Khaan state) and socialism are analysed. The socialist period is discussed in detail as are the purges because related displays at the Victims Museum are comparatively analysed to ascertain connections. The chapter argues that the way in which the NMM and the Victims Museum have depicted the socialist period and political repressions makes them the least resolved in the meta-narrative. By contrast to the ancient states, the Great Mongol Empire and traditional culture, the Manchu and socialist periods remain marginalised while glorification of the periods of independence under the Bogd Khaan and the democratic period substantially link them to the broader narrative of progress.

Chapter seven briefly summarises the argument and draws conclusions that the museums of Mongolia have developed rapidly in a short period of time and been heavily influenced by external forces, both local and international. The museums today owe a great debt to socialist museology and in particular continue to deploy archaeology and anthropological collections as evidence upon which to construct notions of continuous development, uniqueness and legitimacy. The withdrawal of Soviet influence in the late twentieth century left museums with an unprecedented ideological deficit and deregulated environment that was rapidly filled by international soft diplomacy that

reflected popular, western notions of Mongolia as ancient, exotic, mysterious land. This in turn was manifested in the collecting activities, display renovations, international exhibitions and interpretive activities of the museums.

However, more recently the situation of 'imagining from without' has been supplanted by a more powerful imagining from within fostered explicitly by the anniversary celebrations of the Great Mongol Empire and the birth of Chinggis Khan coupled with growth in economic security.³⁶ The critical question of who owns Mongolia's history has been addressed. In response to nationalistic fervour and the political invention of the notion of modern Mongolia as the product of lineage from ancient times, as well as in response to more secure financial circumstances museums have taken up the role of leading in fostering notions of linkage and 'real' Mongolian. The side effect of this is that periods of less popular or politically, ideologically, popularly useful history have remained marginalised or ambiguously presented. Investigating the under-studied, specific convergence of place and time that Mongolian museums represent addresses the need for critical analysis that contributes to the international framework that seeks to understand the relationship of museums to society. The tension and connection between the extent and manner to which museums apply contemporary museological theory and museography and how museums engage with the contexts in which they are received is universal.³⁷ While they strive to collect, conserve and protect material and intangible heritage and to research and represent history accurately, museums are organisations that exist in the real world and are subject to the academic, popular, financial and situational contexts upon which they rely for existence. Further, though museums construct exhibitions

³⁶ Boldbaatar J., 'The eight-hundredth Anniversary of Chinggis Khan: The Revival and Suppression of Mongolian National Consciousness' in Kotkin & Elleman (eds), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century; Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999.

³⁷ André Desvallées & François Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*, International Council of Museums, 2010, <http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Key_Concepts_of_Museology/Museologie_Anglais_BD.pdf>, retrieved 30 June 2013.

and programs designed to transmit and interpret knowledge the transmission is complicated by the biases and beliefs of the viewer.³⁸

It is how the museums of Mongolia have negotiated and responded to their context and in turn what messages they convey that is the central subject matter for the thesis. Per capita, Mongolia has a rich network of public museums and some private ones.³⁹ There are more than forty public museums in Mongolia, which is considerable for a population of just over 2.8 million.⁴⁰ The museums of Mongolia are not high profile in the international museum community and extremely low in profile in popular knowledge. Yet they are responsible for caring for the world's most important collections of objects and research materials pertaining to the centre of Asia and the history of the Mongols, the peoples who created the largest contiguous land empire in world history. The material heritage of the Mongol lands and people, due to its geographical centrality and imperial nature pertains to other great world empires such as Hunnu, Turkic, Persian, Chinese and Russian as well as to the cultures of the Indian sub-continent and east to Iran. These collections have added significance as they represent world historical themes that link Asia to Europe and represent key moments in the development of humans, their relationship to the environment and the development of global exchange.⁴¹ Mongolia also holds significant natural history collections from prehistoric times, including some of the world's most important Palaeolithic specimens. In the past two decades, amid the country's economic devastation and social upheaval the museums have sought to uphold this impressive

³⁸ E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum, Media, Message*, Routledge, London, 2002.

³⁹ Ganganchimeg Aviraa, 'Role of Military Museum of Mongolia in Society', paper delivered at Museums and Human Rights Federation of International Human Rights Museums Third Conference, Liverpool, 9 October 2012, <<http://www.fihrm.org/conference/documents/MilitarymuseumMongolia.pdf>>, retrieved 13 June 2013. In January 2013 the Mongolian Ministry for Culture, Sport and Tourism announced a major new 'Dinosaur Museum' would be installed in Ulaanbaatar in the building that once housed the Lenin Museum.

⁴⁰ Government of Mongolia, Official Tourism website, 'Discover Mongolia', <<http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/page/348/>>, retrieved 6 February 2013.

⁴¹ Urtnasan N., *Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape*, Khotula, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

responsibility by engaging internationally and seeking to improve collections, research and capacity.⁴²

While the museums of Mongolia are the subject of developing Mongol scholarship, bringing scholarly research to the English speaking world provides a link to the international community. Analysis of these museums contributes material for future studies, critiques and comparison to themselves and to their colleagues internationally through the nexus of thought about national museums, museums and identity and museums and post-socialism. It considers how soft diplomacy, popular culture and politics impact in the museums of a transition economy and identifies that financial and ideological and curatorial challenge can lead to external influences significantly shaping museums.⁴³ While museum staff have sought from within to adhere to rigorous research and methodological improvement, the power of the national identity reinvention underway in Mongolia has until recently overridden this. The lack of attention in this case to recent and difficult history demonstrates in its simplest form a lesser regard for the physical manifestations (objects) of the recent past, which may become a significant short coming if allowed continue unchecked. In a more complex way, the lack of regard demonstrates profound difficulties in reconciling the recent past with the present in the new narrative.

While this situation has abated in recent years, the legacy of the period of financial instability will endure in museums due to the longevity of their permanent exhibitions and to its impact on what has been collected. As Mongolia democratises, privatises and engages with the free world market, its museums synergise with international trends such as increasing competition for funds and pressure to commercialise in order to produce income.⁴⁴ In asking what role museums are playing in contemporary

⁴² Three sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2003 and another ten submitted to the tentative list. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 'Mongolia', <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/MN/>>, retrieved 6 August 2013.

⁴³ Timothy Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

⁴⁴ For example Simon J. Knell, *Museums in the Material World*, Routledge, New York, 2007; Knell, MacLeod & Watson (eds), *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, Routledge, 2007; Karp, Kratz, Szwaja & Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Duke University Press, 2006.

Mongolian society, the study raises further questions about the role and relevance of museums that should be a critical area for contemplation by staff, administrators and politicians. To engage prudently with society it is essential that Mongolian museums self-analyse and understand existing institutional history and culture within the international museological context in order to have an awareness of significance and plan strategic and sustainable futures. This dissertation brings to the fore the question of the power relationship between museums and global society and recognises Mongolian museums as key negotiators of this field.

History of Mongolia to 1924

The history of Mongolia is long and complex, and has been told by several eminent scholars, both Mongol and foreign.⁴⁵ This work does not seek to emulate these, but in assuming the reader has little knowledge of Mongolia, a brief inventory of events based on these experts work is included here. These events are listed as they underpin an understanding of where museums fit in Mongol history. They also signpost what history is available to museums to be interpreted. Due to the perceived grand, exotic nature of Mongolia histories until recently have often been focused on grand and mythical ages:

The great conqueror, Jenghiz [sic] Khan, the son of sad, stern, severe Mongolia, according to an old Mongolian legend ‘mounted to the top of Karasu Togol and with the eyes of an eagle looked to the west and the east. In the west he saw whole seas of human blood over which floated a bloody fog that blanketed all the horizon. There he could not discern his fate. But the gods ordered him to proceed to the west, leading with him all his warriors and Mongolian tribes. To the east he saw wealthy towns, shining temples, crowds of happy people, gardens and fields of rich earth, all of which pleased the great Mongol. He said to his sons: ‘There in the west I shall be fire and sword, destroyer,

⁴⁵ See Bibliography for both Mongol and foreign scholarship. A discussion of the evolution of Mongolian scholarship follows in chapter three.

avenging Fate; in the east, I shall come as the merciful, great builder, bringing happiness to the people and to the land.’⁴⁶

Dr Ferdinand Ossendowski, a Polish scientist, recounts a grand legend invoked from history in his writings about Mongolia in the 1920s. From the time of Chinggis Khan, the name of the Mongols has been associated in the Western world with images of marauding mounted hordes of central Asia and the Great Mongol Empire. In reality that grand age of Mongolian legend was relatively short-lived, and only a brief segment of a complex history of shifting tribal alliances, unity and self-determination, imperialism and domination of, and equally by other cultures. The history of Mongolia is rich and diverse and lends itself to ongoing scholarship and to mythmaking. Chinggis Khan and his imperial successors are the subjects of scholarship, particularly in nations that were conquered or threatened by the spread of the Great Mongol Empire which at its height stretched from central Europe to the Middle East.⁴⁷ Until the fall of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in 1368 the Mongols were a major power in Asia and Europe.⁴⁸ In 1755, most of the Mongol tribes in the territories now known as Inner and Outer Mongolia came under the rule of the Qing Dynasty and for the next two hundred years Mongolia was ruled as a vassal province.⁴⁹ The Qing were not Chinese, but ethnically Manchu, yet maintained the capital of the empire at Khanbalik near present-day Beijing, where Khubilai Khan had located the capital of his own empire five centuries earlier.⁵⁰

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Manchu imperial power was waning and relations with Mongolia were increasingly strained. Long-term Mongolian disaffection with taxation, oppression and the perceived subsuming of Mongolia into China was exacerbated by the Qing Empress Xia Xia’s policy issued in 1900 to encourage increased Chinese settlement in Mongolia and foster assimilation of the Mongols through inter-marriage.⁵¹ Two hundred years of direct rule and the influence of Manchu culture on the

⁴⁶ F. Ossendowski, *Beasts, Men and Gods*, Nuvision Publications, 2006, p. 143.

⁴⁷ For example Baabar, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 59–64.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Mongols had transformed the physical landscape of Mongolia by initiating the extension of sedentary settlement.⁵² Chinese businesses and trade dominated in Mongolia and a large population of native Chinese had taken up permanent residence. Cultural practices had altered and been influenced by Qing rule.⁵³ The traditional dress and appearance of the Mongols had been altered such that the Mongols wore Manchu style hair braids and had attached a stiff upright collar to their once collarless *del* (national dress).⁵⁴

Politically the Qing had remodelled the social and governmental structure of Mongolia by dividing Mongolia into administrative districts that did not match traditional tribal boundaries, to concur with its own feudal administrative structure and to undermine Mongolian tradition.⁵⁵ Qing officials presided at upper administrative levels over a large underclass, a majority being nomadic herders with high illiteracy rates.⁵⁶ During this period the Tibetan Buddhism flourished, arguably fostered by the Qing as a form of pacification.⁵⁷ Buddhism had been recognised in Mongolia since the Yuan Dynasty of Khubilai Khan, and further strengthened in 1578 when the head of the burgeoning Gelugpa School was invited to visit Mongolia.⁵⁸ The Manchu fostered the growth of monasteries to the point where, by the turn of the twentieth century it has been estimated that there were 113 000 mostly male *lamas* in Mongolia and 750 Buddhist monasteries.⁵⁹ In the Urga (renamed Ulaanbaatar in 1924) area alone there were approximately one hundred temples of varying sizes and importance.⁶⁰

By 1900 Buddhism was the dominant religion in Mongolia intertwined with ancient pre-existing Shamanist beliefs and practices.⁶¹ In terms of cultural geography it has been suggested that Qing policy actively sought to move the

⁵² N. Tsultem, *Mongolian Architecture*, State Publishing House, Ulaanbaatar, 1988.

⁵³ Baabar, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Baabar, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 71–74.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Tsultem, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Z. Majer & K. Teleki, *Monasteries and Temple of Bogdiin Kuree, Ikh Kuree or Urga, the Old Capital City of Mongolia in the First Part of the Twentieth Century*, unpublished report, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, pp. 10–11.

⁶¹ Ibid.

spiritual and symbolic capital of the once great Mongol Empire away from Kharakhorum and the Orkhon Valley to expedite the extension of Buddhism.⁶² To this end the provincial town Ikh Huree was gradually shifted eastward approximately twenty times in two hundred years to within the valley of the River Tuul, settling in its current location in 1855.⁶³ The Qing concentrated its administrative and political bureaucracy in Urga under the oversight of the Manchu Amban (Governor) and the town grew.⁶⁴ The Qing also stationed major outposts in western Mongolia at Ulaiastai and Khovd townships.⁶⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century Mongolia was populated by approximately 700 000 peoples of nomadic tribes of predominantly Mongol ethnicity.⁶⁶ Most observed traditional herder lifestyles in the sparsely populated environments of Mongolia; sub-Siberian *taiga* (woodlands), the *tal* (grasslands) of the eastern steppe, the Gobi desert and the Altai Khangai mountain range.⁶⁷ Aspects of Mongolian culture such as nomadic animal husbandry, hunting and life in the *ger* had endured since at least the Bronze Age.⁶⁸

⁶² Baabar, op. cit., p. 74.

⁶³ Majer & Teleki, op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁴ Tsultem, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, pp. 135–187.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 6–9.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Baabar, op. cit., pp. 59–92.



Image 1.4

Countryside scene with *ger*, Mongols and their horses, c. 1930s–1950
 British Museum Endangered Archives, ‘EAP264: Preservation through
 digitisation of rare photographic negatives from
 Mongolia’, <http://eap.bl.uk/database/large_image.a4d?digrec=751485;r=32439>, retrieved 13 November 2013

Urga was commonly described by foreign observers as an exotic and far-flung place, a remote trading town clustered around the Gandantegchinlen Buddhist monastery which was surrounded by smaller temples and foreign trade, administrative and residential *ger* districts.⁶⁹ It is often described as having a distinctly religious character, which Ossendowski described as: ‘the city of monks, sacred and revered throughout all the east...’⁷⁰

It was into this unique environment that socialism was introduced in 1924. Subsequently, for almost seventy years Mongolia was influenced by Soviet policies and permeated by Russian culture that resulted in yet another wave of change to its physical, cultural, political and spiritual landscapes.⁷¹ The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are the least infamous periods of Mongolian history, yet are highly significant to Mongol culture, as for the first time the culture of the West was overlayed upon this intensely Eastern

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ossendowski, op. cit., p. 171.

⁷¹ Irina Y. Morozova, *The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Revolutions In Asia, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, 2009.

place. One tangible result of this period among extensive transformation was the introduction and proliferation of state-funded museums which were deployed throughout the socialist period as vehicles for disseminating the ideology of state and legitimising its actions.

In 1989, popular revolutions that had begun in Poland spread to other European socialist countries, precipitating the demise of already beleaguered regimes. Reports of acts of civil resistance in Eastern Bloc countries resonated in Western media and within three years thirteen nations had abandoned socialism and begun to attempt to implement varying forms of social democracy.⁷² While transformation of the European east and the dissolution of the once mighty Soviet Union were observed eagerly as heralding a new world order, countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East were also transitioning but with less world attention. Peacefully and discreetly among these was Mongolia, which had been the first country after Russia to adopt socialism in 1924, decades before many of its European counterparts. Ironically it was among the first nations to jettison these ideologies at the close of the century.⁷³ In 1990, following a series of peaceful protests and political manoeuvrings, the first ever multi-party parliamentary elections were held.⁷⁴ As a result of transition to democracy the power of panoramic accuracy that Soviet museology fostered was sundered and the new political ideology permitted discursive dialogues. Mongolia's peaceful revolution contrasted with those of some socialist alumni worldwide, yet in the aftermath of the elections and transition to democracy Mongolia shared significant similarities: rapid, seismic, and painful change.⁷⁵

Museums before 1924

Considering the nature of the historically recent institution that is a museum questions the compulsions underlying collecting, storing, exhibiting and

⁷² *Socialist Revolutions in Asia*, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, various publication dates.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Baabar, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Boldbaatar J., op. cit.

exalting material culture. There is no evidence that any state museums fitting contemporary definitions existed in Mongolia until the socialist period.⁷⁶ Mongols have a strong system of Shamanistic belief rooted in spiritual connections to the natural environment and elements of the landscape.⁷⁷ Moveable elements, such as carved stones, were revered in connection to place, and not considered for relocation and interpretation beyond the religious/spiritual realm. As a museum is a public place the feudal structure of Mongolian society, based around nomadic family groups, did not lend itself to centralised public keeping places and as vassal province of the Qing Dynasty, it is known that state generosity did not extend to fostering cultural or educational excellence for peasants.⁷⁸ Finally and importantly Eastern perceptions of the Western museum were recent in what is now China, and were nuanced with perspectives based on observation of the phenomena of development that was the antithesis of the Manchu goal of subordination of Mongolia.⁷⁹

Though no museums by contemporary definition had been created in Mongolia until the second decade of the twentieth century, this was not a result of any lack of available indigenous cultural and natural materials of the order that were being collected and displayed in museums around the world at the time. Mongol culture is ancient and has produced a range of materially refined art forms and intricate objects of religion and everyday life that would have made for a fine museum.⁸⁰ Traditional costume was diverse among ethnic groups, and across social status and gender and between geographical regions and seasons. The arts of embroidery, jewellery making, personal adornment, and costume making have been developed and honed, and were clearly alive at the turn of the twentieth century. The sophistication of the nomadic herder lifestyle produced a wide range of animal husbandry

⁷⁶ ICOM Statutes, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Sukhbaatar H.O., *Sacred Sites of Mongolia*, publication of Alliance of Religion and Conservation, World Wildlife Fund Mongolia, The World Bank & Gandantegchinlen Monastery, Ulaanbaatar, 2001.

⁷⁸ Baabar, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Wan-Chen Chang, 'A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Musealization: The Museum's Reception by China and Japan in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Museum and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, University of Leicester, March 2012, pp. 15–27.

⁸⁰ Tsultem N., *Mongolian Arts and Crafts*, State Publishing House, Ulaanbaatar, 1987.

traditions with associated accoutrements.⁸¹ Centuries of nomadic tribal movements and war had necessitated the creation of innovative armour and weaponry that remains legendary today. Arts such as story, song and music were also ancient traditions. Within Buddhism, the written word was an art form and sculptural representation integral.⁸² Alongside man-made material culture, Mongolia is rich with numerous significant sites and materials related to the evolution of man and traces of ancient civilisations, in addition to early incarnations of flora and fauna internationally recognised as some of the finest scientific specimens.⁸³

The following section will give examples of collections that demonstrate the power of the traditional collecting culture. This wealth of material and its potential for being collected is borne out in two well documented examples of proto museums existing at the turn of the twentieth century: The Winter Palace and Khamaryn Monastery. These collections act as a fascinating comparison to the style of museums that the socialist government was to introduce in the 1920s and demonstrate the existence of an indigenous collecting and exhibiting culture. They are described below as rich examples of collections that still exist in museums today, but for contrasting reasons. The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan partially survived as it was deployed for propaganda purposes and the Khamaryn Monastery collection survived as it was saved from inevitable destruction by the local community indicating the level of esteem in which it was held.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tsultem N., op. cit.

⁸³ Fitzhugh Green, *Roy Chapman Andrews: Dragon Hunter*, The Knickerbocker Press, New York & London, 1930.

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan



Image 1.5

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, Ulaanbaatar 1930s
British Museum Endangered Archives, 'EAP264: Preservation through
digitisation of rare photographic negatives from
Mongolia' <http://eap.bl.uk/database/large_image.a4d?digrec=751485;r=32439>, retrieved 13 November 2013

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan is a royal and religious collection that exemplifies the existence of a compulsion to collect and exhibit that predated socialism. Unlike many religious sites in Mongolia substantial parts of the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan survived deliberate destruction during the socialist period and also the chaotic post-socialist period and are extant and today a major museum.⁸⁴ Ossendowski recorded in the 1920s observations made in Mongolia during and after the independence revolution.⁸⁵ In 1921 he was in Urga, the capital of a Mongolia in turmoil on the verge of revolution. Ossendowski stayed for 'half a year' and recorded his reflections about audiences with the head of state the Bogd Khaan at his

⁸⁴ Majer & Teleki, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–30; The Choijin Lama Temple in Ulaanbaatar was also converted into a museum, but its collection was predominantly religious and practical objects, rather than objects of curiosity. Many other monasteries partially survived (such as Gandantegchinlen), but were shut down or abandoned.

⁸⁵ Ossendowski, *op. cit.*

Winter Palace on the edge of the town.⁸⁶ Ossendowski describes his first sighting of the Palace as such:

At last before our eyes the abode of the Living Buddha! At the foot of Bogdo-Ol [mountain] behind white walls rose a white Tibetan building covered with greenish-blue tiles that glittered under the sunshine.⁸⁷

The Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu (the Bogd Khaan) was born in Tibet, installed on the throne on 29 December 1911 at the time of the founding of the Mongol state and declaration of Mongolia's independence from Qing rule.⁸⁸ The Palace was the winter seat of highest authority, and contained offices of upper level government and religious hierarchy as well as the official residence to which important visitors were permitted access. Built between 1893 and 1903, the Palace complex was an ensemble of temples, offices, gardens, residences and outbuildings surrounded by a wall punctuated by practical and ceremonial gates.⁸⁹ While many of Ossendowski's observations are about the character and political actions of the Bogd Khaan himself, and about events and life in Urga, some are of the contents of the Winter Palace:

During my stay in Urga I visited the abode of the Living Buddha several times...I saw him reading horoscopes, I heard his predictions, I looked over his archives of ancient books and the manuscripts containing the lives and predictions of all of the Bogdo [sic] Khans.⁹⁰

...motorcars, gramophones, telephones, crystals, porcelains, pictures, perfumes, musical instruments, rare animals and birds; elephants, Himalayan bears, monkeys, Indian snakes and parrots, these were all in the palace of 'the god'...It was a most unique Museum of precious

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 169–266.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

⁸⁸ Emgent Ookhnoi Batsaikhan, *Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, The Last King Of Mongolia*, Institute of International Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

articles, here were gathered together rare objects unknown to the Museums of Europe.⁹¹

While recounting what he witnessed in the Palace, Ossendowski records dealings with the ‘treasurer’ of the Palace and the ‘librarian’.⁹² He describes a collection of objects, art works and manuscripts arranged by type and grouped together and on display, in state ownership and being guided through the collections by enthusiastic staff.⁹³ In one sense, he is describing a traditional palace collection – an archive of objects and manuscripts related to or collected by successions of sovereign rulers. Ossendowski is also describing a museum. While he clearly views what he sees in the Palace through Western eyes using jargon such as ‘museum’, ‘archive’, ‘library’, ‘department’, ‘exhibits’, and ‘treasurer’; what he describes can be taken as evidence of a proto-museum within Mongolia that housed state-owned objects and presented Mongolian history.⁹⁴

Ossendowski describes how the Palace ‘treasurer’:

...showed the exhibits and talked of them for a long time, and evidently enjoyed the telling. And really it was wonderful! Before my eyes lay the bundles of rare furs; white beaver, black sables, white, blue and black fox and black panthers; small beautifully carved tortoise shell boxes containing *hatyks* [ceremonial scarves] ten or fifteen yards long, woven from Indian silk as fine as the webs of spider; small bags of golden thread filled with pearls,...In a separate room stood the cases with statues of Buddha, made from gold, silver, bronze, ivory, coral, mother of pearl and from rare colored [sic] pieces of fragrant wood...Some rooms were devoted to the library, where manuscripts and volumes of different epochs...fill the shelves....one department is devoted to the mysterious books on magic, the historical lives and works of all thirty-one living Buddhas...⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 200–201.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

In effect, the functions of the Palace staff somewhat accord with those of modern museum staff. Further, Ossendowski relates how the Bogd Khaan recounted a history of Mongolian Buddhism explaining that a holy *lama* was brought to Mongolia from Tibet establishing a continuous lineage of living Buddhas residing in Urga.⁹⁶ The Bogd Khaan reportedly explained that the ring of Chinggis Khan and his grandson Khubilai Khan was given to the first Bogd Khaan and had been kept in that line of succession. At the conclusion of the telling of the story, the Bogd Khaan instructed his staff to show this ring to Ossendowski, and it is described in some detail as ‘a large gold ring set with a magnificent ruby carved with the sign of the swastika.’⁹⁷ This anecdote is interesting as the ring is used as a visible symbol to contextualise the legitimacy of the new ruler in the ancient lineage. By telling the story and showing and interpreting the ring the Bogd Khaan elevates it from simple precious treasure in the state coffers to a material link to ancient Mongol history. Secondly, the Bogd Khaan revives the name of Chinggis Khan and his successors in justification of the lineage and legitimacy of Buddhism in Mongolia and the freedom/independence of the Mongols.⁹⁸

During the twentieth century, the fortunes of the name of Chinggis Khan would be mixed. His name would be suppressed during the socialist period for exactly the reasons the Bogd Khaan had framed it in 1921, and would be revived again in myriad ways after 1990. The appropriation of the name of Chinggis Khan for legitimisation of the national identity of the Mongols would flourish again, widely and rapidly at the end of the twentieth century. It would be reflected in the reinterpretations of the displays of the NMM, the Statehood Museum and more broadly in popular culture. Ossendowski’s observations of the Palace demonstrate that a keeping place for national history existed in Mongolia before European style museums were introduced. The anecdotes of Ossendowski demonstrate a history defined through Buddhism, and actively in use for legitimisation of the then ruler.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ This anecdote was discussed with the new Director of the Winter Palace Museum in May 2010 and he knew nothing of the story or of the whereabouts of the ring.

Khamaryn Monastery

Unlike the Winter Palace, Khamaryn Monastery in the east Gobi desert, which is also well documented, did not survive the purges.⁹⁹ Hundreds of religious and noble sites such as palaces, temples, and lamaseries existed across the Mongolian territory which also held collections that contributed to preserving the past, but due to destruction of temples and confiscations few examples remain.¹⁰⁰ Khamaryn Monastery was established by Lama Danzanravjaa, a Buddhist writer and educator in 1821. Not a simple monastery, Danzanravjaa incorporated an inclusive school, a theatre, library and an 'exhibition temple' which is now considered by some to be Mongolia's first museum.¹⁰¹ The temple contained up to 10 000 objects including those collected by Danzanravjaa during his travels, gifts from guests, objects from the Gobi and artworks and writings produced by Danzanravjaa himself.¹⁰² The collection included works on paper, coated images on paper, documents, prayer books, costumes (including masks), hats and boots, metal, wood and eventually the remains of Danzanravjaa.¹⁰³ All of the temple buildings were destroyed during the purges of 1938. In recent years, the remarkable story of the survival of the collection has come to light. This story highlights the esteem in which the collections have been held as objects representing a major spiritual leader and also complex practice of keeping or curation.¹⁰⁴

When Danzanravjaa died of poisoning in 1856 his assistant, Balshinchoijoo packed the collections and stored them in two temple buildings for their protection from Manchu imperial authorities. This act initiated a tradition called *takhilch* in this case by which a male of successive generations accepts sworn responsibility for secretly caring for the collections.¹⁰⁵ Balshinchoijoo

⁹⁹ Peter Morrow, 'Preserving the Legacy of Danzanravjaa, Lord of the Gobi,' 2002. <<http://danzanravjaa.org/lordofthegobipart1.php>>, retrieved 13 June 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Sukhbaatar O., *Sacred Sites of Mongolia*, WWF Mongolia/ARC, Ulaanbaatar, 2001: Majer & Teleki, op. cit., pp. 44–182.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Sarah McHugh, *General Conservation Survey of Danzanravjaa Museum*, Ulaanbaatar, November 2004. <<http://danzanravjaa.org/museum.php>>, retrieved 16 September 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Morrow, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

eventually handed this responsibility to his great great great grandson, Tudev. In 1938, during the purges Tudev predicted the socialists would come to destroy the temples and confiscate objects so secretly, during sixty-four nights he packed as many of the objects as he could into crates and buried them underground away from the temple complex.¹⁰⁶ He revealed their whereabouts to his grandson Altangerel who in turn kept the secret until 1990.¹⁰⁷ When the socialist government fell and the local community had embarked upon rebuilding two temples at Khamaryn Monastery, Altangerel revealed his role and allowed the exhumation initially of eight of the sixty-four crates so that their contents could return to display in the rebuilt museum.¹⁰⁸



Image 1.6
Khamaryn Monastery, Sainshand Aimag, south Gobi 2011
Photograph Tsend

The original ‘museum’ of Danzanravjaa was established as part of a cultural and religious teaching centre, so was a ‘public collection’ in the sense that it was owned by a monastery, not a private individual. One of the three regulations of the oath of the *takhilch* stated that the items at the temple were not personal property but belong to all Mongols.¹⁰⁹ This embodies the contemporary idea of the museum as place to keep and display objects and also to educate.¹¹⁰ The story of the survival of the collections illustrates a tradition of keeping and conservation of museum objects growing out of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

reverence for objects of spiritual and cultural significance and associated with a revered religious person. The tradition of *takhilch*, a finely crafted form of oral tradition was not exclusive to the Danzanravjaa collection but used widely across Mongolia among religious and family keepers during the socialist period.¹¹¹ While this tradition is not indicative of pre-socialist Mongolia having a museum heritage, it is indicative of a method for preserving material culture that also ascribes interpretive value to the material culture of the past.

Conclusion

This chapter has approached the argument in two parts. The first section outlined the genesis for the research, how the research was conducted and the methodology employed. It put forward the argument that the museums will be approached as objects and unravelled using a detailed case study constructed around two themes in the current Mongolian identity discussion. The second section of this introductory chapter has identified a history of keeping culture in Mongolia that preceded socialism and created some of the collections that exist in museums today. By providing two examples of indigenous keeping culture the chapter demonstrated that material heritage has been recognised over time thus and it was into an already complex environment that socialist style museums were introduced in 1924. Having historically contextualised museums, the next chapter theoretically situates them among areas of relevant scholarship. The chapter explores how scholars of museums have unravelled notions of museums and identity and of museology in general and how this informs a study of Mongolian museums.

¹¹¹ While working at the National Museum of Mongolia I witnessed several times countryside families arriving to meet the ethnography curator with objects that they had ‘dug up’ and wanted to either sell or donate to the Museum; Greywynn Smith, ‘The Spirit Banner of Chinggis Khan’, March 17, 2012, unpublished paper emailed to author 15 January 2014.

Chapter II

Theorising Mongolia's Museums

In this dissertation the way in which history is deployed in museums to contribute to national identity in post-socialist states is the key theoretical problem. Thus the theoretical context of the study is fundamentally interdisciplinary and is positioned at the intersection of more than one complex debates. When considering where to usefully situate this thesis within current scholarship three contexts converge – museology and identity and post-socialism and identity and Mongolian studies. Drawing aspects of these areas of scholarship that relate to cultural appropriation together they form the lens through which to conduct critical analysis of Mongolian museums. Identifying these theoretical debates is, however, merely a tentative step as each has its own history and evolution, and contains layers of thematic discussion, some of higher relevance than others. While museums are widely considered to be key purveyors of historical knowledge and contributors to a sense of self and nation, Mongolian museums' contributions remain significantly under analysed.¹

As there is no body of scholarship about Mongolian museums it is necessary to identify points of convergence in global scholarship that can be applied. While there is a substantial, sophisticated history of the study of museums the situation in Mongolia has unique characteristics, as every nation does, that make geo-specific study necessary. The overriding implication of this is that while museums have developed a lively culture of research, exhibitions and education, scrutiny of the ideology and politics underpinning decision making and narrative construction is lacking. Being a curator, I have personal experience of the reality that not all museum professionals operate through an academic rubric and that often practical considerations far outweigh scholarly. However, critical appraisal of the meta-meanings of these day-to-

¹ Flora Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves': The Role of Objects in National Identity*, Leicester University Press, London, New York, 1994, p. 3.

day processes means museums can guard against operating with underdeveloped or opaque ideological foundations. This creates a platform from which to understand the unique characteristics of the museums and their role in contemporary society.

The lack of museological debate about Mongolian museums reflects the broader problem of the ‘fall through the cracks’ tendency regarding Mongolia itself.² Mongolists operate through a range of disciplines which are often concurrent with inter-border world themes such as post-socialist studies, Tibetan Buddhism, Asian and Chinese studies, anthropology and linguistics.³ The problematic place of Mongolia in area studies remains a concern for scholars who recognise the historical tendency for Mongolia to fall between academic borders and thus be overlooked.⁴ While Mongolia has historically retained this problematic place, Kotkin and Elleman remind us that rather than being between the academic borders it should be more central. They note significant themes in world history have been played out in Mongolia; the expansion of socialism that eventuated in the demarcation of a Sino-Russian frontier, the fate of pastoral nomadism in modern times, the spread of Chinese settlement in Asia, the defeat of Japanese ambitions in Asia and the creation and subjugation of buffer states.⁵ In doing so they recognise that the ‘travails of the Mongols’ offer ‘many insights into fundamental issues of today’s world’.⁶ Kotkin ascribes the problem to the position between China and the Russian Federation and population sparseness meaning its history will always be ‘up for grabs’ among ‘state builders’ on its borders.⁷ Now, in the twenty-first century, ‘third neighbours’ join the confluence of imagining from without. In predicting that the

² Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2011; Shagdaryn Bira ‘Mongolian Historical Writing from 1200 to 1700’, John R. Krueger (trans.), *Studies on East Asia*, vol. 24, Centre for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2002 and ‘Historiography Among the Mongols’, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2000.

³ The Bibliography in this dissertation provides a snapshot of the range of approaches.

⁴ Sabloff, op. cit.; Stephen Kotkin, ‘In Search of the Mongols and Mongolia: A Multinational Odyssey’, in Kotkin & Elleman (eds), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999, p. 3.

⁵ Kotkin, op. cit.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

‘...inescapable international character of Mongolian history seems destined to continue’ Kotkin and Elleman define the eclectic nature of Mongolian studies.⁸

While not dwelling on the place of the work of Edward Said the relevance of the notion of *Orientalism* is important.⁹ While debate has developed and become more complex since Said first applied the notion and cross-cultural understanding has been enriched, Mongolian historiography has a strong and continuing tradition of Western research involvement and thus perspectives.¹⁰ This work, like so many that have gone before perpetuates the ‘internationalist’ tradition but brings new subject matter – museums. It is undertaken by a foreigner and cannot seek to represent a Mongol perspective. Rather, the aim is to consider Mongolian museums in their international scholarly context, the benefit being that Mongolian museums can be added to an ongoing debate about museums in global society. In this study I attempt to consider the museums as members of the international museological community, rather than as curious other.¹¹ This thesis will prove that the ‘international character’ of Mongolian history is keenly reflected in museums in the legacy of socialist museology, the heavy influence of cultural diplomacy and in popular notions of what Mongolia is. Fundamentally, the very existence of Western style museums in Mongolia reflects the ‘internationalisation’ of Mongolian history.¹² As museums are custodians, researchers and presenters of history they are important contributors to this evolving lineage of deployment of history in the construction of collective identity in two, three and sensory dimensions. Therefore, it is critical that they are afforded scholarly attention. Indeed as academia is often manifested in books and journals that are not popularly accessed, museums have a greater reach to general audiences and therefore in shaping popular knowledge. The point of emphasising the cross disciplinary nature of the work is to make clear that the though seemingly discursive, the nexus of the theoretical contexts (Mongolian Museums) is the subject matter of the work.

⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 1978, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Kotkin, op. cit., pp. 3–20.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kotkin, op. cit., p. 18.

Museological Hybridity

When discussing how with its absence of museological scholarship Mongolia relates to discourse about museology a number of complexities emerge. The notion of ‘museum’ has been identified as a product of the West, and the discipline of museology has until recently been West-centric.¹³

Understanding that the Western model was adopted in Asia, scholars have identified that the model was actually an adaptation based on Eastern perceptions.¹⁴ In Asian and other non-Western places museums were introduced during periods of colony or adopted as symbols of modernity and progress.¹⁵ Mongolia was not officially colonised yet it also did not entirely independently seek to choose to explore and emulate Western museums. Rather, Western style museums were introduced through the filter of socialist museology and heavily reliant on Marxist/Leninist ideology.¹⁶ Throughout the greater part of the twentieth century museums were introduced and shaped by socialist policy, with specific disdain for what had gone before.¹⁷ Therefore the museological context for this work is complex; socialist museology, Western museology and the meanings of both in an intensely Eastern place.

Chapter one described the existence of an indigenous keeping culture in Mongolia, but this was not in accord with socialist ‘scientific’ practice and was officially halted meaning socialist museology supplanted rather than became hybrid with this culture. The notion I term museological hybridity in

¹³ For example Tony Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, in Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne (eds), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 1996; G. Kavanagh, *Making Histories in Museums*, Continuum, London, 2005.

¹⁴ For example Wan-Chen Chang, ‘A cross cultural perspective on musealization: the museum’s reception by China and Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century’, *Museum and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, University of Leicester, March 2012, pp. 15–27; Ivan Karp, Corinne Kratz, Lynn Szwaja & Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Duke University Press, 2006.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Irina Morozova, *The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Revolutions In Asia, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 27. Morozova makes a complex case for identifying the level of influence of the Comintern and Russian agencies in Mongolia.

¹⁷ Ibid.; Also evidenced by the destruction of monasteries which were key keeping places and for example, in the dispersal and sale of parts of the collections of the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan.

Mongolia thus transpired in the democratic period.¹⁸ In Mongolia museological hybridity was not a merger of cultural practices rather it was the collision between the existing tenets of socialist museology and the rapid influence of Western museology.

As contemporary debate about museology has its genesis and has been significantly though not exclusively perpetuated in Western traditionally influential or colonial countries, Mongolia has naturally fallen by the wayside.¹⁹ As museological analysis has been extended to traditionally less studied places the complexity of museums globally and their interconnectedness has become a key area of discussion. Reflecting the evolution of museology scholars and curators have sought to redress the imbalance and take a more egalitarian view of museums.²⁰ Scholars have sought to question the applicability of museological thinking to diverse geographies, histories and cultures. In 'Globalization, Profession, Practice' Kreps and colleagues seek to address West-centric models of museology and indeed interpretive perspectives that Kreps argues neglect other cultural models of curation and museum.²¹ By highlighting issues raised by the transplantation of Western museology into non-Western places Kreps considers the Eurocentric nature of museum studies and the impact of 'reproduction' of the Western museum model worldwide.²² Should colonial reproduction be considered with negative connotations such as replication or falsifying then the new museology and the model it purports are problematic. While appropriating Western models, museums in the non-West have also been influenced by local attitudes and traditions.²³ Non-Western practices and curation appropriate for the local context, and the intermingling of these local practices (in Kreps' case religious ceremony in the Museum Balanga in

¹⁸ Karp et al., op. cit.

¹⁹ Greenberg et al., op. cit., pp. 2–3.

²⁰ For example: Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, Routledge, London, 2003; Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum; Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, Altamira Press, Oxford, 2004; Kavanagh, op. cit; Karp et al., op. cit., Sheila Watson, *Museums and their Communities*; Leicester Readers in Museum Studies, Routledge, London, 2007; Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, United Kingdom, 2011.

²¹ Christina Kreps, 'Non-western models of museums and curation in cross-cultural perspective' in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), op. cit.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chang, op. cit.

Indonesia) with Western ones, Kreps argues, results in an effective ‘hybridity’, noting this hybridity is often qualified.²⁴ As in mainstream museological terms the local ‘flavour’ may be viewed as unprofessional or not ‘real’ museum practice there is tendency for the Western model to be accepted as the superior.²⁵ In chapter one the existence of a pre-socialist indigenous museum culture in Mongolia was evidenced and discussed using the case of Khamaryn Monastery.²⁶ It is a tradition that has proved successful yet would be considered ‘unprofessional’ in relation to current aspirations to reach Western standards. The issue in the Mongolian context of applying notions of hybridity is that due to the comprehensively dominant nature of socialist museology traditional practices have not been part of the culture of modern Mongolian museums. Rather the complex case study in chapters four to six demonstrates how strongly and rapidly Western museological influence has recently permeated museums and intermingled with socialist traditions.

The growing awareness of the impact (potentially homogenising, or conversly fostering diversity) of globalisation on museums is a key companion to this thesis because the situation of ‘openness’ in Mongolia corresponds with the acceleration of the spread of ‘technologies of globalisation’ that have occurred in recent decades.²⁷ As mass media and access to digital technologies, the internet and social media have flourished, so too has the exchange of ideas extended intercultural knowledge. Karp and colleagues describe how until relatively recently impacts on museums and their practice had been little understood.²⁸ They note both positive and negative impacts of globalisation and in particular the power relationships that globalisation reinforces between rich and poor and the potential for ‘clashes of value systems’.²⁹ In the case of Mongolia, this issue has not been explored at all, so this thesis seeks to understand the influences of globalisation on specifically Mongolian museums and thus extend existing

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kreps, op. cit., pp. 33–34.

²⁶ *Peter Morrow*, ‘Preserving the Legacy of Danzanravjaa’, Lord of the Gobi, 2002, <<http://danzanravjaa.org/lordofthegobipart1.php>>, retrieved 13 June 2013.

²⁷ Karp et al., op. cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

understandings. Acknowledging that international cultural exchange (particularly in the form of expositions and exhibitions) is not new but it is part of traditional museographical practice, the past decades heralded significant transformations in the place of museums in social and cultural exchange.³⁰ Precipitated by a fashion for history and heritage and precarious financial circumstances in many cases, the growth in global tourism has presented museums to new audiences and ‘markets’.³¹ In the case of Mongolia, the situation has been pronounced. The exponential growth of inbound and outbound tourism after 1990 was simultaneous with the collapse of the economy and subsequent curtailment of funding for museums and their projects.³² While tourism is one of many ‘globalising’ processes, it will be demonstrated that particularly in the case of the NMM fostering tourist visitation and cultural diplomacy have been two of the key strategies employed as panaceas for funding shortfalls.³³ This has impacted on the way the NMM conducts its projects and what it displays. This is because as an audience based approach means curators do not necessarily visit their collections in the first instance, but rather seek to present history that they perceive visitors want to see.³⁴ In short, globalisation has meant that Mongolian museums have more audiences, more diverse audiences and access to ideas about Mongolia and about museums from foreign perspectives that together are significant influencers on what is exhibited and how it is interpreted.

There has been much discussion that considers the politics of exhibition and interpretation.³⁵ The role of the curator, the bureaucracy, of chance and social and political influences are all factors in constructing meaning from objects.³⁶ Early works by scholars such as Merriman, Greenberg and Ames were widely influential in dissecting ways interpretation has been employed

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia, from Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005, pp. 175–198.

³³ See case study chapters four to six.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For example Anderson, op. cit.; Michael Belcher, *Exhibitions in Museums*, Leicester University Press, 1991; Greenberg et al., op. cit.

³⁶ Ibid.

surreptitiously at times for specific purposes such as political and anthropological.³⁷ The contested nature of historical representation was not only identified but scholars came to conclude that the museum and its displays are in complex dialogue with a society whose sense of self is reflected in the messages, both explicitly and sub-textually transmitted by the museum.³⁸ Scholars have criticised the tradition of deploying objects as manipulable matter upon which to construct authoritative narratives with specific moral messages for unquestioned consumption.³⁹ It has been agreed that museums should now understand the fluidity and diversity of history and take an inclusive, interactive approach.⁴⁰ To borrow from archaeologist Meskell, who critiques the history of archaeological theory, museologists, like archaeologists can be said to have engaged also in the ‘familiar postmodern project of deconstructing master narratives, unsettling binaries and acknowledging marginalised knowledges...’⁴¹

Within debates about exhibitions it has been agreed that museums that present history are participants in the broader social phenomena of constructing collective identity.⁴² While museologists have considered the ways in which museums have diversified their exhibitions and included their audiences, so too they have acknowledged a diverse range of types of museums.⁴³ In particular, and of relevance is that these issues have been considered in relation to national museums.⁴⁴ Within the field of national

³⁷ Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The past, the heritage and the public in Britain*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1991; Greenberg et al., op. cit.; E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, London, 1992; Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1992; Said, op. cit.

³⁸ Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998; Timothy Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod & Sheila Watson (eds), *Museum Revolutions: How museums change and are changed*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007.

⁴¹ Lynn Meskell (ed.), *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritages in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 4.

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991.

⁴³ Knell et al., op. cit.

⁴⁴ D. Poulot, J. M. Lanzarote Guiral & F. Bodenstein (eds), *Great Narratives of the Past Traditions and Revisions in National Museums, Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris 28 June–1 July & 25–26 November 2011, EuNaMus Report no. 4*, Linköping

museums scholarship about how difficult or dark histories are assimilated within the national narrative have considered how this intersects with broad notions of national identity.⁴⁵ Mongolia is in an intense phase of reassessing its identity.⁴⁶ This is evidenced by the official celebrations of the anniversaries of the establishment of the Great Mongol Empire and the birth of Chinggis Khan, which generated significant amounts of official rhetoric, symbolism and events in Mongolia that drew heavily on history to support notions of ‘true’ identity.⁴⁷ Considering the role museums are playing in revisionism questions the very relevance of museums to their context.

Discussions about the fluidity of collective identity not necessarily in connection to museums, but to society in general have developed in complexity particularly in the past four decades. Benedict Anderson first published *Imagined Communities* in 1983 and a revised addition was published in 1991, reflecting the rapid transformation in scholarship about nationalism.⁴⁸ Anderson acknowledged that the terms nation, nationality and nationalism were ‘notoriously difficult to define’ yet settled upon what has become widely accepted: ‘the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.’⁴⁹ Anderson defined some characteristics of nationalism; community encompassing a ‘horizontal comradeship’, limited in the sense that any nation no matter how large has ‘finite, if elastic boundaries’, and sovereign in the sense that the genesis of nationalism was during a period in (European) history when the legitimacy of divine ordination and ‘hierarchical dynastic’ belief was dismantled.⁵⁰ Anderson summarised that the imagined community is not merely a

University Electronic Press, Linköping, 2012,

<http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078>, retrieved 16 June 2013.

⁴⁵ D. Poulot et al.; D. Poulot, F. Bodenstein & J. M. Lanzarote Guiral (eds), *National Museums and the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts*, Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Brussels 26–27 January 2012, *EuNaMus Report no. 8*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, 2012,

<http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078>, retrieved 16 June 2013.

⁴⁶ See Bibliography for a range of scholars who approach Mongolian national identity.

⁴⁷ Boldbaatar J., ‘The eight-hundredth Anniversary of Chinggis Khan: The Revival and Suppression of Mongolian National Consciousness’, Kotkin & Elleman (eds), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century; Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999.

⁴⁸ Anderson, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

replacement for religious or dynastically generated sense of unity of previous centuries (Empires, religions), but a product of social and scientific change brought about in particular by modern mass communication that proffered greater opportunity to think about ‘the nation’.⁵¹ Anderson noted in a revised edition of his work that one intent of the new work was to ‘de-Europeanise [sic] the theoretical study of nationalism’.⁵² By incorporating theory related to his own interest in Thailand and Indonesia he strove to overcome what Chatterjee later described as ‘derivative discourses’ of non-European anticolonial nationalisms.⁵³

Gellner and followers argue that nationalism developed at a time of industrialisation that superseded agrarianism that produced a societal restructure.⁵⁴ Gellner purports that nationalism is associated with a sense of continuity while in fact it is a product of a ‘profound break in human history’.⁵⁵ As Gellner asserts:

Nationalism is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself. It is in reality a consequence of a new form of social organization [sic], based on deeply internalized [sic], education-dependant high cultures, each generated by its own state.⁵⁶

Again, Mongolian circumstances do not easily converge with this processual notion as it never had agrarian society nor did it take part in the industrial revolution. Also when industrialisation did to a limited extent occur it was introduced during socialism when nationalism was carefully contained.⁵⁷ Kaplonski’s early argument assists to assimilate Mongolian nationalism into the international context by arguing that nationalistic thought or the idea of a

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 22–23.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 209–210.

⁵⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism; new perspectives on the past*, second edition, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006.

⁵⁵ Gellner, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Christopher Kaplonski, ‘Creating National Identity in Socialist Mongolia’, *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 17, no. 2, Taylor and Francis Online, 1998, pp. 35–49, <<http://www.chriskaplonski.com/downloads/NationalIdentityMongolia.pdf>>, retrieved 15 August 2006.

national community was actually fostered as *part* of the socialist ideology in the form of uniting the workers for the common good.⁵⁸ Thus while no large scale industrial revolution occurred in Mongolia the seismic rearrangement of society that socialism instigated provided the ‘new form of social organisation’ that Anderson and Gellner attribute as being the birthing ground for nationalism.⁵⁹

Anderson’s popular theory has been discussed by scholars considering collective memory in Mongolia, who inevitably consider the differentiation of Mongolia from the temporal process of the development of the ‘imagined community’ identified by Anderson.⁶⁰ Anderson and subsequent scholars describe how European notions of community transformed as a result of scientific, social and economic revolutions that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in particular with the rise of the ability to imagine community afforded through mass print. When mass print did arrive, it was for a majority illiterate population and within a decade came under the control of a socialist regulated system, one that carefully managed nationalist ‘imagining’.⁶¹ The arrival of the first printing press in Mongolia in 1912 and the printing of the first newspaper in 1915 are dissonant with Anderson’s notion of shared identity and more importantly its development in Mongolia.⁶² Anderson asserts that the availability of mass communications (print) was an important condition that facilitated imagining community.⁶³ Gellner similarly sees the role of communication as central – participation by the masses in information exchange, rather than the message itself that engenders nationalism.⁶⁴ In analysing the role of mass communication in the dissemination of the nationalist idea Gellner argues that the message of nationalism does not pre-exist and be transmitted by mass communications,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Anderson op. cit.

⁶¹ Kaplonski, op. cit., pp. 35–49,

⁶² Anderson, op. cit., p. 37, notes it is estimated some twenty million books had been printed in Europe by 1500. The majority of Mongolians were illiterate until the middle of the twentieth century. Thus if national identity in the form of imagined community was to come to Mongolia on Andersons terms, it is distinctly recent.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Gellner, op. cit.

but rather participation in the media that is important. Gellner asserts that the masses:

do not transmit an idea which happens to be fed to them. It matters precious little what has been fed to them: it is the media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralised[sic], standardised[sic], one to many communications which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put in to the specific messages transmitted.⁶⁵

Gellner asserts that it is the language and style of communication and audience comprehension that create a community of the included, rather than the subject matter itself.⁶⁶ Later in this chapter Gellner's theory as it relates to museums as transmitters to 'the masses' is discussed.

In recent decades, museums have been criticised for being didactic at the expense of good communication and therefore audience receptiveness. The new museology recognised the shortcomings of ignoring the audience as a participant in dialogue or polyphony.⁶⁷ It also recognised the social and transformative values museums have and can incorporate knowingly in displays.⁶⁸ The question remains if the museums are participating in national identity debate, are their collections central to their existence, or is it their 'participation' in mass communication that is their vehicle for justification of existence?

In *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Greenfeld discusses the evolution of notions and definitions of nation, nationalism and national identity and asserts that national identity tends to be associated with a community's sense of uniqueness and the qualities contributing to that be they political, religious or cultural.⁶⁹ She describes the evolution of the term nation from its linguistic origins through to its gathering connotation as referring to not only a

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 120–122.

⁶⁶ Gellner, op. cit.

⁶⁷ E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum, Media, Message*, Routledge, London, 2002.

⁶⁸ E. Hooper-Greenhill, op. cit. 1992.

⁶⁹ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p.8.

population of a country, but a unique population and eventually a unique sovereign people.⁷⁰ The utilisation of ethnicity to define uniqueness (with reference to the NMM and the Winter Palace Museum) is one characteristic of the museums in the study. The other idea in Greenfeld's work that enlightens us is the assertion that:

The location of sovereignty within the people and the recognition of the fundamental equality among its various strata, which constitute the essence of the modern national idea are at the same time the basic tenets of democracy.⁷¹

While this dissertation does not seek to explain the relationship in Mongolia between national identity and democracy, the new democracy in Mongolia has brought about a reappraisal – or even reinvention – of national identity that supports Greenfeld's assertion. This in turn returns us to the issue of what form of national identity, if any existed in Mongolia before the democratic period.

Scholars contest that it was only during the socialist period in which Mongol national identity became apparent due to state devised propagandising about the unity and equality of all Mongols, hitherto a feudal nomadic society.⁷² Kaplonski's opinion that 'written history shifted from being about rulers and people to being about a people – the Mongols' is fascinating if one considers museums within the definition of historiography.⁷³ Kaplonski qualifies the limits of new history by noting a lack of historiographical criticism and lack of secular education at the time.⁷⁴ This confluence of factors mirrors to an extent museums in the Soviet Union at the same period where two-thirds of the population were illiterate and most ethnic groups did not have secular writing traditions.⁷⁵ Atwood concurs that the concept of nationality in

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷² For example Kaplonski, op. cit., pp. 35–49

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ I. A. Antonova et al. (eds), *Museums in the USSR, How Soviet Museums Protect Historical and Cultural Monuments*, United Soviet Socialist Republic, Ministry of Culture, Central Museum of the Revolution, Moscow, 1980, p. 14.

Mongolia, 'remained virtually invisible' until the early decades of the twentieth century.

The substantial volume of discourse on post-socialism in Central Asia, Europe and elsewhere discusses the place that heritage, history and museums have within the wider social, political, economic and identity rearrangements. Common to recent scholarship about 'post' places is that cultural heritage has a role in rebuilding national history during transition and therefore contributing to a sense of national identity.⁷⁶ Recent work that observes the renegotiation of cultural identity and reclaiming of the pre-socialist past, particularly that with reference to Central Asia is pertinent as a basis for understanding the role of the museums of Mongolia in the upsurge in nationalist sentiment and cultural revival.

The effect of the end of socialism on intangible heritage (such as song, music, dance, oral traditions) and tangible heritage (places, precincts, monuments, architecture and objects) is well analysed, as are notions of the use of tangible and intangible heritage within post-socialist constructions of history and national identity. Kathleen Smith's work *Mythmaking in the New Russia* is a fine and useful example as are the works on Russia by those such as Atai and Paxson.⁷⁷ Together these works provide a basis for comparison to Mongolia, which is enriched when taken into consideration with works about other post-socialist cultural heritages such as Pilbrow, Fulbrook, Aplence, Cash and James.⁷⁸ Smith's important work explores the appropriation of cultural commemorations and festivals by governments and interest groups as a method of 'mythmaking' and to underpin legitimisation of new

⁷⁶ For example, recent work generated by the EuNaMus project, several papers of which are listed in the Bibliography.

⁷⁷ Farhad Atai, 'Post-Soviet Art and Culture in Central Asia', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Special Issue: Out of the Ruins: Cultural Negotiations in the Soviet Aftermath, vol. 16, no. 2, 1999; Margaret Paxson, 'The Festival of the Holy Trinity (Troitsa) in Rural Russia; A Case Study in the Topography of Memory', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Special Issue: Out of the Ruins: Cultural Negotiations in the Soviet Aftermath, vol. 16, no. 2, 1999.

⁷⁸ See Bibliography for citations.

institutions.⁷⁹ Similarly Paxson explores how changes and continuities in the way the Festival of the Holy Trinity is celebrated in northern Russia reflect the influences of change on cultural practice.⁸⁰ James, in examining the Statue Park Museum in Hungary, describes the destruction of visual symbols in the immediate post-socialist era.⁸¹ James contends that a shift in meaning occurs with the simple change in context, describing the Statue Park Museum as functioning like a cemetery, ‘where the past can be mourned and where loss can be assimilated’.⁸² While this is a very different type of museum to the subjects of this study, the notion of the changing meanings ascribed to the physical evidence of the socialist past is relevant as an observation of how everyday objects of socialism, such as statues and slogans become museum pieces that illustrate a past rather than representing a current ideology. Nikolai Vukov’s more recent work relates the treatment of monuments not only to a reworking of the past, but also to the contrived shaping of identity.⁸³ Vukov explores initial hesitancy in Bulgaria to clear monuments as being rooted in religiosity and fear of desecrating memory of the dead and the subsequent later act of destroying monuments to the dead as destroying icons that embodied the power of the past, refusing to pay respect, and articulating change explicitly physically and publicly.⁸⁴ No socialist monuments, statues or slogans have been acquired yet by the museums of Mongolia, an interesting comparison to the Hungarian, Bulgarian and Russian situations. The fate of socialist monuments in Mongolia is under-researched. While this is outside the scope of this thesis it is an urgent area for attention given the rapid rate of disappearance of all but a few socialist

⁷⁹ Alison Abrams, Meeting Reports summary of Kennan Institute Lecture by K. E. Smith, 8 March 1999, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, <www.wilsoncentre.org/index.cfm?=&topics.print_pub&doc_id=13721>, retrieved 15 August 2006; K. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory During the Yeltsin Era*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

⁸⁰ Paxson, op. cit.

⁸¹ Beverly James, ‘Fencing the Past: Budapest’s Statue Park Museum’, University of New Hampshire, paper delivered at AEJMC Conference, December, 1996, <<http://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=aejmc&D=0&T=0>>, retrieved 15 August 2006.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Nicholai Vukov, ‘Death and the Desecrated: Monuments of the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria’, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2003, pp.49–54.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

relics.⁸⁵ The lack of socialist material culture preserved in Mongolian in museums represents however, another piece of evidence of the relatively unimportant place of the socialist period in popular Mongolian history.

Some works about sites enrich the debate on the use of the past to construct identity. Veronica Aplence, for example, examines changes to on-site interpretation of the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Lednice-Valtice Monument Zone in the Czech Republic as an example of the negotiation of contemporary narratives of national identity. The author reveals how the site has been packaged as an 'art object' rather than a place presenting its inherent controversial political meanings, and how this new recycled identity has been accepted in recent times, altogether avoiding the revisionist potential of the site. Coming chapters will explore activities at the Winter Palace Museum that have focused on art objects and architecture that reflect this approach described by Aplence.⁸⁶ Activities that promote aestheticisation of this site have resulted in the political and symbolic functions of the site being overlooked in interpretation.⁸⁷ Hue in Vietnam, also a World Heritage site is discussed by Colin Long as problematic for its representation of a reactionary regime.⁸⁸ Long, like Aplence, describes the way a possible conflict between the inherent values of the site and the socialist view of the past is resolved through mediums of preservation and promotion.⁸⁹ Representations in the NMM and Victims Museum of contested or difficult areas of history, such as state orchestrated murder and violent repression can be compared to studies such as these to gain an understanding of the ways in which issues are handled by curators and staff.

⁸⁵ In 2002, a two-storey Lenin statue was recycled into a nightclub in Ulaanbaatar. The main hall of Lenin Museum, with its golden mosaic dome, is presently a pool hall though in 2013, the Mongolian Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Culture announced that the Lenin Museum would be repurposed to house a Mongolian Dinosaur Museum that would be a major tourist attraction. The mausoleum of Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan, on the main city square has been demolished to make way for a Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex.

⁸⁶ Veronica Aplence, 'Narratives of History, Narratives of Change, the Continuing Creation of Heritage at the Lednice-Valtice Monument Zone', paper delivered at Annual SOYUZ Symposium, Views from Within: Ethnographic Perspectives on post-socialist Culture and Society, Columbia University, 11–12 February, 2000.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Colin Long, 'Feudalism in the Service of the Revolution, Reclaiming Heritage in Hue', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2003, pp. 535–558.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

In *Post-Soviet Art and Culture in Central Asia*, Farhad Atai surveys cultural institutions in five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, arguing that the role of the arts and culture is contested in institutions that previously had had a clear sense of their place in the Soviet system. This survey is very useful when considered in the Mongolian context. Atai concludes that withdrawal of Moscow's didactic directives and of state funding has left long-standing established and experienced organisations in a state of 'high confusion' exacerbated by the dilemma for organisations with national status to deal with the ongoing contestation of national identity which will be demonstrated to be a key issue for the NMM.⁹⁰

More recently, Apor and Sarkisova considered in the context of museums and cinema how history's role has transformed from being a vehicle for celebration of the glorious past, to being a reminder of difficult pasts and a warning not to forget. Museums are seen as 'connective structures' that fulfil the role of commemoration. The collection of essays, *Past for the Eyes, East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* explores how museums represent identity in the post-socialist period. While the essays focus on Eastern Europe, they provide interesting parallels for the Mongolian situation.⁹¹ In analysing museums in Bulgaria, Vukov discusses the tendency of scholars to accept memory as a duality; that is, remembering and forgetting. Vukov introduces a third paradigm to consciousness – the notion of the 'unmemorable', as one through which the 'blankness' of interpretation in museums of the socialist period can be viewed – and argues that 'unmemorableness' is linked to value or 'worthiness'. Vukov demonstrates that unmemorableness is not a tripartite branch of remembering or forgetting, but a product of 'restraint' of representation. He argues that history is remembered, but in the case of museums not 'embodied in materialized [sic] forms', thus omitted from the

⁹⁰ Farhad Atai, op. cit.

⁹¹ Oksana Sarkisova & Peter Apor (eds), *Past for the Eyes, East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2008.

master narrative.⁹² While some museums and cultural institutions make explicit anti-socialist revisions, the situation identified recently by Vukov also shares parallels with the ambiguous nature of socialism as represented in Mongolian museums today.⁹³

In subsequent chapters the place of two periods in Mongolian history will be analysed in light of their current place in the master narrative; the period of Manchu domination and the socialist period. It will be demonstrated that both periods as represented in museums exhibit characteristics of ‘unmemorableness’ and are underrepresented in museums. Qualifying this for the Mongolia specific situation, aspects of both periods are represented (unlike Bulgaria where the socialist period is not represented at all) in museums, yet these are selectively those that are presented as memorable (for example the perceived cruelty of the Manchu regime), or unmemorable (for example the political purges of the 1930s). In a more recent collections of essays, titled *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed* and *National Museums, New Studies From Around the World*, Knell and colleagues provide further new material specifically about museums in post-socialist countries with the aim of avoiding the established geographic parameters of museum studies. Case studies regarding the national museums of Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania combine the scholarly contexts of post-socialism with museology.⁹⁴ Most recently the European National Museums Project (EuNaMus) project involving a number of European Universities including the University of Tartu and the Central European University has expanded the understanding of Eastern European museums and how they contribute to national and European identity and identifies the power of museums as agents of change at times of great social upheaval. Kuutma and Kroon describe in detail ways in which Estonian museums responded to the initial phase of post-socialism by installing new exhibitions that were designed to be temporary. They argue how the paucity of both

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Nikolai Vukov, ‘The Unmemorable and the Unforgettable, Museumizing the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria’, in Sarkisova & Apor, op. cit., pp. 307–334.

⁹⁴ Knell et al., op. cit.; Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen, Amy Jane Barnes, Stuart Burch, Jennifer Carter, Viviane Gosselin, Sarah A. Hughes & Alan Kirwan (eds), *National Museums, New Studies from Around the World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011.

funding and scrutiny in the early the years of democracy meant museums languished due to lack of resources and direction.⁹⁵ There are parallels here with Atai's description of the ideological vacuum left by the demise of socialist structures and its effect on cultural institutions.⁹⁶ While the article is about Estonia, the expected characteristics of the post-socialist phase have some synergy as well as some difference to Mongolia. What they demonstrate is the general tendency for museums to need to transition, yet not have the framework or resources with which to do so. The major point of departure is that with acceptance into the European Union in 2004, Estonian museums became a part of an established museum network and funding structure as a foundation from which to undertake revitalisation. Mongolia does not qualify for entry to the European Union, and thus the possibilities for managed, planned evolution that this network affords have been limited. Apor's appraisal of the museums of Hungary identifies similar synergies to those of Kuutma and Kroon when tracing the evolution of legislation underpinning museums, the common situation being the lack of regulative legislation in the early post-socialist years, followed by attempts by governments to draft legislation and policy that balances the traditional scientific and educational functions of the museum with new museological ideas and new free market economy.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ For example the national Museum of Estonia installed new exhibition in 1994 which was intended to be a temporary measure while accommodation was resolved. The exhibition was still extant at the time of writing. The NMM's Socialist Period Hall was in a similar situation until 2013.

⁹⁶ Kristin Kuutma & Paavo Kroon, 'Museum Policy in Transition from Post-Soviet Conditions to Reconfigurations in the European Union Museum Policies in Europe 1990–2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia', *EuNaMus Report no. 3*, Lill Eilertsen & Arne Bugge Amundsen (eds), Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, Sweden, 2012, <<http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:557284/FULLTEXT01.pdf>>, retrieved 7 August 2013; Atai, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Peter Apor, 'Museum Policies in Hungary 1990–2010', *Museum Policies in Europe 1990–2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia*, *EuNaMus Report no. 3*, Lill Eilertsen and Arne Bugge Amundsen (eds), Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, Sweden, 2012, <<http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:557284/FULLTEXT01.pdf>>, retrieved 7 August 2013.

National Identity

Another key nuance when considering the Mongol people and collective identity is the distinctive geopolitical characteristic of having been historically briefly united and then divided into three major geographical regions; Inner and Outer Mongolia and Buryatia. As Lattimore, Jagchid and Heyer and more recently Kaplonski, Sneath, Kotkin and Elleman, Humphrey, Campi, Myadar and Uradyn E. have demonstrated, the identity of the Mongol community is both limited by national borders and at others time breaches them.⁹⁸ Kaplonski and Sneath have written frequently on the subject of national identity in Mongolia and considered an appropriate definition and both draw upon the work of Greenfeld.⁹⁹ Greenfeld places her work within the tradition of inquiry that ‘seeks to understand the nature and to account for the emergence of modern society’.¹⁰⁰ Kaplonski notes that while Greenfeld’s work about national identity provides a useful definition that Chatterjee asserts that nationalist thought seeks to replace the structure of colonial power with a new order, that of national power.¹⁰¹ While Chatterjee’s writing focuses on south Asia, the synergies that postcolonialism has with post-socialism are useful to note and this reference is a link to the related world of scholarship on national identity in postcolonial nations. The non-committal definition of national identity Kaplonski settles upon is ‘a more or less agreed upon identity that a sizeable number of Mongolians (but not necessarily the majority) wield as their identity in some contexts’.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ For example: Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1962, Uradyn Erden Bulag, ‘Mongolian Modernity and Hybridity’, *MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter*, no. 19, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 2004, pp. 1–3; Sachin Jagchid & Paul Heyer, *Mongolia’s Culture and Society*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1979; Christopher Kaplonski, ‘Reconstructing Mongolian Nationalism: The View Ten Years On’, paper delivered at Mongolian Political and Economic Development During the Past Ten Years and Future Prospect Conference, Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, 23–24 August, Taiwan, 2000, <<http://www.chriskaplonski.com/downloads/nationalism.pdf>>, retrieved 15 August, 2006; Orhon Myadar, ‘Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads’, *Inner Asia*, vol. 13, no. 2, Cambridge University, 2011, pp. 335–362.

⁹⁹ Greenfeld, op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰¹ P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 42.

¹⁰² Kaplonski, op. cit., p. 335.

Kaplonski has written about ways that history (intangible and material) has been appropriated as a vehicle for the construction of a national identity by government, politicians and the media. He cites examples of historical references being used in contemporary rhetoric, particularly in reference to remembering the socialist past, the political repressions and in the connection of the glorious past associated with Chinggis Khan to present-day Mongolia.¹⁰³

Uradyn E. asserts that the Khalk-centric view of some Mongols leads to the marginalisation of not only ethnic minorities, but also extends to Khalk who do not reside within Mongolian borders.¹⁰⁴ Uradyn E. has dissected the creation of modern national identity of Mongols in Mongolia, China and Russia and suggests that the resulting 'Khalk-centric construct' involved growth of the idea of the 'pure' Mongolian being the citizen of Mongolia and the exclusion of the outsider in his case Inner Mongolian as *erlizz* (hybrid).¹⁰⁵ Uradyn E. attributes these phenomena to a 'paranoid' fear of China and notes its manifestation in such 'symbols and preoccupations' as: '...virgin soil, animals, dung, milk, heart, mind, ancientness and 'originalness'.¹⁰⁶ These elements of 'preoccupation' are noted here as they will be demonstrated to be very present in the interpretation of traditional Mongol culture in case studies of museums in subsequent chapters.

Within the literature about the use of the past in constructing national identity in post-socialist states, much has been said about remembering, reconciling, forgetting, or to adopt Vukov's term, 'unremembering' difficult history. Despite the new museology and the postmodern deconstruction of master narratives, all national museums are faced with presenting a story in whatever form that may be – poetic, thematic, didactic or chronological – that has cohesion. The new museology and indeed broader postmodern thought acknowledges the multiplicity and diversity of stories, and multiple perspectives that lead to understanding of the complexity of the past. It has

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Gellner, op. cit., p. 120; Uradyn Erden Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 4–6.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 6.

been widely accepted that in maintaining social relevance and in striving for inclusivity and a 'dialogue' between the museum and the audience, museums must play a role identifying and incorporating hitherto omitted subjects. There is a growing awareness of the role of the museum in recognising underrepresented stories (women, ethnic groups), indigenous cultures, intangible heritage and 'difficult' or 'dark' history. In each case the curator or curatorial team must choose to include minor voices or contested subjects or not and to consider how if included, the meta-story can be stitched together.¹⁰⁷ Further the post–Second World War period onward and the past decades in particular have demonstrated a sharp increase in the number of sites and memorials devoted to difficult history such as war, genocide, incarceration and massacre.¹⁰⁸ Recent conference proceedings resulting from the EuNaMus project have greatly extended this area of thought to focusing on the way museums deal with periods of problematic history in post regime situations. The collection of works gives insight into the Soviet system and also are a major contribution to understanding the ways in which national museums have 'managed' the recent past.¹⁰⁹ An overriding theme of the works which concentrate on Eastern Europe is the way in which museum interpretation is pedagogical in acknowledging darkness for the purpose of ensuring it will not be repeated, that is the past is represented in order that it will not become part of the future.

Secondly, a general occurrence in museums is the problem of 'how to maintain the idea of an eternal set of continuous national qualities, a mystical concept of the nation'.¹¹⁰ This thesis will demonstrate that in the case of the

¹⁰⁷ A. Nikiforidou Bounia et al., *Voices from the Museum: Survey Research in Europe's National Museum, EuNaMus Report no. 5*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, Sweden, 2012, <<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-84966>>, retrieved 7 August 2013.

¹⁰⁸ G. Ashworth & R. Hartmann, *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*, Cognizant Communications, New York, 2005; Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Oxford, Berg, 2007; William Logan & Keir Reeves (eds), *Places of Pain and Shame Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*, Routledge, 2008; Richard Sharpely & Philip R. Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications, Bristol, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Poulot et al. (eds), op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Peter Apor, 'Master Narratives of Contemporary History in Eastern European National Museums', *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums* Conference proceedings from, EuNaMus European National Museums: Identity Politics, the

Victims Museum, the pedagogical message is explicit, yet the Museum as a memorial does not seek to position the purges within a rational continuum. The purges are presented as an anomaly of history, orchestrated from without. The NMM by contrast faces both dilemmas and has taken a cautious approach to reconciling unsavoury periods in to the ‘eternal set of continuous qualities’.¹¹¹ By presenting the positive aspects of the Manchu period (cultural and religious sophistication and the continuity of ancient nomadic traditions) and the social and economic gains (education, literacy, industrialisation, international relations) of the socialist period the NMM has sought to diminish the anomalous nature of both periods and to construct an awkward continuum.

In discussing the place of the interpretation of socialism in museums in Romania, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Serbia and the Baltic Republics, Apor describes museums as the ‘direct decedents of the anti – communist imagination’.¹¹² Further, that in presenting terror and repression in the way they do, the museums present socialism as ‘alien’ to society and the result of ‘outside’ forces.¹¹³ What follows from this distancing of responsibility is that the socialist dictatorship contradicts the ‘spirit’ of the nation itself. Apor concludes that the presentation of ‘abstract ahistorical forces’ is a way of moralising about human suffering, rather than presenting historical fact.¹¹⁴ I have paused on Apor’s article as it returns us to the notion of the way in which the ambiguous place of the purges in Mongolian museums directly reflects that ambiguity in society. In the case of Mongolia, it will be demonstrated that while the purges are represented in the NMM and the Victims Museum, they are presented in very different ways. The presentations of the Victims Museum equate closely to the exhibitions in Eastern Europe described by Apor and others. That is the violence and injustice of the socialist regime is presented as a pedagogical lesson for the

Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris, 2 June–1 July & 25–26 November 2011; Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein & José María Lanzarote Guiral (eds), *EuNaMus Report no. 4*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping Sweden, 2012, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078>, retrieved 8 August 2013.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

future, or in Mongol, *Buu Mart* (we must not forget). However, in the case of the NMM for reasons that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the place of the socialist period and the purges remains far different to outright demonisation. I argue the NMM reflects two phenomena, first the still politically charged place of socialism and therefore the blame for its failures in Mongolia.¹¹⁵ The displays also reflect the concept of ‘the unmemorable’. While the NMM does have displays about the socialist period, unlike some described by Vukov and Apor, it is their level of worthiness in the national narrative that has meant that the exhibitions remain unrenovated a decade after they were installed, and the entire period interpreted as both ‘good and bad’, predominantly good in fact.¹¹⁶

Christopher Kaplonski considers contemporary debate about political repression in Mongolia and frequently draws upon contemporary evidence including museums, memorials, ceremonies and speeches to explore the place of socialism in national identity reformation.¹¹⁷ Kaplonski dissects political debate about both blame and establishment of legal frameworks for compensation. In doing so he extrapolates how Mongolia’s struggle to come to terms with and incorporate a palatable version of the political repressions and the socialist period has in fact been a struggle to resolve a key conundrum for a unified national identity:

Ultimately, then, the debate on repression law was a debate on whose version of the past would be accepted as the legitimate one. This in turn would affect which version of Mongolian identity would be accepted as the legitimate one.¹¹⁸

It is logical that the accepted legitimate version of the past would most likely be the one presented in the state-owned and funded museums of Mongolia that are examined in this thesis. An aspect of Kaplonski’s questioning relates to the role collective (potentially politically cultivated) and individual

¹¹⁵ Christopher Kaplonski, ‘Neither Truth nor Reconciliation: Political Violence and Singularity of Memory in Post-Socialist Mongolia’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Routledge, 2008, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14690760802094941>>, retrieved 13 June 2008.

¹¹⁶ Vukov, 2008, op. cit., pp. 307–334.

¹¹⁷ Kaplonski, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

memory (less controllable) play in contributing to the recent two decades of debate about blame for the purges, rehabilitation of the purged and compensation for victims' families.¹¹⁹ Kaplonski summarises that the core problem is that apportioning blame for the repressions upon the influence of the Soviet Union would be an admission of a puppet state.¹²⁰ Conversely laying blame on Mongol cadres would fundamentally confront the current popular concept of true, ancient Mongol unity by acknowledging atrocities were conceived of and committed by Mongol upon Mongol.¹²¹ Simultaneously this would lay blame upon the socialist party, thus implicating the current and powerful Mongolian People's Party both morally and financially.¹²² This idea has significant resonance when applied to the issues faced by administrators and curators of the exhibitions and interpretive activities of the studied museums. As each museum is state-funded and thus subject to political influence, analysing how staff have addressed or resolved this difficult challenge is fascinating and will be teased out in coming chapters.

Conclusion

The chapter has dissected key schools of thought as a foundation for understanding the cross disciplinary nature of the thesis. The thesis is neither pure Mongolian studies, post-socialist studies nor national identity scholarship but uses museology to weave these areas of debate together. It draws upon parallel debates by museologists, post-socialist and Mongolian studies as a basis for deconstructing how Mongolian museums have participated in the revision of national identity. We began by identifying the lack of scholarship about Mongolian museums. This deficit, I argue necessitates seeking out parallel debates about museums, post-socialism, Mongolia and national identity from other disciplines. The chapter has drawn

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Christopher Kaplonski, 'Blame, Guilt and Avoidance, the struggle to control the past in post-socialist Mongolia', *History and Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, Indiana University Press, <<http://www.chriskaplonski.com/downloads/BlameGuiltAvoidance.pdf>>, retrieved 15 August 2006.

these together as a comparative or hybrid, rather than taking a monolithic approach. This is not only necessary but also evidences the complex nexus of influences that Mongolian museums encounter.

A discussion about museology argued that Western museums (including those in postcolonial nations) have been discussed for decades and the newest museology generally recognises the bilateral relationship between museums and society. Within this broad area, scholars have particularly paid attention to the ways in which exhibitions transmit messages or as ‘contact zones’.¹²³ However, I argue that though the critique of Western style museums is complex and continues, it is socialist museology to which Mongolia owes its greatest debt historically and this legacy continues today. Fortunately, scholars of socialism, post-socialism and museums have begun a fulsome discussion of museums in transition.¹²⁴ While none of these are about Mongolia, they are excellent indicators of inter-border similarities between museums responding to post-socialism. This literature clearly places revisionism of national identity high on the agenda of museums and also indicates museums are heavily influenced by the political and popular culture just outside their walls. The re-making of national identity has been demonstrated to be commonly linked in post-socialist places to appropriation of the past for purposes of legitimisation.¹²⁵

Literature by Mongolists about national identity abounds that supports this trend.¹²⁶ The question this raises is that if museums in other places have been demonstrated to contribute to mythmaking, then what is the case in Mongolian museums? The next three chapters will answer this question. By

¹²³ Dr Robin Boast, ‘Neocolonial collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited’ *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 34, no. 1, Wiley online Library, Spring 2011, pp. 56–70.

¹²⁴ For example Izabella Main, ‘How is Communism Displayed, Exhibitions of Communism in Museums of Poland’, in Oksana Sarkisova & Peter Apor (eds), *Past for the Eyes*, op. cit., pp. 391–424; Kristin Kuutma, ‘Contested Memory and Re-configured Master Narratives: Museum Institution in Totalitarian Regimes, National Museums and the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts Conference Proceedings from EuNaMUS, Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Brussels 26–27 January 2012, Dominique Poulot, José María Lanzarote Guiral & Felicity Bodenstein (eds), *EuNaMus Report no. 8.*, Linköping, University Electronic Press, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=082>, retrieved 10 July 2013.

¹²⁵ Kristin Kuutma & Paavo Kroon, ‘Museum Policy in Transition from Post-Soviet op. cit.

¹²⁶ For examples see; Kaplonski, Bulag, Myadar, Jagchid & Heyer, Buyandelger, Sabloff, Atwood, Sneath, and Campi cited in Bibliography.

undertaking a case study of museums as they relate to identity, the thesis will demonstrate that Mongolia shares this synergy with other post-socialist alumni, but in a highly nuanced way. Mongolian museums have used the past to create a new master narrative. However, unlike other countries Mongolia's state-funded museums have not thoroughly demonised socialism. The reasons for this will be shown to be complex. They relate as much to the overwhelming attraction of periods of the glorious past in national identity as they do to the unattractiveness of socialism. The reasons relate to the legacy of socialist museology and its overlaying with significant influence of cultural diplomacy. In other words, museums reflect to a significant extent the result of external influence.

Chapter III

Twentieth-century Mongolia – Socialist Museology

This chapter draws on scholarly histories written recently in order to illustrate the context in which Mongolian museums have existed and to highlight some of the events of the century to 1990 that are accepted by experts as significant within Mongolia's recent history. It has been noted that museums were introduced to Mongolia and grew and transformed as a result of Soviet-style museology. Further, Mongolian historiography as a whole was revolutionised by socialist normative influence. Therefore the second section of this chapter describes the methods by which museums were introduced and how they evolved throughout the century, providing a basis upon which to compare what happened to them when democracy arrived. The final section of this chapter completes the foundation for the case study that follows in chapters four to six by outlining some of the major transformations that occurred after 1990. Major themes are explored as indicators of both influences on museums and as subject matter for museums.

In 1911, in opposition to Manchu rule and opportunistically in response to the Russian revolutionary movement and the disintegration of the Qing Empire, the Mongols sought Russian support for their declaration of freedom and proclamation of the Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu (Bogd Khaan) as the head of state.¹ For the next ten years China refused to acknowledge Mongolian independence and until 1945 continued to consider Mongolia a province while Russia sought to extend its influence there.² In 1921 China officially dissolved the declared Mongolian autonomy, in response the MPRP resistance group was formed and with a petition from the Bogd Khaan

¹ Emgent Ookhnoi Batsaikhan, *Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, The Last King Of Mongolia*, Institute of International Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

² Ibid.; Bat-Erdene Batbayar (Baabar), *History of Mongolia*, The Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge, Monsudar, Ulaanbaatar, 1999, pp. 101–234.

sought the assistance of the Bolsheviks.³ Under protection of Russian troops a Mongolian Government was formed and the People's Republic of Mongolia was declared in 1924, the city of Urga was renamed Ulaanbaatar (Red Hero) and Manchu officials were expelled. From that time Soviet influence grew and the path of Mongolian twentieth-century history was directly influenced by Soviet policies.⁴

The period following the establishment of the Mongolian People's Republic until the conclusion of the Second World War was one of upheaval. Successive plans and policies were implemented by the fledgling socialist Government, under heavy influence of the Soviet Union via instruments such as the Comintern (Communist International) and through targeted aid and cooperation projects.⁵ Though Mongolia had adopted socialism following the events of 1921 to 1924, membership of the MPRP itself remained proportionately small.⁶ The movement was confined to groups of revolutionaries in provincial centres and the city with varying degrees of allegiance to the socialist ideology in proportion to the nationalist idealist motivation of Mongolian self-determination and freedom from Manchu rule.⁷ Bawden suggests that based on the absence of the socialist 'classics' from a catalogue of all books published in Mongolia until 1925 little knowledge of Marxist/ Leninist theory existed before the revolution.⁸ The meagre experience of the MPRP in effecting revolution and garnering Soviet assistance was not founded on a strong, locally integrated version of Marxist ideology and debate continues today about how thoroughly the theories underpinned the actions of the revolutionaries and resultant Government.⁹ In the aftermath of the initial revolutionary fervour, the relevance of Soviet

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.; also Irina Morozova, *The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Revolutions In Asia, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, 2009.

⁵ Irina Morozova, *The Comintern and Revolution in Mongolia*, Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge, White Horse Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 1. The Soviet department called the Communist International known as the Comintern was founded by Lenin to co-ordinate revolutionary struggles of the proletariat internationally.

⁶ I will refer to the Socialist Party as the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party or MPRP when referring to it up until it's renaming as the Mongolian People's Party or MPP in 2010. Morozova, *ibid.*, 2009, pp. 26–43.

⁷ Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, p. 206.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

political ideology and its practical applicability to the unique Mongolian situation was tested and in some instances proven to be inappropriate or catastrophic.¹⁰

In the decade following the revolution the tasks confronting the socialist Government of widening its popular mandate, increasing membership and instigating real change were significant. Capital infrastructure such as roads, telegraph and rail, health and secular education services were scant. Thus involving the rural population in national initiatives was inherently difficult due to the sparseness and mobility of the population in a climate and geography that precludes sound communication.¹¹ Adding to logistical difficulties, demographics did not favour the consolidation of socialism. A large portion of Mongolian men were unavailable to join political life as they were either involved in religious life or were nomadic herders.¹² Where infrastructure and networks that were likely to facilitate permeation of new ideology existed, literacy was restricted to *lamas* (priests) who had learned through Tibetan style religious instruction or to members of the former Manchu administration.¹³ Descriptions of early twentieth-century Mongolia by observers have common themes including backwardness and isolation, religiosity and exotic culture. When Ossendowski, Kendall and Andrews report on the physical appearance of Urga with its Russian, Chinese and Mongolian districts they inevitably describe the proliferation of lamas and temples and give some description of Mongolian dwellings and the richness of culture visible to the observer. Most note the ‘cosmopolitan’ nature of society and mention the colour and diversity of national and ethnic costume and all describe the magnificent Mongolian traditional women’s dress and adornment with fascination.¹⁴ They allude to the possibility of modernisation, but imply it is remote due to the isolation of Mongolia. Some European descriptions, including that of Ossendowski of Mongolia shortly before, during

¹⁰ A full discussion of the role of theory and of the Comintern in Mongolia is provided in Morozova, 2002, op. cit.; also Bawden *ibid.*, p. 207.

¹¹ Bawden, *ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–289.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Kendall, *A Wayfarer in China; Impressions of a trip across West China and Mongolia*, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1913.

and after the revolution, give insights in to the way Mongolia appeared to critical eyes; ‘...Mongolia, country of miracles and mysteries...’¹⁵

[t]here is, of course, no lack of modern influence in the sacred city [Urga], but as yet it is merely a veneer which has been lightly superimposed upon its ancient civilization, leaving almost untouched the basic customs of its people.¹⁶

...Urga, even if it has a Customs House, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, motor cars and telephones, is still at heart a city of the Middle Ages.¹⁷

As the Comintern was charged with coaxing socialist allegiance in far reaches of Mongolia, then the frank opinion of one Russian agent reporting on the situation in the 1920s is telling: ‘we are far away, something around 800 years or more... Mongolia has been preserved in anabiosis.’¹⁸ Couched in emphatically negative terms, the common Western conclusion from eye witness accounts around the time of the revolution was that Mongolia was an isolated nation lacking civilisation and progress. Removing cultural bias, these records are in fact witness to strong cultural continuity, particularly in terms of religion and spirituality. Whatever the interpretation, these observations by travellers familiar with Western notions of development support the notion that significant change needed to occur if socialism, the newest and most revolutionary of Western ideas, atheistic, sedentary and global, was to take hold and flourish.

Even if the situation had been different in terms of basic involvement of the population in national politics and traditional culture Mongolia still presented a crucial crippling demographic hurdle for the application of Marxist/Leninist ideology. The noble classes like all of the population had been oppressed by the Qing administration, so all classes had a cause for

¹⁵ Ferdinand Ossendowski, *Beasts, Men and Gods*, Nuvision Publications, Sioux Falls, 2006, p. 199.

¹⁶ Roy Chapman Andrews, *Across Mongolian Plains; A Naturalist's Account of China's 'Great Northwest'*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1921, Chapter VI.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Russian State Archives of Social-Political History, 495, Sch2.D 188.1.48, in; Morozova, 2002, op. cit., p. 14.

revolution, not just the lower. Moreover, Mongolia was a nation of nomadic pastoralists and as the industrial revolution had not occurred there was no associated capitalism to deride and no critical mass of workers or even a substantial enough underclass that could be mustered as revolutionaries. By contrast to the Russian situation the lack of a sector of population who could become identified as the proletariat was a major problem for the unfurling of socialism.¹⁹ Without this crucial element the development or imposition of Soviet theory in the Mongolian situation was difficult from the outset and would require both a reorganisation of socialist ideology and a reorganisation of Mongolian society. The three decades following the revolution saw both occur with pronounced outcomes: eventually a unique ideological adaptation of Marxism was created to suit Mongolia – the notion that Mongolia because of its forward thinking ingenuity, would leap from feudalism, over capitalism directly into socialism.²⁰



Image 2.1
Poster, D. Amgalan, 'Mongolia Leaps Over Capitalism', 1961

¹⁹ Bawden, op. cit., p. 245, pp. 246–247. Bawden debates the prevalence of literacy among the lay population as often underestimated or unreported by 'Marxist apologists' keen to portray pre-revolutionary Mongolia as sub civilised.

²⁰ Ibid.

The period from 1924 to the end of the 1940s saw initiatives including a failed attempt at collectivisation of agriculture, some slow progress in establishing state services and infrastructure, destruction of the Buddhist ‘system’ and the most extensive show trials, confiscations and purges. The upsurge against the first phases of collectivisation a central tenet of socialism, meant that it would not be finally implemented until the 1950s.²¹ Severe persecution of members of the feudal elite and confiscation of stock and property in the 1930s broke the power base of Mongol lords paving the way for a new order.²² Destruction or closing of all but two of Mongolia’s monasteries coupled with the execution of a large portion of the male religious population removed the power of the lamasery from the political sphere as well as transforming the demographic landscape of Mongolia.²³

The Second World War greatly affected Eurasia and Mongolia was not excepted. Most significantly the War altered the economies and foreign relations policies of Mongolia’s two longest term influencers/dominators, China and Russia. Increased Japanese activity in the region before and during the War, a fear of Japanese intentions and subsequent Japanese defeat on Mongolian territory fed into a readjustment of Sino-Soviet relations that strengthened Mongolia’s position among the two powers. It also lent Mongolia a measure of border stability, definition and relative security that it had not had before.²⁴

To explain this further, in the summer of 1939 Japan invaded Mongolia on its eastern border and Mongolia declared war on the Japanese, thus entering the Second World War. A battle between Japanese and combined Mongolian Army and Red Army troops ensued at Khalkin Gol (lake) in Dornod Aimag.²⁵ The Japanese were defeated resulting in a Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact which ensured Japanese respect for the eastern border of Mongolia.²⁶ Aside from the border security that the Pact provided this battle

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Christopher Kaplonski & David Sneath, *The History of Mongolia*, Global Oriental, Folkestone, 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Baabar, op. cit., Book III.

²⁶ Ibid.

in which Soviet and Mongol troops fought alongside each other led to a consolidation of Soviet influence and broadened acceptance by Mongols of the importance of allegiance with the Soviet Union.²⁷ Mongols are proud still of their country's contributions of horses, meat, skins and fur in support of the Red Army during the War and proud representations of the War effort are made all over Mongolia. In Ulaanbaatar, the NMM and the National Military Museum have substantial displays about this period and as a direct result of the battle, a significant War Memorial Museum was erected in the town of Sumber, near the battle site at Khalkin Gol and a number of grand monuments also remain today.²⁸ Museums to Russian military commander G. K. Jukov who led the Mongol-Soviet army were erected in Choibalsan, the closest provincial capital to Khalkin Gol and in Ulaanbaatar and remain in operation today, the G. K. Jukov Museum in Ulaanbaatar having recently been refurbished with Russian financial support.²⁹



Image 3.1
G.K. Jukov Museum, Ulaanbaatar, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

²⁷ Elena Boikova, 'Aspects of Soviet Mongol Relations 1929–1939' in Stephen Kotkin & Bruce Elleman (eds), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century; Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999., pp. 107–122; Bruce Elleman, 'Final Consolidation of the USSR's Sphere of Interest in Outer Mongolia', in Kotkin & Elleman, *ibid.*, pp. 123–136.

²⁸ Author observations during travel in Mongolia.

²⁹ *Mongolia Segodiya*, (Mongolia Today Newspaper), 5 May 2010; Author's conversation with Director, G. K. Jukov Museum, Ulaanbaatar, September 2010. 'Jukov' is a direct transliteration from the titling of the Jukov Museum in Ulaanbaatar.

In October 1945 the results of a national referendum indicated the Mongols desire for official independence from China. Subsequently China recognised the independence of the territories referred to as Outer Mongolia and a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Mongolia and the Soviet Union meant official recognition by the Soviets of independent Mongolia for the first time.³⁰ One of the enduring themes of Mongolia's history and an impediment to its development into a defined geopolitical state had always been the expansion and contraction, both dramatic and subtle of the boundaries of the territories controlled by the Mongol peoples.³¹ As such it is highly significant symbolically as well as politically that for the first time in the middle of the twentieth century Mongolia had a well-defined border and a relatively affluent ally.³² The events of 1945/6 were in fact a culmination of a series of events which resulted in Mongol-Soviet alignment that had been developing throughout the century. Mongols debate the extent to which Soviet influence was sought or imposed, giving rise to some interesting thinking on whether the negative and positive outcomes of the socialist period were Mongol generated, or Soviet imposed.³³ Historian Baabar argues that Mongolia became a 'Soviet Republic' much earlier, around the time of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1924.³⁴ Morozova is also direct in claiming that it is 'well known' that the development of Mongolia was controlled and led by the policies of the Soviet Union and the Comintern.³⁵ Whatever the opinion of when it occurred, the War effort served to consolidate and entrench these links and to further cool the relationship between China and Mongolia.

By 1946, with its eastern neighbours at bay and a strong mutually beneficial relationship with the Soviet Union, Mongolia though depleted was positioned to take advantage of its new stability. The Government embarked on a series

³⁰ Baabar, op. cit., pp. 411–412.

³¹ Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2011; Sechin Jagchid & Paul Heyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1979.

³² Baabar describes the expansion and contraction of the Mongolian territories in some detail. Again, there is much scholarly difference of opinion as to the intentions of the USSR toward Mongolia over time and particularly during the early to mid-twentieth century.

³³ Baabar, for example, offers strong opinions on the role of the Soviet Union.

³⁴ Baabar, op. cit., p. 252.

³⁵ Morozova, 2002, op. cit., pp. 43–44.

of reforms including; the 1946 Treaty of Friendship and the Agreement on Economic and Cultural Cooperation and in 1947 the adoption of the 1948–1952 first Five Year Plan for reconstruction.³⁶ In 1952, Marshal Choibalsan passed away. He had been a key figure both during the revolution and in Government as Minister of Internal Affairs in 1936 and Commander-in-Chief and Minister for Defence in 1937.³⁷ Choibalsan had presided over the major purges of the 1930s and his passing marked both a real and perceived end to a particular period.³⁸ The new leader Tsedenbal Yu. began internal reform that would eventually contribute to the creation of an environment for further political revolution later in the century.³⁹ Internationally, as countries of the world rearranged and realigned themselves in the post War period Mongolia was able to forge ties with emerging and re-emerging nations. It joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) which facilitated economic integration through fostering bilateral and multilateral arrangements among socialist countries.⁴⁰ Other connections to the world community were made, such as Mongolia's admission as a member of the United Nations in 1961. In 1963, the United Kingdom became the first Western nation to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia and subsequently a first batch of Mongol students funded by UNESCO was dispatched to study at Leeds University.⁴¹

Debate about postwar reforms questions the extent to which acceleration of Mongolian democratic revolutionary activities grew out of opportunities presented by governmental reforms or whether revolutionaries and the public were inspired to act by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eventual collapse of the international socialist network.⁴² Morozova concludes that the end of the Choibalsan era was symbolic by comparison to the direct impact

³⁶ Library of Congress Country Studies, Information about Mongolia, 1946–1952, June 1989, p. 1, <[http://www.loc.gov/cgi_bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+MN0032\)>](http://www.loc.gov/cgi_bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+MN0032)>), retrieved 2 May 2004; Bawden, op. cit., p. 381.

³⁷ Baabar, op. cit., pp. 352–356.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Morozova, 2009, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, Soviet sponsored. See glossary of Library of Congress Country Studies, *Mongolia; Socialist Construction under Tsedenbal, 1953–1984*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Kotkin & Elleman, op. cit., p. 278.

⁴² Morozova, 2009, op. cit., p. 133.

that the rapid withdrawal of Soviet aid, troops and political influence had.⁴³ She controversially asserts that reforms, the initiative for which she credits to the Government and MPRP, created an environment conducive to change that already existed at the time of the Soviet collapse and withdrawal.⁴⁴

New Histories

The socialist system introduced in 1924 overlayed a new culture of literacy, education, archaeology and science. The development of Mongolian historiography took a radical turn during the socialist period as part of the ‘scientific’ reshuffle connected to the national literacy and secular education system that was introduced, through which Marxist/Leninist ideology was disseminated.⁴⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, the classics of Marxism/Leninism were eventually translated into Mongolian, historical material was collected and historians were trained and the first secondary school history textbooks were written.⁴⁶

The First International Congress of Mongolists was held in Ulaanbaatar in 1959 and non-socialist scholars were permitted to attend.⁴⁷ Due to the aforementioned intrigue among Westerners with mysterious Mongolia some of the key earliest works about history which provide a perspective on how the interpretation of Mongolia and its history have changed are written by foreigners. To this end Chris Atwood notes that much of Mongolian history has been told by non-Mongols.⁴⁸ The earliest scholars to whom contemporary Mongolists refer tend to be early-twentieth-century European figures such as linguists Poppe and Heissig.⁴⁹ While both authors’ primary concern was language each usefully for today’s scholar ventured into writing about and promoting Mongolian Studies and has been widely translated into

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 134–142.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁵ Shagdaryn Bira, ‘Historiography Among the Mongols’, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*; vol. 4, no. 2, UNESCO, 2000.

⁴⁶ *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, 3rd Edition, 1970–1979, The Gale Group, 2010. Quoted at <<http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/People's+Republic+of+Mongolia>>, retrieved 7 March 2013.

⁴⁷ Bawden, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁸ Christopher Atwood, in Kotkin & Elleman, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Stephen Kotkin, ‘In search of the Mongols and Mongolia: A Multinational Odyssey’, in Kotkin & Elleman, op.cit., pp. 3–18.

English. A later group of scholars, including Owen Lattimore and Charles Bawden, provide useful contemporary accounts of Mongolia from the mid-to latter twentieth century.⁵⁰ Such is the ongoing legacy of Lattimore that in 2008 a conference was convened by the American Centre for Mongolian Studies (ACMS), the International Association of Mongolian Studies (IAMS) and the National University of Mongolia titled *Owen Lattimore: The Past, Present and Future of Inner Asian Studies*.⁵¹

The Soviet system and how it affected its satellites will not be described in detail here. However, it is accepted that history was appropriated as a key tool for disseminating ideology or propaganda and that museums became what Kuutma has described as ‘specialised propaganda institutions in the Soviet cultural and academic sphere’.⁵² The outcome of the socialist period is that history began to be written more frequently and in a Western socialist style, more people became literate and were therefore able to access history through education and reading, and museums were arranged to reflect socialist ideology. As museums were a populist shopfront for historical invention, they were used to interpret (in objects and words) the class struggle and developmental benefits of socialism.⁵³

As discussed in chapter one, Mongolia has rich oral, Shamanist and Buddhist traditions that have preserved aspects of history both material and intangible.⁵⁴ It also has vast archaeological and archival evidence from ancient times to the present. Mongolists vary in their appraisal of Mongol historiography with some identifying stronger traditions than others. Bawden credits the Mongols from medieval times as being one of the ‘civilized

⁵⁰ Owen Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys*. New York, Doubleday Doran, 1941 and *Nomads and Commissars: Mongolia Revisited*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1962; C. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968.

⁵¹ The American Centre for Mongolian Studies, <http://www.mongoliacenter.org/library/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=152&Itemid=147>, retrieved 4 March 2012.

⁵² Kristina Kuutma, ‘Contested Memory and Re-configured Master Narratives: Museum Institution in Totalitarian Regimes, *National Museums and the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts* Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Brussels 26–27 January 2012; Dominique Poulot, José María Lanzarote Guiral & Felicity Bodenstein (eds.), *EuNaMus Report no. 8.*, Linköping University Electronic Press, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=082>, retrieved 10 July 2013, pp. 81–82.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kotkin & Elleman, op. cit, p.15.

peoples of High Asia', and notes a literary tradition beginning with the adaptation of the Uighur script from the Mongol language during the reign of Chinggis Khan.⁵⁵ Bawden, however, notes that scholarship was hindered as printing was either centred in Beijing or temple printerries and that the predominant scholarship was generated by *lama* or nobles. He also notes that 'recent' (he was writing in 1968) cultural production was being 'crippled by the primitive demands of socialist realism.'⁵⁶ Recently, discussing the official rewriting of history during the early socialist period Kaplonski attributes the effectiveness of this strategy to what he describes as: 'the lack of tradition of historiographical criticism, the lack of widespread secular education and the Buddhist tradition which gave the written word extra authority.'⁵⁷ Whichever view or combination of it is accepted, it remains a consensus that a strong culture of history writing has been limited until recently relative to many other parts of the world. The general consensus is that the writing of history in a Western secular scholarly style was introduced in the twentieth century with a socialist realist filter.⁵⁸ Thus, it is only since the latter part of the century that unfettered, well researched history has flourished.

Creating Museums – Enriching the State Collection



⁵⁵ Bawden, op. cit, pp. 22–23.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 22–23.

⁵⁷ Kaplonski, op. cit., pp. 35–37.

⁵⁸ Bira, op. cit.

Image 3.2

State Central Museum, Ulaanbaatar, c. 1930s

British Museum Endangered Archives,

<http://eap.bl.uk/database/large_image.a4d?digrec=751485;r=32439>,

retrieved 13 November 2013

Amid all of the reforms of the twentieth century the way in which history itself was managed changed dramatically. It was not only the writing of history that was transformed by socialist ideology, but also the ownership of material heritage was removed from nobles and lamaseries and centralised under state control. As discussed in chapter one, the process of museumisation of collections did not occur in an historical vacuum but was a layered over a pre-existing collecting culture. Collecting and exhibiting for pedagogical purposes and identity building were not new to Mongolia, yet the socialist system brought a new way of using objects for didactic purposes. Having outlined the existence of collections and a keeping culture that existed before socialism, in order to critique the museums it is essential to examine the context of cultural rearrangement that took place early in the twentieth century. To understand the Mongolian museum-making process, one must understand how the Soviet model evolved. The significance of the place of history in socialist ideology was summarised by Lenin in 1920:

Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeoisie epoch, it has on the contrary assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture.⁵⁹

Museums were created based upon the socialist museum model and were developed as preservers of the past for educative, propagandist and didactic purposes – as places in which to package a state crafted developmental past as the official past and for glorifying achievements and heroes of the socialist international movement. Lenin was particularly interested in using culture as

⁵⁹ V. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, April to December 1920, quoted in I. Antonova (ed.); *Museums in the USSR, How Soviet Museums Protect Historical and Cultural Monuments*, United Soviet Socialist Republic, Ministry of Culture, Central Museum of the Revolution, Moscow, 1980, p. 13.

an element of socialist ideology. An underpinning concept of the notion of progress and triumph of the proletariat was that the present was a product of the past and that history was not to be forgotten; that is, 'Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated'.⁶⁰ A huge museum-making program was undertaken in the Soviet Union from very soon after the Revolution.⁶¹ The priority task post revolution was to gather, preserve and study monuments pertaining to the people's revolutionary struggle and the history of the three revolutions (1905 and February and October 1917) in Russia and to make private collections public.⁶² In a recent article on the role of the Soviet museum system Kuutma describes the concept of the museum as a place for ideological manipulation:

History was perceived as a didactic space where the narrative of economic and military domination prevailed, with a firm focus on events and impersonal numerical data deemed politically correct. In the Soviet master narrative personal experience or memories did not exist or matter.⁶³

After the revolution Lenin established a 'Peoples Commissariat for Education' the portfolio of which included the 'Collegium for Museums and the Protection of Art and Historical Monuments'.⁶⁴ As early as 1918 the Soviet Government began issuing a series of decrees moving formerly private collections into the national collections for their 'protection' and for the education of the people.⁶⁵ In the case of the Soviet Union, this philosophy when transmuted into policy meant that the number of museums grew from 213 in the pre-revolutionary period to more than 1500 by 1980. Many of these were created from pre-existing institutions such as palaces, grand homes and places of imperial significance. Others were created from 'green

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kuutma, op. cit., p.86.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Museums in the USSR*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 16–29.

space' such as revolution museums, science museums and provincial museums.⁶⁶

The point of recounting this brief chronology is that it is accepted that Mongolia was heavily influenced by Russian policy and the Soviet model gives insight into the ideology underpinning the Mongolian situation.⁶⁷ In Mongolia the introduction of museums was one element of a state-driven national town building program and the introduction of socialist style cultural infrastructure, which led to a comprehensive cultural overhaul.⁶⁸ In the 1920s, the government also introduced a National Theatre, a State Printing House, in the 1940s the National Opera and Ballet and in the 1950s the National Drama Theatre.⁶⁹ The cultural landscape of Mongolia was totally transformed within three decades from what it had been under the Qing. Russian 'experts', many of whom were archaeologists worked with institutions from inception, thus exerting substantial influence.⁷⁰ The development of museums was coupled with the development of archaeology that began in the first decades of socialism and took direct tutelage from the Soviet Union. The archaeology of the Soviet Union and hence the tradition exported to Mongolia was different from that of the West as it was filtered through the ideology of Marxism/Leninism.⁷¹ Klejn describes how archaeology took on an early importance in the Soviet Union and then in other socialist countries as a 'new' superior science and a symbol of progress by virtue of its Marxist paradigm.⁷² Archaeology would guard against the previous 'evil' falsifications of history by the bourgeois and religious

⁶⁶ *Museums in the USSR*, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Morozova, 2009, op. cit., Morozova makes a complex case for identifying the level of influence of the Comintern and Russian agencies in Mongolia, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Tsultem N., *Mongolian Arts and Crafts*, (English, Russian, French, Spanish), State Publishing House, Ulan Bator, 1987.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Greywynn Smith, 'The Spirit Banner of Chinggis Khan', March 17, 2012, unpublished paper emailed to author 15 January 2014. This paper is based upon the personal diaries and documents of Simukov and Dendev.

⁷¹ Leo S. Klejn, *Soviet Archaeology: Trends, Schools and History*, Rosh Ireland & Kevin Windle (trans.), originally published in Russian, 1993, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, E. N. Chernykh, 'Postscript: Russian archaeology after the collapse of the USSR: infrastructural crisis and the resurgence of old and new nationalisms', in Philip E. Kohl & Clare Fawcett (eds), *Nationalism, politics and the practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 139–148.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 10–11.

classes.⁷³ A complex debate on the methodology and theory of Soviet archaeology as well as its standing within the wider political system throughout the socialist period in Russia is described by Klejn.⁷⁴ The overriding concept is the important place of archaeology in the socialist cultural system and that the Soviet system (as evidenced in bouts of intense funding and activity and reporting) employed archaeology as a key tool for reinforcing and illuminating socialist ideologies.⁷⁵ Chapter five will demonstrate how the legacy of the ‘scientific importance’ of archaeology is strong and influential at the NMM. The NMM has maintained and accelerated its archaeological focus and in doing so realigned its notion of modern Mongolia as one rooted in a succession of progressively developing ancient states.

A substantial amount of museological theorising has considered the appropriation of archaeological materials for constructing nationalist narratives and identified this as both a long-standing international phenomena and a strong characteristic of Soviet museology. The work of Kohl and Shnirelman and Klejn, for example, brings into focus the relationship between the archaeological past and constructs of nationalism in the Soviet context.⁷⁶ Kohl acknowledges that an upsurge in interest in the relationship between archaeology and nationalism has occurred in Eastern Europe and Eurasia as a result of (though not exclusively) the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and subsequent border and sovereignty disputes, often with deep historical origins.⁷⁷ He acknowledges, as does Meskell, that archaeological practice itself has national characteristics and that it is relatively recently that the ‘cloak’ of objectivity that archaeology once had has been abandoned for an understanding that pure scientific objectivity is not possible and that science cannot but process through subjective rubrics.⁷⁸

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Klejn identifies nine groups of scholars each with differing opinions.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kohl & Fawcett, op. cit., pp. 139–150; Philip E. Kohl, ‘Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the reconstructions of the Remote Past’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, Ithaca, 1998, pp. 223–246, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/223370>>, retrieved 22 August 2008; Klejn, op. cit.; Victor A. Shnirelman, ‘From internationalism to nationalism: forgotten pages of Soviet archaeology in the 1930s and 1940s’.

⁷⁷ Kohl, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 225.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; Meskell, op. cit.

The ethics of constructing nationalism from archaeology poses questions as to what the role of archaeology should be in the museums of Mongolia. For example, the NMM has a high proportion of archaeological staff and has greatly expanded its archaeological activities since the democratic period. The case study that follows in subsequent chapters will identify that the influence of Soviet archaeology is an historical legacy in Mongolian museums. While extensive research surrounds the practice and politics of archaeology in general, it is Soviet archaeology that shaped substantial portions of today's Mongolian museum collections and the authority of archaeology remains paramount in construction of the new national narrative.

Building further on understanding the ideology behind socialist museology and archaeology, the discussion now moves to the actual methods by which museums were made. The Mongolian situation shared similar characteristics with the Soviet Union in that there were two methods by which museums were created. They were created from pre-existing collections and buildings, or purpose built. A brief description of significant milestones follows that serves as subject matter upon which to complete an understanding of the history of museums as they appeared. On 22 November 1921, the year of the Mongolian independence revolution the government created the 'Research Institute of Mongolia'.⁷⁹ The Institute included language and history researchers and scholars from all disciplines as well as a library and museum open for the public. Thus the collection and storage of historic and natural history materials was written into policy.⁸⁰ The resolution stipulated that the Institute would collect 'different and interesting' things that would be displayed in a museum and also collect a fund of sutras and books of the world that the people could see and use.⁸¹ There were also calls for the establishment of a national museum and collecting of objects began in preparation for the establishment of a new building to house the objects.⁸²

⁷⁹ Mongolian National Archive, Fund 23, Unit 12, quoted in Prof. Ochir A., *Mongol Muzein Tobtsoon*, Ulaanbaatar, 2004, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Museums.mn, 'Museums of Mongolia' website, <<http://museum.pixel.mn>>, retrieved 8 February 2008; Ochir, op. cit., p. 13.

During the period before and following the revolution, Russian and other foreign funded activities accelerated, including scientific and archaeological expeditions. This type of collection, led by researchers such as Kozlov, Lisovskii, Kiselyov and Simukov, endured and by the 1960s this method had become standard.⁸³ One of the earliest of these expeditions was part of the Tibeto-Mongolian expedition led by Kozlov to excavate burials of nobles at Noyon Uul in 1924 was possibly precipitated by the opening of the new State Central Museum, its need for objects to display and the establishment of research institutions. Excavations yielded a range of rare, organic material such as silks and a fine felt carpet produced by the Hunnu of the Bronze Age. The ancient carpet was cut in two, one part being sent to Russia, the other remaining in Mongolia. Some of these finds made their way to the State Central Museum and eventually to the NMM, where they remain on display today.⁸⁴ Likewise, Roy Chapman Andrews' expeditions in the south Gobi desert in the 1920s and 1930s, funded by J.P. Morgan and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, contributed dinosaur nests, eggs, skeletons and related specimens up to ninety-five million years old to the state collections.⁸⁵ These specimens would remain in the State Central Museum building when it became the Natural History Museum.⁸⁶

In 1924, the year Mongolian People's Republic was declared, the new Government established and opened the Mongolian National Museum (later renamed the State Central Museum, the precursor of the NMM) in a section of a wooden house near where the town square was to be established soon after.⁸⁷ The Museum had two sections, nature and history and two hundred objects were on display.⁸⁸ These collections are the seeds of the National and Natural History Museums of today. The Museum exhibitions were first shown to delegates of the *Ik Hural* (Parliament) in November that year.⁸⁹

⁸³ *Mongolia*, no. 3 (78), Mongolians Peoples Republic State Committee for Information, Radio and Televisions, Ulaanbaatar, 1984, p. 19.

⁸⁴ Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D. at the National Museum of Mongolia, 20 May 2010.

⁸⁵ Fitzhugh Green, *Roy Chapman Andrews; Dragon Hunter*, The Knickerbocker Press, New York & London, 1930.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ochir, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

One room was occupied by objects from the Russian archaeologist Kozlov's recent expedition to Noyon Uul.⁹⁰ The Museum charter was to introduce the history, culture and natural environment of Mongolia to its visitors. The first Director of the Museum was Jamyan Ongundyn, who was a scholar and aristocrat and had been a teacher and mentor of national revolutionary hero Sukhbaatar D.⁹¹ The cultural heritage collections would remain with the natural history objects from this time until they were officially separated in 1990. The Mongolian National Museum was the first state-run museum open to the general public in Mongolia.⁹² In 1924, Government museums were also established in the major provincial towns of Khovd and Ulaiastai.⁹³

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the State Central Museum grew. In 1926, the Museum collections were expanded and the collections divided into art, ethnography and natural history.⁹⁴ At the end of 1926, Dendev P. was made Director of the Museum and Russian archaeologist Simukov who was head of the Geography Department which oversaw the Museum was instructed to review the collections at the Bogd Khaan Museum.⁹⁵ In the same year the government created a special bureau for establishing museums.⁹⁶ On 1 April 1926, the Government decided to turn the Winter Palace complex into a museum and instructed the Academy of Science to manage this task.⁹⁷ Responsibility for the Winter Palace was handed to the State Central Museum in 1954, yet the Winter Palace Museum did not open to the public until 1961.⁹⁸ Also in 1926 the State Central Museum began purchasing objects and officially approached other organisations, such as the Ministry of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.; Baabar op. cit., p. 199.

⁹² International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, *Nomadic*, Newsletter no. 55, Ulaanbaatar, May, 2004, p. 8. Some objects from the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan made their way into the collections of this and other museums in the after the death of the Bogd Khaan.

⁹³ Ochir, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Discussion with Ms Enkhmaran, Librarian of the National Museum of Mongolian History, 5 December 2005 regarding a series of photographs of Mongolian museums dated 1974.

⁹⁵ Smith, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Ochir, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Trade and provincial governments, for donations of objects. This resulted in the donation of a substantial amount of ‘local goods’ to the Museum.⁹⁹

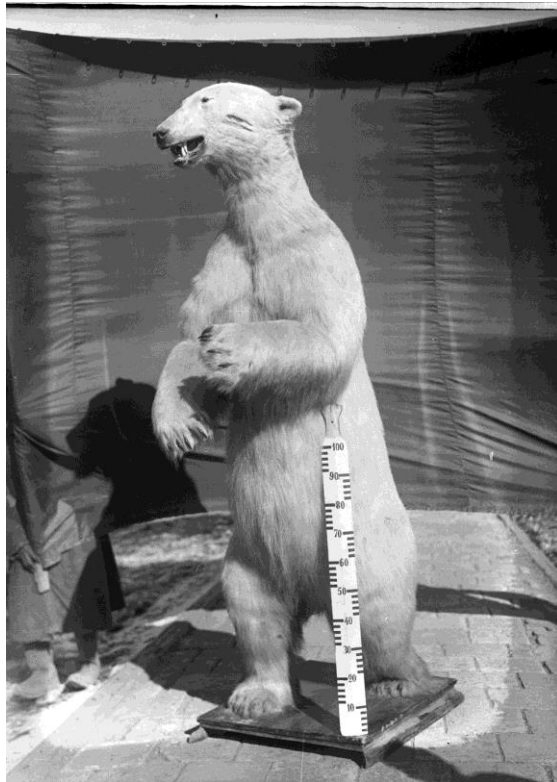


Image 3.3

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, cataloguing the collections, c. 1930–1950

British Library, Endangered Archives, ‘EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia’,

<<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

The 1930s is an interesting decade in relation to collecting and exhibiting in the museums because the major purges occurred, accompanied by mass confiscations of private and religious property yet it has not been extensively scrutinised.¹⁰⁰ Between 1937 and 1938, approximately 16 613 *lama* were persecuted and or executed and by 1940 only twenty-six temples and monasteries remained functioning.¹⁰¹ Estimations of loot taken from monasteries indicate ‘truckloads’ of copper and bronze ware were confiscated.¹⁰² A recent publication written by Professor Ochir A. (Director

⁹⁹ Ochir, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Morozova, 2009, op. cit., pp. 16–40.

¹⁰¹ Majer & Teleki, op. cit.

¹⁰² Baabar, op. cit., p. 370.

of the NMM from 2004 to 2007) gives some insight based on archival sources into how the purges affected Mongolia's growing museums.¹⁰³ Though it has always been known anecdotally, it is becoming clearer in current research how museum collections were 'enriched' with confiscated objects.¹⁰⁴ In 1929, the Confiscation Commission established a policy for museums and research work that identified five types of confiscated objects that would be transferred to museums.¹⁰⁵ They were: objects that illustrated feudal times, art objects both foreign and local, prehistoric weapons, ancient objects and curios and rare objects. The Commission established the *Cudar Litgim Hureenengeec* (Extra Special Acquisition Commission) to go to localities and choose objects for the State Central Museum. Objects not chosen for the Museum were transferred to local museums.¹⁰⁶ The Commission that registered the precious effects of the Bogd Khaan (jewellery, gold and silver objects, international gifts and ceremonial costumes) did not transfer these to the State Central Museum as the Museum did not house precious objects, but rather most were sold at auction.¹⁰⁷ The then registrar of the Commission, Amar D. (who would later become Prime Minister) was unhappy with this practice and wrote to the Central Committee of the MPRP stating that these unique objects should be kept as property of the state.¹⁰⁸ Many of the possessions of the nobles and the monasteries were destroyed along with books although most were documented by the newly established Confiscation Commission, some were 'lost'.¹⁰⁹ As discussed previously much cultural material, particularly heirlooms and religious artefacts were hidden and buried by Mongols so as to avoid confiscations. Some of these artefacts emerged later in the twentieth century after the end of socialism and eventually made their way into museum collections.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰³ Ochir, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Email, Dr Bumaa D., 28 February 2013; Smith, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Ochir, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Ochir, op. cit., pp. 13–14.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Mongolian National Archive, Fund 23, Unit 1, quoted in Ochir, Ibid., pp. 14–15.

¹⁰⁹ Ochir, op. cit., p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Observation of the author and in discussions with Curator of Ethnography, National Museum of Mongolian History, 2000/2; Bruce M. Knauft. & Richard Taupier, *Mongolians After Socialism: Politics, Economy, Religion*, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, National University of Mongolia, Open Society Forum, Mongolia, Admon Press, Ulaanbaatar, 2012, p. 192.

meanings of this period for the studied museums will be examined in chapter six.



Image 3.4

State Central Museum, Ulaanbaatar, c. 1930–1950

British Library, Endangered Archives, ‘EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia’,
<<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

From 1940 to 1941 the State Central Museum increased its emphasis on countryside research.¹¹¹ In 1942, the first University opened and thus the development of scholarly research accelerated. Expeditions occurred to countryside areas looking for arable land and also yielding more objects.¹¹²

An historical archaeological collection was acquired for the State Central Museum in 1949 from a joint Mongolian/ Russian expedition that was undertaken to Kharakhorum under Russian archaeologist S. V. Kiselyov.¹¹³

Throughout the 1940s, local museums, smaller versions of the ones in the capital were established in *aimag* (province) and *soum* (local government) centres such as Bayan Olgii, Darkhan and Tov.¹¹⁴ These museums tended to house a wide range of objects relating to local natural history and

¹¹¹ Dr Idshinorov S., *Museum Guidebook*, National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, 2000.

¹¹² Author’s conversation with Dr Bumaa D., 20 May 2010.

¹¹³ *Nomadic*, op. cit.

¹¹⁴ Knaft & Taupier, op. cit., p. 192.

government related activities such as schools, building programs, collectivisation and information about the glorious revolution.¹¹⁵

Throughout the century other smaller museums were created. Revolutionary hero Sukhbaatar died in 1924 and a museum was created in his name in Ulaanbaatar in 1946. The Museum of Sukhbaatar was located in the building that had acted as the office of the Central Committee of the MPRP in the lead up to and after the 1924 revolution. In 1953, the Museum was incorporated into a larger museum about Sukhbaatar and his fellow revolutionary Choibalsan. In 1956, it was renamed the History of Ulaanbaatar City Museum and shifted its focus to showcase the development of Ulaanbaatar, celebrating socialist town planning and construction initiatives. In 1960, a resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the MPRP resolved to expand the museum to become the Museum of History and Reconstruction.¹¹⁶ In 1954, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the 1924 revolution, the collections of a small Revolution Museum which had been instigated in 1931 were merged with those of the State Central Museum. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev visited and viewed ethnographic objects.¹¹⁷ This merger may have been in preparation for the opening of the new State Central Museum building in central Ulaanbaatar in 1956.¹¹⁸

From 1956, the State Central Museum was housed in a neoclassical white stucco building in the centre of Ulaanbaatar. This incarnation of the Museum initially contained galleries displaying history, palaeontology, natural environment and Mongolian fine art.¹¹⁹ In the same year the Museum introduced an ethnography display about traditional customs and costumes of Mongol ethnic groups.¹²⁰ In 1961, William O. Douglas, an Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States travelled to Mongolia and his observations including of a visit to the State Central Museum were chronicled in an article for National Geographic magazine published in 1962.

¹¹⁵ Based on observations of the author of small museums such as; Dadal, Ondorkhan, Choibalsan, Darkhan and Yoliin Am.

¹¹⁶ Ibid; Enkhnanan, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Enkhnanan, Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Nomadic*, op. cit.

Douglas noted the then current antagonism toward the period of Manchu rule. He described how the nine methods of torture invented by the Manchu were on display and interpreted.¹²¹ Official government photographic documentation (see chapter six for one such image) from just after this time supports the notion that instruments of torture featured graphically.¹²² This anti-Manchu message conveyed by the Museum at this time is important as only two decades previously during the purges the Mongols had inflicted a range of tortures and assassinations upon themselves on a large scale and which can be assumed are not included in the Museum displays of the time. Thus display of Manchu brutality shifted focus from recent Mongol self-infliction of brutality and constructed a useful other upon which to apportion negativity.



Image 3.5
State Central Museum, the Standard of Chinggis Khan, 1961
Photograph National Geographic

¹²¹ William O. Douglas & Dean Conger, 'Journey to Outer Mongolia', *National Geographic*, vol. 121, no. 3, 1962, p. 316.

¹²² British Library, Endangered Archives, 'EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia', <<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

The object that is depicted by permission of the Museum in *National Geographic* (pictured above) is a standard or banner purported to be from the time of the Great Khans.¹²³ The notion of the ‘black’ and ‘white’ banner is highly symbolic today as Chinggis Khan used the black banner during war and the white banner during peace. Together they symbolise the power and complexity of ancient Mongolia. The actual authenticity of the banners is contested; some believe the white banner was lost, others that it rests in Ordos, Inner Mongolia.¹²⁴ One story of the Banners in relation to the Museum is recounted by archaeologists Dendev and Simukov in their personal papers which are now held by the Simukov family in Moscow.¹²⁵ They recount how the Black Banner was saved and preserved by the First Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu Zanabazar who built a temple at Baruun Khuree in Overkhangai Aimag to house it.¹²⁶ The Banner was worshipped and the temple had its own *takhilch*.¹²⁷ In 1937, Simukov and Dendev were instructed to take the Black Banner of Chinggis Khan from its long-term home to the State Central Museum. Dendev describes the interaction between the *lama* of the temple and himself and Simukov in detail, relaying how sacred the object was and how reluctant the keepers were to part with it.¹²⁸ Eventually they did, obviously wishing to avoid persecution and the object was transported to the Museum where soon after it ‘disappeared’.¹²⁹

The picture of the banner in the Douglas article of 1961 explains neither how the object was interpreted. Whether it was a facsimile or not is not reported, though it is depicted as displayed sitting on a low plinth flanked by two smaller black and white standards mounted on poles.¹³⁰ These appear to be similar to those on display in the Museum today (pictured in chapter five). That the object was singled out either by Douglas or the museum staff to be

¹²³ Douglas, op. cit., p. 307.

¹²⁴ Smith, op. cit.; Saruulbuyan J., Eregzen G. & Bayarsaikhan J. (eds), *National Museum of Mongolia*, National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2009, p. 68.

¹²⁵ Smith, Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ British Library, Endangered Archives, ‘EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia’, <<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

photographed suggests that it was held in some esteem. Like the ethnography displays, the presence of this object in the collection points to incorporation and ascribing of significance of that period of Mongolian history within the displays of the Museum. Also, the history of the object supports the notion of Mongolians having a long tradition of keeping and revering objects and ascribing particular reverence to the material heritage of Chinggis Khan and the Great Mongol Empire.

Mongolia's economy improved in the post War period and the Eleventh Congress of the MPRP in 1947 adopted the first of a series of five and three year plans aimed at improving the economy and culture. As a result the number of museums in Mongolia increased in the 1960s, both in the capital city and in provincial centres.¹³¹ In 1966 the Fine Arts Museum was established to exhibit arts of Mongolia from Palaeolithic times to the early twentieth century and the Museum of Geology was created in 1966 within the Mongolian University of Science and Technology.¹³² A large V.I. Lenin Museum was created in a new building in central Ulaanbaatar in 1967 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution and to memorialise Lenin.¹³³ From 1967 to 1974, it received 300 000 visitors and its collection expanded by fifteen percent.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, 3rd Edition, 1970–1979, The Gale Group, 2010. Quoted at <<http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/People's+Republic+of+Mongolia>>, retrieved 7 March 2013.

¹³² Knauf & Taupier, op. cit.

¹³³ Ochir, op. cit.

¹³⁴ Ibid.



Image 3.6

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, Green Palace building displays, c. 1930–1950

British Library, Endangered Archives, ‘EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia’, <http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

To mark the fiftieth anniversaries of both the Russian and Mongolian revolutions, revolution museums and museums to commemorate heroes were introduced in the 1970s. A large Revolution Museum was founded in Ulaanbaatar in 1971 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1921 revolution; it was in a new purpose built building between the Ministry of Interior headquarters in what had formerly been the Ministry yard and Parliament House.¹³⁵ The new Revolution Museum was a modernist building with bas-reliefs depicting revolutionary soldiers on horseback. The collection of the Revolution Museum would eventually become the majority of the twentieth-century collections of the NMM.¹³⁶

The Revolution Museum collection records are currently held at the NMM. The NMM also holds a series of photographs and text pages about the history of museums, published on 23 July 1974 by the Institute of Photographs of the State to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the NMM. The

¹³⁵ *Nomadic*, op. cit.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

photographs depict some of the displays of the existing museums, in particular the Revolution Museum and the State Central Museum.¹³⁷ The images give insight into the state's version of the successes of the museums building program.¹³⁸ The card catalogues of the Revolution Museum indicate that a large amount of objects were acquired in 1971.¹³⁹ In that year Deputy Director of the Revolution Museum of Russia, Mr Ustinov is pictured visiting Museum and making a presentation to staff. Mr Tsedenbal, Chair of the Central Committee of the MPRP, also visited the Museum to mark the occasion. This series of official photographs also shows Russian museum staff assisting with the creation of the Revolution Museum at Altan Bulag in Selenge Aimag and a party of Russians and Mongols in Sumber Soum, where the museum to commemorate the decisive battle at Khalkin Gol was to be created.¹⁴⁰ Further evidence is depicted in recently digitised archival images of the museums of Mongolia from the Archives of Cinema, Photography and Sound recording in Ulaanbaatar pictured throughout this thesis.¹⁴¹

In the 1980s as Soviet influence waned, a significant shift in the use of the State Central Museum's collections can be detected. In 1984, an ethnographic expedition to Arkhangai Aimag was undertaken which added more than four hundred 'ancient household articles' to the collection, continuing the tradition of acquisition through archaeological and ethnographic expeditions previously discussed. In an article in *Mongolia* magazine, printed by the State Printing House in 1984, Sodnom Ch., Head of the History Section of the State Central Museum, explained the reasons behind the expedition and acquisitions;

¹³⁷ Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D., 25 November, 2005.; photographs of Revolution Museum supplied by Ms Baaska, then Registrar, National Museum of Mongolian History, December 2005.

¹³⁸ Set of eighteen photographs, Library of the National Museum of Mongolian History, 1974, viewed December 2005.

¹³⁹ Investigations of the catalogues held at National Museum of Mongolian History, 24 November, 2005; Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D., op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ Enkhmaran, op. cit.

¹⁴¹ British Library, Endangered Archives, 'EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia', <<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

The main aim of such expeditions, which have become almost traditional, is to intensify and expand research into the study of traditions, of the typical features of the lifestyle and cultures of the peoples inhabiting Mongolia.¹⁴²

In 1987, the State Publishing House published a series of books about Mongolian culture.¹⁴³ The nature and content of these books illustrates some significant shifts in the uses of the State Central Museum collections as well as in state policy toward cultural education and interpretation of the objects. In this series of publications, text and catalogue are printed in four languages indicating the publication was intended for a broad international audience. The introduction to *Mongolian Arts and Crafts* describes how the creation of traditional materials began in the 'hoary past'. It describes the Mongolian *ger*, traditional costumes and over twenty types of folk craft in detail, illustrated by objects drawn from the museums of Mongolia. Objects depicted in the publication include arts and crafts, ethnographic materials such as costume and jewellery and religious objects, including 'splendid icons of sacred Buddhist pantheons...'¹⁴⁴ Objects are drawn from the collections of several museums and are celebrated as 'fine and intricate...' and 'highly developed...'¹⁴⁵ The author concludes that the survey 'is graphic proof of the richness and pricelessness of centuries of cultural heritage, created by the unceasing labour and talent of the Mongolian people'.¹⁴⁶ This is a rare example of a state sponsored catalogue of museum collections of the socialist period that illustrates openness to ethnographic and Mongol cultural heritage. The descriptions of the objects further indicate an acceptance of the fine quality of what would in the past have been considered 'feudal' objects and in particular the presentation of Buddhist objects as fine art. While removing them from their primary religious meanings, the catalogue

¹⁴² Sodnom Ch., *Mongolia*, no. 3 (78), op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁴³ Tsultem N., *Mongolian Arts and Crafts*, State Publishing House, Ulan Bator, 1987 and *Mongolian Architecture*, State Publishing House, Ulan Bator, 1987.

¹⁴⁴ Tsultem, op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ The State Central Museum, the Academy of Sciences, the State Fund of Precious Metals Depository, the Museum of Fine Arts, a museum called the Buriatia United Museum, the Bogd Khaan Residential Museum (the Winter Palace), Gandantegchinlen Monastery, the Choijin Lama Temple Museum, the State Public Library and *soum* and *aimag* museums; Tsultem, *ibid.*, N.B, the history and fate of the Buriatia United Museum is not known.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

nevertheless celebrates the objects in a way that would not have been possible earlier in the century.

Museum-making and modernisation continued up to the democratic revolution. In 1989, the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery was created from the contemporary collections of the Fine Arts Museum, with a charter to collect, exhibit and interpret Mongolian modern art. *Die Mongolen: The Mongols* exhibition catalogue, published in 1995, accompanied an exhibition that was held in the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1989.¹⁴⁷ The exhibition is indicative of increasing Mongolian international engagement, this particular example a result of a cultural treaty with the German Government allowing for a major exhibition about Mongolia to travel to Germany.¹⁴⁸ The project was stewarded by the Ministry of Culture and the Central Office of Museums which at the time controlled all state museums. Objects drawn upon for the exhibition and depicted in the catalogue are from the State Central Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts.¹⁴⁹ They include Shaman costumes, ethnic costumes and many Buddhist religious objects and iconography. Each is described and interpreted for its craftsmanship and meaning.¹⁵⁰ The mere fact that one of the earliest international travelling exhibitions out of Mongolia was about Mongol religion, culture and craftsmanship – much of it ‘feudal’ – in itself is significant and signals an increasing tolerance for Mongol custom from within.¹⁵¹ The aforementioned books and catalogues together provide a useful snapshot of the situation of the museums of Mongolia in the 1980s on the eve of the withdrawal of Soviet influence and financial support. The museums were under control of a central museums agency; collaborating with other museums within Mongolia and collaborating internationally. In the 1980s, the collections of ethnography and Mongolian arts and crafts appear to have been in the spotlight and were subject to scholarly interpretation both within and without Mongolia.

¹⁴⁷ Walther Heissig & Dominique Dumas, *Die Mongolen: the Mongols*, exhibition catalogue, Staatliches Museum für Volkerkunde, München, Pinguin Verlag, Innsbruck, 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Dr Bumaa D., e-document titled ‘Edited list for Foreign Rel[at]ions’, emailed to the author September 2009.

The second method of museum creation was necessitated by the existence of historic buildings and collections of the Buddhist clergy and feudal hierarchy that became state property after the purges of the 1930s. By 1962, only two monasteries in Ulaanbaatar remained in operation indicating the vast cache of sites and objects had come under state control the Winter Palace being one of the most significant.¹⁵² The Palace complex was described in chapter one as a working residence and temple complex. In 1926, after the death of the Bogd Khaan his Palace complex was declared a museum.¹⁵³ In 1954, the renamed Bogd Khaan Museum was made a branch of the State Central Museum.¹⁵⁴ Some objects from the Bogd Khaan Museum, such as ceremonial robes were transferred out of the former Palace and into the State Central Museum collection and were thus disassociated from their natural home.¹⁵⁵ Occasionally, those monasteries that were not destroyed were, like the Choijin Lama Temple, turned into local museums in regions across Mongolia.¹⁵⁶ Like the Winter Palace, the Choijin Lama Temple in central Ulaanbaatar was proclaimed a museum under the control of the Committee of Sciences in 1942. The preceding year it had been included on the List of Cultural Monuments by Parliament. The Choijin Lama Temple Museum had been built as a monastery between 1904 and 1908 and was active until the purges in 1938.¹⁵⁷ So, in summary, this recounting of the history of museums in the socialist period demonstrates their situation on the eve of transition to democracy. There was an extensive, complex network of museums spread across the country that were state controlled and vehicles of official ideology, heavily influenced by Soviet-style museology and archaeology.

¹⁵² Douglas, op. cit., p. 333.

¹⁵³ Majer & Teleki, op. cit.

¹⁵⁴ *Museums.mn*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ The Bogd Khaan's ceremonial robes appear in Heissig, op. cit., as part of the collections of the State Central Museum, later in the National Museum of Mongolian History, *Guidebook*, Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit. They are currently on exhibition in the Museum and pictured in chapter six of this work.

¹⁵⁶ Observations of the author in Khentii, Dornod, Dalanzadgad, Arkhangai.

¹⁵⁷ *Museums.mn*, op. cit.

Transition 1989–1990

Regardless of genesis, the events that resulted in Mongolia's first democratic election took place in swift succession. They were influenced by a key group of young urban Mongols who had recently returned to the country after attending international universities where they had encountered contemporary intellectual and popular developments.¹⁵⁸ Precursors to the revolution occurred in 1989; a Government commission recommended that the victims of the purges (carried out under Choibalsan's direction) should be rehabilitated symbolising an end to systemic political repression that had, though in increasingly diminished or subtle form, persisted until the 1980s.¹⁵⁹ Also in that year demonstrations and hunger strikes calling for greater freedom of expression, a multi-party system and economic reform began. Popular support grew quickly. The Mongolian Democratic Union was the first formal group to emerge and relatively soon after new political parties were formed challenging the requirement of Article Eighty-Two of the National Constitution for one-party rule.¹⁶⁰ In 1990, the socialist Government faltered and rescinded Article Eighty-Two thus permitting a multi-party system. Mongolia's first ever democratic election followed in July in which the MPRP gained a majority of seats.¹⁶¹ Some reluctant political concessions followed culminating in a new Constitution being adopted in 1992. This ratified the recent reforms and renamed the Mongolian People's Republic simply 'Mongolia' demarcating the new era from the socialist.¹⁶² The MPRP has continued to win or participate in ruling coalitions in most elections since.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia, from Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005, pp. 1–6.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–27.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

Domestic Affairs

The post-socialist period can be loosely considered in two phases; initial repercussions followed by a subsequent decade of more controlled change and consolidation. In the shock years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the decline and then swift withdrawal of Soviet financial support, troops and trade led to limited economic growth resulting in food shortages, high unemployment and widespread poverty as well as an increasingly decrepit national infrastructure. Adding complexity to the delicate internal situation, the openness that democracy afforded and lack of regulation led to foreign involvement such as commercial and religious as well as governmental entering Mongolia and jostling to fill the void left by the dispatch of socialism. As well as the adoption of the new Constitution in 1992, the Government also began programs to democratise Mongolia.¹⁶⁴ From 1991 to 1993, the government swiftly de-collectivised farming and privatised assets and livestock which had been a mainstay of the Mongolian economy.¹⁶⁵ The rapid privatisation led to uneven distribution of wealth and corruption. Herder families comprising almost half of the nation's population who had previously been grouped into *negdels* (cooperatives) were left to operate in an unregulated, depressed and volatile market while previously guaranteed state support was wavering and the security of food distribution networks and cheap fuel had disappeared.¹⁶⁶ The Government also set up a stock exchange in January 1991 and began to privatise state monopolies such as banks, factories and eventually mines and mining licences.¹⁶⁷ Land laws were amended and privatisation of property began in 2003 leading to controversy about who should receive or purchase land and how privatisation would impact on traditional herding practices in the countryside.¹⁶⁸

As well as implementing internal reform the government began rapid advancement of international diplomatic and trade relations, beyond the previously limited socialist networks. Diplomatic relations with the United

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 120–121.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

States were established in 1990, facilitating lucrative bilateral agreements, new markets, grants and donations. Other foreign countries established aid programs through new embassies or honorary consuls such as Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, China, Turkey, Germany, Canada and France. The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Program and the International Monetary Fund also began operations.¹⁶⁹ By 2002, grants and loans made up more than thirty percent of Mongolia's Gross Domestic Product.¹⁷⁰ From 1990 to 2009, USD 4.056 billion had been received in grants and loans by Mongolia.¹⁷¹ The overarching significance of this statistic being that the level of support that the Soviet Union had withdrawn had been replaced by world support and its inevitable influences within the first decade of democracy.

Since the early 1990s, Mongolia has continued to advance its diplomatic and economic ties with Western and Asian nations who in turn have interest in strategic relationships. A significant indicator of the induction of Mongolia into the capitalist fellowship was the visit by President George Bush Jr to Ulaanbaatar in November, 2005. During a day of ceremony the President of the United States delivered a speech praising Mongolia's military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and issued a joint statement with the Mongolian President Enkhbayar D. pledging to work together to further strengthen the bilateral economic and trade relationship. During his speech, tapping into Chinggis Khan imagery, Bush Jr invoked a well-known Mongolian legend about Chinggis Khans mother teaching her children that there is strength in unity as a way of illustrating and giving gravity to the United States-Mongol relationship.¹⁷²

In March 1996, Mongolia's first permanent internet connection was launched, facilitating further connectivity with the contemporary business

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 37–38.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁷¹ United States Department of State, 'Background Note: Mongolia', <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2779.htm>>, retrieved 3 July 2011.

¹⁷² Speech of George Bush Jr, 'US President on Freedom and Democracy', *The Mongol Messenger*, 30 November 2005.

world, international trends, foreign languages and popular culture.¹⁷³ This event has had widespread impact on Mongolian society by facilitating connectivity to world influences and markets, not only for the elite urban entrepreneurs, but for countryside Mongols also. In the case of museums, the transmission from ‘many to many’ phenomena that the proliferation of technology caused has brought with it the challenge to present an authoritative, coherent story in competition with ‘non-state’ transmitters.¹⁷⁴ Further connection to the world occurred in 1997 when the government abolished customs duty on all imports except oil, tobacco, alcohol and vehicles – an important step toward the introduction of foreign goods and services.¹⁷⁵ Foreign investment would, after a slow start also increase, with particular emphasis on mining and resources which continues to be debated today.¹⁷⁶

Connectivity to the rest of the world has occurred not only in trade, economic and communication terms but is planned as a physical reality. In 2000, the government announced the Millennium Road, a paved vehicular route crossing Mongolia from east to west, eventually linking Mongolia directly to Europe and Asia – an important step for a landlocked country.¹⁷⁷ Further, plans for the Mongolian Millennium Road would network into section AN32 of the Super Asian Highway millennium development goal project involving thirty-two countries. Facilitated by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific the Super Asian Highway would ambitiously link Tokyo to Istanbul.¹⁷⁸ While currently almost ninety percent of Mongolia’s roads remain unpaved, the intention to physically connect to international trade and traffic routes has been likened to a revival of the

¹⁷³ Geoff Long, ‘Why Mongolia?’ *Ie-OTI: OnTheInternet*, International Electronic Publication of the Internet Society, January/February 1998, <<http://www.isoc.org/oti>>, retrieved 19 May 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Kirsten Bound, R. Briggs, J. Holden & S. Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, Demos, London, 2007.

¹⁷⁵ Rossabi, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁷⁶ Uradyn Erden Bulag, ‘Mongolia in 2008: from Mongolia to Mine-golia’, *Asian Survey*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2009, pp. 129–134.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Asian Highway’, Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2004, <<http://treaties.un.org/doc/source/events/2004/network.pdf>>, retrieved 20 June 2011.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

ancient silk route.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in 2010 Leighton Asia was awarded a design and construct contract to build a freight railway line to transport coal direct from the mines in south Gobi to China, thus physically re-making Mongolia's tie to its historical foe.¹⁸⁰

While the last decade of the twentieth century was one of rapid change on all levels in the first decade of the twenty-first century it became possible to discern some general characteristics of the 'new' Mongolia.¹⁸¹ Following is a summary of some of the outcomes of transition as a point for consideration of their representation within museums in subsequent chapters.

Mining, Tourism and Religion

Though Mongols with ancient spiritual connections to their environment traditionally consider breaking ground a bad portent, the most significant economic effect of democracy is the introduction of large scale mining. It is rich in primary resources such as coking coal, copper, gold and iron ore and mining companies including Xstrata, Canadian-based Ivanhoe and Australian Rio Tinto have been heavily active.¹⁸² The mining boom is predicted as the major future of Mongolia's economy – the Mongolian Wolf as it is known – to the extent that, for example, one gold and copper extraction project Oyu Tolgoi (Turquoise Hill), which is jointly owned by the Mongolian Government and Ivanhoe Mines is predicted to account for one-third of the national entire Gross Domestic Product by 2020.¹⁸³ As of November 2010, the company declared to have already invested USD 4 billion in development of the mine.¹⁸⁴ Aside from the financial effects of such large scale foreign investment, flow-on changes to the local community occur; for example Oyu Tolgoi mine has not only employed and trained Mongolian locals in technical

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Watts, 'To bridge nations and carry hopes of half the globe: The New Silk Road', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19–20 March 2005.

¹⁸⁰ Damon Kitney, 'Leighton Takes Train to a Mining Boom', *The Weekend Australian*, June 19–20, 2010.

¹⁸¹ The SOYUZ 2005 conference, for example, explored the notion of a 'post post' socialism.

¹⁸² Uradyn Erden Bulag, 'Mongolia in 2008: from Mongolia to Mine-golia', *Asian Survey*, vol. 49, no. 1, University of California Press, 2009, pp. 129–134

¹⁸³ 'Precious Metals', *The Report: Mongolia 2012*, Oxford Business Group, 2012, p. 103.

¹⁸⁴ Open letter from management of Oyu Tolgoi project, <<http://en.ot.mn/418.shtml>>, retrieved 3 July 2011.

skills, but also funded the development of schools, computer lessons, medical services and cultural and environmental protection programs as part of its strategy to ingratiate itself.¹⁸⁵ Since 1995, the Australian Government alone has offered AUD63 million in aid to Mongolia, closely aligned with the social and environmental impacts of mining.¹⁸⁶ Australia's interests are also reflected in Australia in the establishment of a Mongolian Studies Centre at the Australian National University in 2011.¹⁸⁷

Parallel with the influx of foreigners associated with the resources boom has been an influx of foreign tourists. Recent decades have seen increases in tourism from south Asia, the Pacific, Europe and America.¹⁸⁸ The Government has actively promoted the growth of inbound tourism and abolished the socialist model of one monopoly travel company. In 1998/99 the government participated in a United Nations sponsored project for the development of a framework for tourism and developed a Master Plan on National Tourism Development in Mongolia with the assistance of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The *Year Book of Mongolia Tourism Statistics* charts a steady growth in tourists from all parts of the world.¹⁸⁹ The significance of tourism growth is multifarious; it contributes significantly to Gross Domestic Product and assists to drive employment and infrastructure development both in city and rural areas thus increasing access to once unreachable places for foreigners and access to once unreachable ideas for Mongols.¹⁹⁰ Physically, this has also resulted in a proliferation of businesses and services geared to foreigners.

¹⁸⁵ Oyu Tolgoi LLC, 'Oyu Tolgoi Report on Phase 1 Activities of the Cultural Heritage Programme 2011', <http://ot.mn/sites/default/files/reports/Oyu_Tolgoi_Cultural_Heritage_Programme_Design_EN_0.pdf>, retrieved 22 October 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Mongolia Profile', <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/asian-century/mongolia.html>>, retrieved 17 October 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Australian national University, Mongolian Studies Centre, <<http://chl.anu.edu.au/sites/mongolianstudies/>>, retrieved 15 January 2014.

¹⁸⁸ National Statistical Office of Mongolia, *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook*, 2011, Ulaanbaatar, 2012.

¹⁸⁹ *Yearbook of Mongolian Tourism Statistics*, <<http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/mn/downloads/statistic/Statisticyearbook%201999-2004.pdf>>, retrieved 8 August, 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Proselytising religious groups and non-profit organisations have also begun to exert influence. An example is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. The churches missionaries arrived in Ulaanbaatar in 1992 and have become increasingly influential, conducting services, camps and English language classes.¹⁹¹ The Church recently celebrated twenty years in Mongolia and reported 10 600 members.¹⁹² The Church is the largest Christian organisation in Mongolia and is proud of Mongolia's participation as it has one of the highest 'missionary service rates' to population in the world.¹⁹³ Other religious organisations such as the Seventh-Day Adventist Humanitarian Operation (ADRA), Ananda Marga and the South Korean United Methodist Mission continue to operate orphanages, aid and relief programs aimed at those who have become disadvantaged due to the economic shocks in return for recruitment outcomes.¹⁹⁴ With over half of the population practising Buddhism and over twenty-five percent atheist, the proportion of Christians and other Western religions is small yet significant for its rapid growth. Such is the growing influence of 'other religions' in order to curb surreptitious recruiting the government recently introduced regulations around religious organisations including official registration requirements and banning religious groups from proselytising in the form of offering free English lessons.¹⁹⁵

Religion is a significant feature of Mongolian life and since 1990 a revival has manifested in both the reconstruction of monasteries and in a flourishing of Buddhist and Shamanistic symbolism and practice.¹⁹⁶ One of the earliest examples of the importance of the rebirth of Buddhism was the

¹⁹¹ Rossabi, op. cit., pp. 40–41.

¹⁹² The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Church News and Events, 'Members Celebrate twenty Years of Church in Mongolia', 29 May 2013, <<http://www.lds.org/church/news/members-celebrate-20-years-of-church-in-mongolia?lang=eng>>, retrieved 21 November 2013.

¹⁹³ David Stewart, 'The Mongolian Miracle', *Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Mission*, <<http://www.mission.net/mongolia/ulaanbaatar/news.php?nID=257>>, retrieved 8 July 2011.

¹⁹⁴ International Religious Freedom Report for 2012 United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208462.pdf>>, retrieved 13 October 2013.

¹⁹⁵ United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and labour, 'International Religious Freedom Report July–December, 2010', 13 September 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168367.htm>, retrieved 21 November 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Manduhi Buyandelger, *Tragic Spirits, Shamanism, Memory and Gender in Contemporary Mongolia*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013.

reconstruction and reinstatement in 1996, by decree of the government of the statue of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara at Gandantegchinlen Monastery in Ulaanbaatar.¹⁹⁷ The original statue had been destroyed in the socialist period and its replacement, filled with a range of Mongol religious and daily life goods (including an entire *ger*) and constructed of locally sourced materials, is a symbol of Mongols pride in their religion and the connection of Mongolian culture to Buddhism.¹⁹⁸ A friend wildlife conservationist Gankhuyag B. explained the importance of the statue as a symbol not only of religion, but of the freedom of the Mongols and their ownership of their future.¹⁹⁹ Aspects of these religious revival projects are indicative of the pride of modern day Mongols in their cultural heritage and national identity rather than purely in the interest of practicing Buddhism as although there is a revival of Buddhist rhetoric, the number of *lama* is declining.²⁰⁰ The reconstruction of Erdene Zuu Monastery which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004 is interesting in this context. The Monastery is officially considered significant as one element of a much larger World Heritage listed Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape valued for its reflection of the symbiosis between ancient nomadic society and its governance and religious traditions, as well as a key tourist destination.²⁰¹

Buddhism has also influenced contemporary Mongolian society in more subtle ways. The growing awareness of the uniqueness of Mongol Buddhism is evident in the recognition and revival of key religious figures such as the First Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, Zanabazar, the Eighth Bogd Khaan and Lama Danzanravjaa as learned, forward thinking leaders of their time. The Eighth Bogd Khaan, for example, who was derided as a debauched feudals during socialism has been revised as nationalist and an extraordinary political and religious leader and a key visionary influence over the 1911 revolution.²⁰² Writing in the immediate post-socialist period, Caroline

¹⁹⁷ Government of Mongolia, Mongolia Tourism, <<http://www.mongoliatourism.org/travel-destinations/surrounding-ulaanbaatar/gandan-monastery.html>> retrieved 15 January 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Author's conversation with Gankhuyag B. and the author, 19 January 2000.

²⁰⁰ Wallace, op. cit.

²⁰¹ Website of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1081/>>, retrieved 8 August 2011.

²⁰² Batsaikhan op. cit., pp. xiii–xiv.

Humphrey described in some detail the fortunes of the official and unofficial reputation of the Eighth Bogd Khaan during the twentieth century in Mongolia as a case of private reverence versus public derision.²⁰³ More recently and with more primary sources Batsaikhan's biography of the Bogd Khaan aims to clarify his role in the 1911 revolution and concludes that he was in fact a visionary who led his people spiritually and politically through the revolution which awakened national pride describing him as 'the father of the national revolution'.²⁰⁴ On 29 December 2007, the anniversary of the 1911 secession of Mongolia from the Manchu Empire was officially declared National Independence Day and a day of celebration. Batsaikhan cannot be more specific in reinforcing the rehabilitation of the Eighth Bogd Khaan and elevating him as a contributor to the strength of democratic Mongolia today:

With the elevation of Bogdo[sic] Jebtsundamba Khutuktu to the throne as the khan [sic] of the Mongolian nation and the naming the nation 'Mongolia', the era 'elevated by many' and Ik Khuree – 'Niislel Khuree', a new history began in early twentieth century for the revival of the Mongolian nation in Asia.

The eighth Bogdo [sic] Jebtsundamba Khutuktu is the person who initiated, organized [sic] and led the Mongolian National Revolution of 1911, which both met the aspiration of the Mongols and was successful.²⁰⁵

Similarly, the first Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, Zanabazar who was also considered a feudal during the socialist period has been revived. His name has been given to the national museum of classical art and much of his artwork is housed in the Winter Palace Museum where he is described as 'a

²⁰³ Caroline Humphrey, 'Remembering an "Enemy"; The Bogd Khaan in Twentieth-Century Mongolia', in R. S. Watson (ed.), *Memory History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, 1994.

²⁰⁴ Batsaikhan, op. cit. also: 'The Culmination of The Mongolian National Revolution of 1911 or The Enthronement of Bogdo Jebtsundam', *The UB Post*, 18 December 2009.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

leading figure in the 17th and 18th century art not only of Mongolia but of the orient as a whole'.²⁰⁶

Another nuance of the revival of religion has been renewed respect for sacred Buddhist and Shamanist knowledge in relation to the land, environment and conservation.²⁰⁷ Vesna Wallace describes how:

...contemporary Mongols see the revitalization [of the Buddhist knowledge and practices as connected to the renewal of the traditional values of the pastoral society and national identity].²⁰⁸

In 2001, collaboration between the *lama* of Gandantegchinlen Monastery Centre of Mongolian Buddhists and The World Bank documented Mongolia's sacred lands and the sutras attached to them. The goal of the project was to contribute to guiding how natural resources may be handled in modern Mongolia by respecting ancient tradition.²⁰⁹ The aim of the publication was to enhance knowledge of the spirituality and sacredness of sites and thus add value to their conservation via a form of spiritual respect and continuity. As well as physical reconstruction and academic reinterpretation of key Buddhist figures, Buddhist ceremonies and religious rituals have been revived by religious practitioners and often in connection to the land. Wallace discusses some of these as examples of a revival of the thirteenth century Mongol tradition of dual law of state and religion that feeds in to a new sense of national pride in traditions of old.²¹⁰ Politicians partake in public religious offerings and openly declare their Mongol style Buddhism as a means of connecting rule of state to a kind of fate ordained by the gods.²¹¹ Politicians associate themselves with spiritual values as a way of showing their 'Mongolness' and by way of invoking pride in national

²⁰⁶ The Guidebook of the Bogd Khan Palace Museum, Ulaanbaatar, date unknown yet current in 2010, p. 19.

²⁰⁷ Sukhbaatar, H.O., *Sacred Sites of Mongolia*, Ulaanbaatar, 2001; Vesna A. Wallace, 'Mediating the Power of Dharma: The Mongols Approaches to Reviving Buddhism in Mongolia', *The Silk Road*, vol. 6, no. 1, The Silk Road Foundation, 2008, <http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/vol6num1/srjournal_v6n1.pdf>, retrieved December 2008.

²⁰⁸ Wallace, op. cit.

²⁰⁹ Sukhbaatar, H.O., *Sacred Sites of Mongolia*, Ulaanbaatar, 2001, p. 5.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Wallace, op. cit.

traditions as identity and legitimacy. In 2003, the then President of Mongolia, Bagabandi N. (a member of the MPRP which had during the socialist period banned religion) worshipped at the sacred mountain Otgontenger (Youngest Sky) in Zavkhan Aimag in western Mongolia on behalf of the Mongol state, a symbolic act reinforcing the strong connection between religion and nation.²¹²

Physical Transformation

By contrast to the common imagery of red stars being removed from building facades and statues of Lenin being toppled from their plinths in the Soviet Union, many Soviet-style monuments and much of the symbolism and artwork survived deliberate removal until recently such as those pictured below. The reasons for this are numerous and there are scholarly debates about the Mongols' attitude to their socialist past, in particular, ambivalence to the negative influences of the period on society.²¹³ The prominence of the MPRP at most elections since democracy attests to this.²¹⁴ Whatever the reason, Mongolia today hosts neglected memories of the socialist past juxtaposed alongside tangible symbols of modernity.



²¹² Wallace, op. cit.

²¹³ Christopher Kaplonski, 'Neither Truth nor Reconciliation: Political Violence and Singularity of Memory in Post-Socialist Mongolia', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Routledge, 2008, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14690760802094941>>, retrieved 13 June 2008.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Image 3.7

Abandoned Military Garrison Parade Ground and Soviet troop's apartment block, Choibalsan, Eastern Mongolia, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

At an accelerated pace in recent years socialist buildings and relics are not only suffering from neglect and the strain of pollution and extreme temperature fluctuations (often resulting in facades literally cracking off buildings) but are also becoming enveloped or obscured by much larger-scale visible symbols of Mongol modernity. The Zoos Bank (Coin Bank) in Ulaanbaatar (pictured below) is a fine illustration of the impact of the free market economy. The bank has been erected on what was formerly a public thoroughfare that facilitated access from a main street to a residential district communal park with children's play equipment, trees and seating.

Ulaanbaatar was once rich in such planned spaces, a common feature of Soviet-style residential districts aimed at providing healthy communal experience and equality for dwellers within that micro district. The Zoos Bank building was designed to reference two stacks of coins – an irony given that coins are no longer in circulation due to massive inflation. The pink coloured residential buildings abutting the bank building are obscured by commercial businesses punctuating the ground level and billboards on upper levels, further complicating a once simple, functional planned precinct.



Image 3.8

Zoos (Coin) Bank building between two socialist-era residential blocks. Right, middle ground are small Russian-style kiosks known as ‘tuutz’ which have all been cleared from central Ulaanbaatar, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

A highly intrusive example of recent change in Ulaanbaatar is Blue Sky Tower at the southern end of Sukhbaatar Square (pictured below). The Western style high rise tower’s name alludes to a key deity of sacred worship *IkhTenger* (Big Sky) in traditional culture. Not only does the building interrupt the vista from Parliament House to the Bogd Khaan Uul sacred mountain range that was a feature of socialist town planning, it obscures the sacred sky above. While developers of Blue Sky Tower announce that two grand columns in the buildings foyer reference the traditional *ger* hearth, the one hundred and five metre high tower is a symbol in scale of insensitivity to its surroundings and an increasing shift away from tradition and from socialism in modern Mongolia.²¹⁵



Image 3.9
Sukhbaatar Square, south-east, Ulaanbaatar. Once a visual focal point of the town square, an equestrian statue of hero Sukhbaatar now appears to gesture toward the Central Tower building (mid-ground left). Blue Sky Tower (right background) and other new multi-storey constructions interrupt views through to the sacred Bogd KhaanUul mountain range, 2010
Photograph Steven Alderton

It is not only commercial interests that have resulted in physical changes in the past decade. An example is the placement of a large statue of the Buddha,

²¹⁵ Hotel Blue Sky, Ulaanbaatar, <www.hotelbluesky.mn/>, retrieved 4 June 2012.

a gift of cultural diplomacy by the Government of South Korea that stands next to the Soviet-style Second World War memorial at Zaisan Hill on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar (pictured below). The statue has joined the Soviet War memorial precinct in being a popular day trip destination for city dwellers and their visitors. In 2003, a Soviet tank memorial, celebrating Mongolia's contribution of tanks to the Soviet war effort was relocated from its location at the cross roads at the entry to the city to the base of Zaisan Hill. This added another backdrop for sightseer photographs and another dimension to the now multilayered experience that Zaisan offers of city panorama, socialist propaganda, military commemoration and Buddhist reverence.



Image 3.10
Zaisan Hill Memorial viewed from the base of Zaisan Hill and Buddha statue, 2010
Photograph Steven Alderton

Further subtle yet ubiquitous changes have occurred in material and pop culture with the arrival of vastly accessible internet and television even in Mongolia's remotest areas. Aspects of Mongol traditional culture have begun

to be not only revived (as in the case of Buddhism) but also adapted in creative ways. For example, the Mongol traditional *del* was common on the streets of every city and village until recently having been replaced by denim jeans and sportswear. Mongol boots, similarly have been replaced by training shoes for men and high heels for women where the terrain permits. However, if the *del* has begun to disappear from everyday life, it is reappearing in interesting ways. In the 1990s and 2000s, it was commonplace to see busloads of Mongolian University graduands visiting the Square for photographs during day-long celebrations. The graduands would pose in front of the statue of Sukhbaatar and in front of Parliament House, then the two great city monuments. Female students wore traditional *del*, brightly coloured, ankle length and belted at the waist. By 2010, many girls had abandoned the traditional, simple wrap around design for Westernised, Sinocised and often very brief adaptations, alluding to Mongolian traditional culture, while harnessing contemporary fashion references (pictured below). By contrast, young Mongol men do not wear the *del*, but the latest chic Western style suits.



Image 3.11

University graduates gather for photographs during spring each year, in front of the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex, Ulaanbaatar, May 2010

Photograph Steven Alderton

Reappraising National Identity

The direct consequences of transition internally coupled with an influx of external influences have led Mongols to reappraise their sense of nation. In recent decades, new perspectives on the ancient and recent past have appeared reflecting the emergence of a new generation of post-socialist thinkers. Themes in history that have attracted attention in scholarly circles include the ancient states, traditional culture and nomadic life and the Great Mongol Empire. The sophistication of law and cultural tolerance of the Great Mongol Empire have been framed as the genesis for modern Mongolian democracy and as representing the ingenuity and sophistication of ancient traditional life and customs that constitute the core of what it is to be Mongol today. The events and key figures of the 1921 and 1924 revolutions have also been scrutinised in some detail.²¹⁶ The purges of the 1930s have had lesser but substantial attention, particularly in the press connected to wider political debate about exoneration and compensation. The purges will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters in relation to the displays and activities of the museums.

Emphasis in popular culture differs to that of academic and tends toward appropriating glorious or romantic aspects of the past. Any time spent watching music videos on popular television networks reveals frequent allusions to Chinggis Khan and his successors and the beauty and romance of traditional life on the steppe.²¹⁷ References to events and figures of the twentieth and twenty-first century are not as prominent, reinforcing the notion of the continued ambivalence of Mongols to the perceived success or failures of their recent past. Anthropologist Kaplonski argues that the purges have remained in the domain of personal rather than collective memory and thus have not been dealt with as a civic issue citing the fact that Mongolia has never established a 'truth commission', nor has it pursued the perpetrators of the violence.²¹⁸ Aspects of history have become linked to

²¹⁶ For example Rossabi, Campi, Kaplonski, Atwood. See bibliography for references.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Kaplonski, 2008, op. cit.

rhetoric, both official and colloquial about the meaning of Mongolia and Mongolness. Kaplonski categorises the key forms of nationalism that have arisen; pan-Mongolism, Khalk (the majority ethnic group) centrism, civic nationalism and xenophobic nationalism.²¹⁹ At the extreme right, small ultra-nationalist groups attracting urban youth such as Tsagaan Khaas (White Swastika) and Dayar Mongol (Worldwide Mongols) have emerged in recent years.²²⁰ Their neo-Nazi-inspired ideology aims to raise awareness of what they perceive as the threat that foreign influence, of the Chinese in particular, has to the purity of Mongol blood and therefore the strength of the Mongol nation. While they look to Adolf Hitler for rhetoric, they also appropriate Chinggis Khan and his ancestors as exemplar role models. In a recent protest, Dayar Mongol combined the use of swastika symbols and portraits of the Khans to put their message that the Khans wisdom in preserving Mongolia should be respected.²²¹ While xenophobic groups are a minority and present an eclectic appropriation of historical references, at the other end of the spectrum Batsaikhan summarises a view that is not unique to academia in Mongolia: 'We should be well aware that the future of our nation will become uncertain if we ignore our origin, history, culture and tradition.'²²² Seven years earlier in 1992, in the immediate post-socialist period when emotions were more raw the issue was put more directly and with a warning tone by the authors of *The Great Dictionary of Mongolian Customs*: 'If you lose your customs, this gives rise to bad people, if you forget your rituals, you will lose your Mongolness.'²²³

²¹⁹ Christopher Kaplonski, 'Reconstructing Mongolian Nationalism: The View Ten Years On', conference papers Mongolian Political and Economic Development During the Past Ten Years and Future Prospect, Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, 23–24 August, 2000.

²²⁰ 'Dayar Mongol Movement Holds Peaceful Protest', *The UB Post*, Ulaanbaatar, undated, <http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/index.php?Itemid=0&id=936&option=com_content&task=view>, retrieved 1 September, 2011.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Batsaikhan, 2009, op. cit.

²²³ From Av'yasüren Ch. & Nyambuu Kh., *Mongol yos zanshlyn ikh tailbar tol' (The Great Dictionary of Mongolian Customs)*, Süülenkhüü, Children's Publishing House, Ulaanbaatar, 1992. Quoted in Kaplonski, 'Blame, Guilt and Avoidance, the struggle to control the past in post-socialist Mongolia', *History and Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, Indiana University Press.

Chinggis Khan

No work about contemporary Mongolia is complete without reference to the incredible popularity of Chinggis Khan. Because of his monumental career achievements and given that his name was forbidden by the socialist Government as a potential nationalist rallying point, it was predictable that his name would be one of the most popular symbols to emerge once censorship was eased.²²⁴ It is widely accepted that Chinggis Khan is the most popular historical figure in Mongolia today and the Mongol of most interest internationally. A statement on the occasion of the 790th anniversary of the foundation of the Great Mongol Empire and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the People's Revolution by Ochirbat P., President of Mongolia in 1996 is a sound example of the official importance placed on linkages between the current democratic state and Mongol nationalism with the ancient empire:

It is impossible to separate the present reform process from the previous 70 years of historic development. There can be no reform isolated from history. Likewise, it is impossible to separate our last 75 years from the 800 years history since the establishment of the first Mongolian State. The unlimited wisdom of the Mongolian statehood has led this nation from generation to generation together with its culture and civilization, and creative vitality.²²⁵

The construction of national identity patriotically links the state made by Chinggis Khan and maintained by his successors to the present. The Great Mongol Empire is referenced as the basis of Mongolian democracy and a golden age of pan-Mongol pride, strength and connection to geographical homelands. This view encapsulates key aspects of the revised Mongol identity; the strength of Mongolia as a single nation of united nomads, the pan-Mongol ideal and the centrality of nomadism and the steppe to Mongol identity. The latter being dubious given that over fifty percent of the

²²⁴ Christopher Kaplonski, 'The Case of the Disappearing Chinggis Khaan: Dismembering the Remembering', *Ab Imperio*, no. 4, 2005,

<<http://www.chriskaplonski.com/downloads/Disappearing.pdf>>, retrieved 15 August 2006.

²²⁵ 'Historical Path of Mongolia's Statehood and Independence', address of President Ochirbat, 1996, *Mongoluls.net*, <mongoluls.net/historicalpathofmongolianstatehood>, retrieved 15 May 2011.

population currently reside in towns and cities and several generations of Mongols have lived only urban existences.²²⁶ The year 1996 was one of grand historical statements. President Ochirbat in an official address asserted that:

Historians and scholars have proven that Mongolians have more than 2000 years of historical tradition of statehood. 790 years ago, on the memorable 16th day of the first summer month of the year of Tiger of the fourteenth sixty-years-lunar cycle or on May 25 1206 by Georgian calendar, Chinggis Khan convened on the upper bank of Onon River the Great Assembly of Mongolian princes based on the ancient tradition of the Mongolian state institutions and by raising the state nine white banners he proclaimed the establishment of the Great Mongol State uniting the Central Asian 'felt dwellers' ... Different tribes emerged and created their states on the ancient Mongolian territory, like the Huns, Syanbi, Nirun, Tureg, Uighur, Kidan and exactly 790 years ago a powerful state of genuine Mongolian nation uniting all the Mongolian tribes was created.²²⁷

Statements such as this were common from politicians preceding and during the anniversary celebrations and remain common today. In an address in 2005, then Prime Minister Enkhbayar N. predictably refers to Chinggis Khan yet steps further back into history by placing him as not the creator of steppe statehood, but a great perpetuator. Describing how eight hundred years ago Chinggis created the Great Mongol Empire (which Enkhbayar points out he himself is now leader of), Enkhbayar says: 'Thus he managed to continue the ancient nomadic traditions of statehood from the period of the Xiong'nu [sic] Empire.'²²⁸ Enkhbayar continues on to say that his modern democratic Mongolia is 'a direct result of the enormous experience of the Mongols in the

²²⁶ Orkhon Myadar, 'Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads', *Inner Asia*, vol. 13, no. 2, Cambridge University, 2011, pp. 335-362.

²²⁷ Ochirbat, op. cit.

²²⁸ *Nomadic*, monthly newsletter of the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, no. 68, 2006; Address of President Enkhbayar, *The Mongol Messenger*, Ulaanbaatar, 30 November, 2006, p.1.

culture of statehood'.²²⁹ Importantly, the statements of Presidents Enkhbayar and Ochirbat carry another key aspect of national identity – the appropriation of historical figures as a form of political genealogy to reinforce the legitimacy of the current democratic regime. They are used to construct an image of a government that is part of an ancient lineage constituted of true Mongols, a people experienced since ancient times in visionary governance.

On 16 November 2005, the government conducted a ceremony marking the transfer of the remains of revolutionary heroes Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan from their mausoleum in front of Parliament House to make way for the new State Reverence Palace and Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex.²³⁰ The complex opened in 2006 at a reported cost of MNT 7.5 billion, illustrating the centrality of the cult of Chinggis Khan.²³¹ The government would subsequently in 2009 decree that the Palace would contain a new Mongolian Statehood Museum, which will identify the ancient states period as the genesis of Mongolian statehood.²³² The Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex (pictured in chapter four) is one of several prominent examples of the exaltation of Chinggis Khan. In 2005, the nation's only international airport was renamed Chinggis Khan International Airport and there is discussion about changing the name of Sukhbaatar Square to Chinggis Khan Square. Monuments have also been erected with private and public funds in provincial Mongolia.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Oyundelgur B., 'Remains moved to Altan-Olgii', *The Mongol Messenger*, Ulaanbaatar, 16 November 2005.

²³¹ Ochirbat P., *op. cit.*

²³² Discussion with Mr Altantugs N., Curator, during a visit to the unopened Statehood Museum of Mongolia, 25 May 2010.



Image 3.12

Mongolians pose in front of the GENCO tourist attraction, Tov Aimag, 2012
Photograph Baigalmaa Tseevendorj

The forty-metre-high stainless steel statue of Chinggis Khan at Tsonjin Boldog (pictured above) is a fine example. The European equestrian-style statue has a passenger lift in its hind legs, giving access to a viewing area and within the statue are a restaurant, shop, function centre, exhibition gallery and a storey-high replica of a traditional Mongolian boot that tourists can be photographed in front of. The statue is surrounded by a tourist *ger* camp configured to resemble the layout of infamous Mongol horse regiments of the thirteenth century.²³³

Re-evaluating Socialism

In a statement marking the 790th anniversary of the foundation of the Mongol Empire and the 75th anniversary of the People's Revolution in 1996, President Ochirbat summarised the socialist period within the context of greater Mongol history:

²³³ GENCO Tours Mongolia Website, <<http://www.genco-tour.mn/eng/project/>>, retrieved 3 June 2011.

This was a clear manifestation of how Comintern Soviet Russia's foreign policy strongly influenced Mongolia's choice of the road of development and its State structure. While following this path we achieved a lot and made great progress. We also made mistakes and errors.²³⁴

The President's ambivalent attitude to the socialist past is exemplar of one way in which Mongols are re-evaluating their history. Christopher Kaplonski, in a range of papers from the early 1990s until the present, identifies an evolution in the approach Mongols have taken to the recent past.²³⁵ He describes how, in the early democratic years, the socialist past was not included in what he refers to as the 'new heritage' that historians and politicians were constructing. While Kaplonski charts the manipulation of history for political gain, in particular by the MPRP he is careful to note that evolving attitudes to the past are bound in popular imagination to notions of Mongolness and cultural continuity. He suggests that the initial lack of scrutiny of the socialist period was due to the need to distil a popularly comfortable new Mongolian history giving way to deeper scrutiny and, eventually the incorporation of the socialist period into the newly constructed national story. In other words, as democracy developed and became a reality for Mongols, appraisal of the recent and painful past became possible.²³⁶ One of the 'mistakes and errors' that President Ochirbat eludes to are the political repression of revolutionaries, *lama* and propertied Mongols of the 1930s onward. The progress of debate about the purges is a telling indicator of Mongolia's reappraisal of the past in relation to its new present and one that is critical for impacting on the way the purges are presented in the museum context. Several occurrences took place in the late 1990s that evidence a re-assessment of the purges in relation to identity and politics.

For example, in 1996, the same year as Ochirbat's speech the government issued an apology to the victims of the political repression and declared 10 September 1937 the official day of commencement of the purges, to be

²³⁴ Ochirbat, op. cit.

²³⁵ Listed in Bibliography.

²³⁶ Kaplonski, 1999, op. cit., pp. 106–107.

marked annually with state and religious ceremonies.²³⁷ Politicians officially visited the site of a mass execution and grave at Songinoharikhan Mountain near Ulaanbaatar and paid respects to the political victims.²³⁸ At this time, the MPRP held a minority in the *Ik Hural* (Parliament) and was denying party responsibility for the purges while minority factions were pressuring the party to accept responsibility.²³⁹ The debate was complex but indicated a discomfort with acknowledging either that the purges were perpetrated upon Mongols by their own (Choibalsan in particular) or that they were orchestrated by the Soviet Union thus confirming Mongolia's lack of independence and self-determination. Broadly, the debate focused on identifying and commemorating the purged, compensating families and descendants and apportioning blame.²⁴⁰

The way in which the debate about the purges and socialist period impacted on museums was momentous and would be paradoxical without the understanding that the MPRP was in a rare period of opposition at the time. On 10 September 1996, the Memorial Museum to the Victims of the Political Repression was officially opened by the government. The Museum which was established by the government under the Directorship of Mrs Tserendulam G., the daughter of ex-Prime Minister Genden P. who had been executed in Moscow. The mission of the Victims Museum was to:

...inform Mongols about the unprecedented tragedy, to commemorate those who suffered and to inspire visitors to contemplate the moral implications of their civic responsibility.²⁴¹

The following year a prominent commemorative memorial to the victims (pictured below) was completed and unveiled in the forecourt of the National History Museum. The National History Museum at the time was presenting a history of Mongolia that incorporated exhibitions about the socialist period and the purges, but was based on collections that reflected state propaganda

²³⁷ Sumya Ch., 'Mongolia Remembers its Purge Victims', *The UB Post*, 15 September, 2005.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Kaplonski, op. cit.

²⁴⁰ Kaplonski, 1999, op. cit., pp. 106–107.

²⁴¹ Memorial Museum to the Victims of the Political Repression, *Memorial Museum of Political Persecutions*, information page in English, Ulaanbaatar, undated, c.2000/03.

rather than curatorial rigour as they had been collected during the socialist period and were from the collection of the Revolution Museum.²⁴²



Image 3.13
Memorial sculpture to the victims of the political repression in forecourt of the National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a context for consideration of the current and recent displays and activities of the National Museum of Mongolia, the Winter Palace, the Statehood Museum and the Victims Museum by discussing key issues of the socialist and post-socialist periods. As ongoing debate has proven, no Mongolist can provide the world with a single Mongolian history, especially that of the twentieth century which continues to be contested. The points in history included in this chapter are put forward as historical milestones that have been proven to have had significant impact on Mongolia. These points in history are recounted for two reasons. They provide the reader with a context for considering *how* the museums have charted and re-charted national history throughout the socialist period. Further, they provide insight into *what* history is available to the museums to present. By outlining the history of Mongolia to transition and by situating

²⁴² A full discussion follows in chapter six.

the creation and evolution of museums within this context, this chapter is the final piece of the multilayered foundation that has been built in the preceding chapters. Ultimately part one of this thesis (that is chapters one to three) has provided the basis upon which to understand what museum culture has existed and how museums have changed since the socialist period.

What has emerged is a picture of an ancient indigenous tradition of keeping and revering objects and the longevity of the importance of Chinggis Khan and the Great Mongol Empire in material heritage. Complex links between Chinggis Khan, the ancient past and the present have been proven to be firmly entrenched. At first glance, the history of museums can be seen to have begun with socialism, yet this is not the case as demonstrated by the existence of collections and the desire to display and conserve well before the twentieth century. Also, with the overlaying of socialist historiography on museology, the ancient religious tradition of *takhilch* was pushed to a new level as collections were stored and secreted as a means of saving them from destruction.

Finally, just as the tradition of keeping has been demonstrated to be indigenous to Mongolia, the complex linkages of objects to the past and to identity also is not new. As Ossendowski's account of the activities at the Winter Palace demonstrates, staff were 'perusing, studying and copying these books, preserving and spreading the ancient wisdom for successors'.²⁴³ Ossendowski retells how the Bogd Khaan contextualised the possession of Chinggis Khans ring in a story that underpins his own legitimacy. But the Bogd Khaan went further to assert that the ring evidences that the Mongols are the 'truest guardians of the bequests of Jenghiz [sic] Khan'.²⁴⁴ Thus, Mongolia did not only have a culture of keeping, but a more complex practice of deploying objects from the past to construct notions of the present was robust.

With this multilayered understanding of museums up to 1990 in place, the next three chapters proceed to detailed analysis of the museums in the

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 207.

democratic period. A case study in three parts, linked to key themes, describes how museums have chosen to represent history since the arrival of democracy and shows how this is different or the same as what preceded. In an environment of political and economic change and historical reappraisal curators have necessarily had to respond to and contribute to a new history of Mongolia and the question is raised as to how, why and by what means. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that museums have changed at an uneven pace as a direct result of popular and political influences from within Mongolia and without and this aligns closely with notions of national identity and true Mongolian.

Chapter IV

After 1990 – Museums Negotiating Democracy

Early in the twentieth century the new socialist regime began swift construction of a history of Mongolia by establishing museums that acted as agents for transmission of state ideology. Similarly, near the end of the century the democratically elected Government began to reconstruct museums to present Mongolian history to reflect and support democratic ideology. During the initial transition of the early 1990s, the NMM in particular was presented dual imperatives of incorporating the events of recent history and of reinterpreting the entire Mongol past in a democratic way – a museological approach that was entirely new to Mongolia. It was presented with these tasks with an inadequate budget and a short time frame. This chapter demonstrates that museums have been in a state of constant flux and continue to grapple with events of the recent past due to cultural politics, financial constraints and popular notions of history.

The previous chapter provided an analysis of some of the effects of democracy on Mongolia generally. At the outset of this chapter, the focus is tightened to hone in on the cultural heritage sector that museums are an integral part of in order to background the reader in some of the major influences that directly practically and ideologically impacted. This section identifies and analyses some of the macro changes in the cultural heritage landscape in recognition that the landscape is under revision officially, commercially and popularly. Cultural heritage has been increasingly influenced by international engagement, tourism and nationalism which have resulted in a rapid change in the power dynamic between popular history, the heritage tourism market and scholarly revisionism. The case study which commences in this chapter will demonstrate the museums of Mongolia, the

traditionally perceived as bastions of ‘history’ reveal attempts at appropriation of the ancient past in a ‘user friendly’ package aimed at tourism and promoting an homogenous national identity.¹

After discussing the cultural heritage sector, this chapter then focuses in further on the fate of four of Mongolia’s museums since 1990 with emphasis on structural rearrangements, charter changes, governance and visitation. As previously discussed, the museums when considered as artefacts will be considered in their parts in order to deconstruct to the meanings they transmit.² The chapter provides a description and critique of the form the museums have taken, in order that in the next chapter, their exhibitions and interpretive activities – their parts – are scrutinised in context. The aim of the argument being to untangle the tangle of museum governance and management decisions and interpretive activities in order to demonstrate not only how museums have changed, but why. It will be demonstrated that changes to areas such as charter, governance, and visitation to museums has not been even. While some have thrived, others have remained in stasis. This I argue is reflective of the popularisation and commercialisation of history as it is presented in museums. Where museums hold collections that pertain to the past that is attractive to tourism and feeds into revisionist notions of a Mongolian modern democracy rooted in ancient customs, change has been great in relation to these periods. Where museums have collections or parts of their collections that pertain to unpopular periods these have been marginalised due to lack of funding and lack of deep philosophical revisionism. Just as museums during the socialist period used objects, particularly archaeological ones, to present a history and identity for the Mongols filtered through Marxist/Leninist ideology, the compulsion to deploy historical objects to construct a positivist master narrative that legitimises the present remains.

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

² Susan Pearce, ‘Thinking About things: Approaches to the study of artefacts’, *Museums Journal*, vol. 86, no. 4, Museums Association, United Kingdom, 1986, pp. 178–181.

Transition

Two distinctive characteristics of the Mongolian transition deeply affected museums. First, as Mongolia's revolution was almost entirely peaceful, the national governance and economic structures which were in place before the revolution remained and were transformed rather than obliterated and remade. Museums, as state-owned institutions, both survived and remained open throughout the 'shock' years and beyond which afforded some stability. Second, as Mongolia was never officially a colony, the government pre and post-election continued to be Mongols and the socialist party was frequently in power. Thus the museums also were not faced with an outright postcolonial reconstruction as was the case in some other former Soviet states.

While these stabilising circumstances existed, two factors combined to challenge museums; dramatic, rapid and sustained funding cuts and the process of 'catch up' that was precipitated by progressive evolution of legislation and policy. Atai has demonstrated how in other post-socialist nations state institutions struggled with a sense of 'confusion' when negotiating the early years when the dismantling of the socialist system and the ideological certainty it afforded left a vacuum that was not immediately addressed.³ Mikhail Piotrovsky is respected for his stewardship of the Hermitage Museum through transition and for maintaining its conservatism, while concurrently acting opportunistically. His description of how the Hermitage approached the immediate post-socialist situation mirrors that of Mongolia, though on a much grander scale. Piotrovsky described how the central balance of the situation was that although financial collapse pushed museums to, in Piotrovsky's words adopt a 'let's try it' approach, the new system (or lack of a new system) meant that the Hermitage Museum was able to take opportunities for self-financing.⁴

³ Farhad Atai, 'Post-Soviet Art and Culture in Central Asia', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 'Special Issue: Out of the Ruins: Cultural Negotiations in the Soviet Aftermath', vol. 16, no. 2, 1999.

⁴ Sylvie Cameron & Laurent Lapierre, 'Mikhail Piotrovsky and the State Hermitage Museum', *International Journal of Arts Management*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2007.

In Mongolia museums that had been wholly state subsidised were significantly financially deregulated when the economy collapsed. In 1999, for example, the entire expenditure on the arts and culture was approximately 1.2% of the government's entire budget and by 2000, the budget for arts and culture was 1.5% of total budget illustrating not only low funding but the slow 'bounce' over subsequent decades.⁵ The consequence of this was that museums were challenged to meet basic operational needs and thus unable to undertake more than the most basic of functions such as pay staff and pay energy bills. In 2001, for example, I arrived at work in late winter at the NMM to find staff working in their winter coats and hats. The Director had taken the decision to turn the heating off to save money. At the time, staff had to supply their own paper and pens at work, there were few computers and the NMM was renting out some of its rooms to companies and non-government organisations.⁶ The NMM was receiving approximately USD50 000 for annual operations and admissions (though meagre) were appropriated back to Treasury.⁷

As discussed in chapter three Mongolia's economy has improved (though not steadily upwards), however it continues to be heavily reliant on foreign aid, investments and tourism.⁸ While the contribution of tourism to Gross Domestic Product is small by comparison to mining, it is estimated that approximately 7.8% of all employment is supported by the industry and that there is substantial room for growth.⁹ Statistics about the number of staff employed in museums reflect growth in the number of museum professionals nationally and the introduction of new museums such as the Statehood Museum and the new Kharakhorum Museum in Ovorkhangai Aimag. The *Statistical Yearbook of Mongolia* records 535 staff in museums in 2008 growing to 635 in 2011.¹⁰ This numerical growth is tempered when

⁵ National Statistical Office of Mongolia, *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook*, 1999, National Statistical Office of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2000.

⁶ Observations of the author 2001-2.

⁷ Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia, from Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005, p. 184.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 'Call of the Wild', *The Report: Mongolia 2012*, Oxford Business Group, 2012, pp. 181-182.

¹⁰ *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 2011*, National Statistical Office of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2012, p. 335.

considered in relation to interrelated factors; Mongolia has experienced high growth in inbound tourism since the end of the socialist period and continues to experience growth. For example, the number of inbound passengers grew from 468 797 in 2008 to 627 007 by 2011 and while not all foreign border crossers were tourists, it is reasonable to extrapolate that the increase would naturally make tourist destinations such as museums busier.¹¹ This is substantiated by increases in official visitation figures for most museums including the NMM whose visitation jumped from 42 400 in 2008 to 52 500 in 2011. The Natural History Museum visitation grew in the same period from 83 700 to 116 800. Some museums, however, have experienced declines in visitation such as the Theatre Museum and the Winter Palace Museum.¹² Though there has generally been growth, this being the third most visited museum (after the Natural and NMM) is indicative of the generally low visitation to museums.¹³ This could be attributed to data collection flaws, but is more logically a result of increased competition from a greater number of more tourist focused attractions such as the proliferation of theme parks discussed in coming paragraphs. The Winter Palace Museum is recorded in 2011 as having 26 100 visitors, including foreigners, a drop of approximately 3000 visitors since 2008. Also, most museums have regularly demonstrated they are becoming more productive places with for the most part have had a slow but steady increase in the number of exhibits on display.¹⁴ And finally, the level of increase in staff needs to be considered in context that some museums have extended the scope of their operations. For example, the NMM and the Theatre Museum have introduced education services.

With the growth in tourism and recognition of its potential for revenue raising, the state has in recent years refined and centralised control of activities of cultural institutions and museums and in particular has made explicit the importance of the role of culture for tourism.¹⁵ In 2012, a new

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 293–294.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 341.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 340.

¹⁵ 'Heritage branding: The country aims to showcase its rich history and culture', *The Report: Mongolia 2013*, Oxford Business Group, 2013, <<http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/heritage-branding-country-aims-showcase-its-rich-history-and-culture>>, retrieved 20 August 2013.

Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism was created, making an unprecedented and explicit link between museums and tourism. Museums had previously been under the stewardship of the Ministry for Science, Education and Culture.¹⁶ The action to create a new Ministry in which culture, including museums would reside raises the issue of the place of culture in the infrastructure of public diplomacy. In nations such as France and Norway cultural diplomacy is the joint domain of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Culture Ministries.¹⁷ In Mongolia the link to foreign affairs is not explicit so cultural activity has evolved to an extent at arm's length from foreign affairs. This lack of central coordination, I argue has led to issues of control from within and influence from without permeating cultural institutions. The idea will be discussed in more detail in coming chapters. The resulting disassociation of culture from education and science is a strong break with the socialist approach to culture as pedagogical and heralds a move toward the commodification of culture as a form of entertainment and 'heritage tourism'.¹⁸ This notion is supported within the 'National Tourism Policy' in which historical and cultural tourism is identified as one of three key drivers for future growth.¹⁹ The new Ministry has recently, in its 'Four Year Plan' targeted fostering activities that promote cultural tourism beyond the limits of Ulaanbaatar and Kharakhorum where most tourists have traditionally visited and beyond the short period around *Naadam* (festival) in summer when inbound tourism spikes.²⁰ The aim of this being to diversify into seasonal tourism and promote tourism to more remote places such as the south Gobi desert.²¹ These possibilities are identified as being facilitated by improved infrastructure to these areas as a result of foreign investment and mining.²² In recognising and developing heritage tourism, the new Ministry has very recently demonstrated its belief in the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kirsten Bound, R. Briggs, J. Holden & Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, Demos, London, 2007.

¹⁸ Lowenthal, op. cit.

¹⁹ 'Broadening Scope', *The Report: Mongolia 2012*, Oxford Business Group, 2012, pp. 187–188.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Seventy percent of all inbound tourists currently visit Kharakhorum; *The Report: Mongolia 2013*, op. cit.

²² Ibid.

potential of Mongolia's vast dinosaur heritage and cache of palaeontological collections. The high esteem in which Mongolian palaeontology is held was confirmed in 1923 when by Roy Chapman Andrews during an expedition of the American Museum of Natural History discovered intact fossilised nests substantiating the theory that dinosaurs laid eggs.²³ Subsequent expeditions throughout the twentieth century yielded remains of several species including over raptors and large tyrannosaurus. The global phenomenon of the popularity of dinosaurs has been acknowledged as taking a powerful hold on popular psyche.²⁴ So to couple exotic, mysterious dinosaurs with exotic mysterious Mongolia has been identified as a potentially profitable match.

In 2013, acting upon the potential offered by dino-tourism the Ministry for Culture, Sport and Tourism announced a major new museum would be created in Ulaanbaatar that displayed Mongolian dinosaurs and a dinosaur themed tourism park would be opened in the South Gobi desert, near sites of discoveries by Andrews and others. The Minister noted at the time that while Mongolia has world famous dinosaurs, they are presently unable to be displayed due to lack of facility.²⁵

The importance of dinosaurs as a symbol of Mongol identity and pride was highlighted recently in the arrival back in Mongolia of smuggled dinosaur skeleton known as Tyrannosaurus Baatar (or Tarbosaurus or T-Baatar). To herald the arrival of the illegally trafficked, repatriated bones from the United States after a complex international legal wrangle, the Ministry staged its first ever 'pop up' exhibition in the middle Sukhbaatar Square.²⁶ The specimen was housed in a temporary building the outside of which was brightly decorated with children's cartoons and the words 'I'm home' (pictured below). Much was made in the media of the importance of the

²³ Roy Chapman Andrews Society, <<http://roychapmanandrewssociety.org/>>, retrieved 16 January 2013.

²⁴ Keith Thompson, 'Dinosaurs as a Cultural Phenomenon', *American Scientist*, May/June 2005, <<http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/dinosaurs-as-a-cultural-phenomenon/4>>, retrieved 24 October 2013.

²⁵ Anu B., 'Ts. TsendSUREN: Remnants of our history will be destroyed over the years if we don't take any action', *The UB Post*, 11 August 2013, <<http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/?p=5380>>, retrieved 15 August 2013.

²⁶ Website of Infomongolia, <<http://www.infomongolia.com/ct/ci/6106>>, accessed 20 August 2013.

repatriation of the materials and ceremonies abounded. The Head of the Office of the President, Mr Tsagaan P. remarked: ‘If Mongolia used to forfeit its heritages it’s now time to obtain it back...’ clearly making an assertion of the importance of Mongolian material culture as ‘heritage’ of the Mongols.²⁷



Image 4.1

Tyrannosaurs Baatar exhibition building exterior, Sukhbaatar Square. The words, ‘*Bi Gertee Irlee!*’ (I’m home!) alongside brightly depicted images of the dinosaurs travel from the United States to Ulaanbaatar, 2013

Photograph InfoMongolia

Ironically while the dino-fervour continued, meanwhile and relatively discreetly the Natural History Museum, which has traditionally displayed dinosaurs, some five hundred metres away was closed and proposed for demolition. One of Mongolia’s oldest museums, once housing the State Central Museum, the Natural History Museum has in post-socialist times had the highest visitation of all museums in Mongolia as it displayed palaeontology.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ National Statistical Office of Mongolia, *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook*, 2011, National Statistical Office of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2012.



Image 4.2
The Natural History Museum, Ulaanbaatar, 2010
Photograph Steven Alderton

The closure and demolition were prompted by the condition of its early twentieth century neoclassical building and its restrictive layout. The Director of the Department of Cultural Heritage suggested that plans are underway to make a new building as part of the broader development program of upgrading exhibitions, conservation and storage for museums.²⁹ Rumours circulated at the time that the site may be sold to a private company for redevelopment.³⁰ In the same period the government has also announced it will appropriate the V. I. Lenin Museum building in central Ulaanbaatar to create the new Dinosaur Museum.³¹ The point of recounting all of this being that while Mongolia's natural history is exceptionally rich and diverse; the popular appeal of dinosaurs has caused a shift in emphasis. While important collections remain poorly housed, under conserved or scantily interpreted, the populist appeal of dinosaurs wins out. The race to interpret and focus on populist history and notions of 'our heritage' will be demonstrated in the coming chapters to be the case too for national history.

Alongside the reorganisation of state museums and the regulation of moveable cultural heritage by the state with emphasis on touristic potential, the commercial tourism industry has developed its own cultural heritage attractions. As some of these attractions sell historical, cultural and natural experiences they are in direct competition with museums. The significance of

²⁹ Anu B., op. cit.

³⁰ Correspondence with various Mongolian museum colleagues.

³¹ InfoMongolia, 'V.I. Lenin Museum to be converted into a Central Dinosaur Museum, of Mongolia', <<http://www.infomongolia.com/ct/ci/5483>>, retrieved 13 June 2013.

the appropriation of the history for entertainment is highlighted well by two recent examples. The metal equestrian statue of Chinggis Khan in military attire that was opened as a tourist attraction at Tsognjin Boldog by a private company, GENCO LLC in 2008 (discussed and pictured previously) has become a popular day trip for Mongols as well as a ‘pit stop’ in tourist itineraries. Another is the Tengri Holding Company project ‘*Chinggis Khaan’s* [sic] Ongon [Sanctity]’, a ‘Chinggis Khaan Theme Park’ with the mission of;

Restoring Chinggis Khaan’s [sic] Sanctity in Mongolia, following Mongolian traditions is vital for creating pride for Mongolians and Mongolian ethnic origin and for promoting Mongolian history, culture and customs to the world.³²

These examples represent a way in which Mongolia seeks to attract tourism by packaging history in a user friendly and entertaining way that remind us of Lowenthal’s cautionary appraisal of ‘heritage’.³³ The attractions, being focused on Chinggis Khan as a world figure link the period of the Great Mongol Empire to the traditional life of Mongols. Further, they seek to define modern Mongol identity as rooted in a strong continuum back to the time of Chinggis Khan and the golden era of steppe life. The centrality of historical continuum to the ongoing reappraisal of national identity is a key trend today and is keenly reflected in these attractions that compete with museums for visitors.³⁴

While the actual restructure of the Ministry is recent since 1990, the Government of Mongolia has amended legislation constantly. For obvious reasons, the focus of the first years was the amendment of laws and regulations pertaining to urgent matters such as the structure of government, the economy and finance and trade sectors. Culture related legislation (including that pertaining to museums) has also been amended in the past two decades, reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of culture to

³² Tengri Holding Company, <http://tengriholding.com/?page_id=501>, retrieved 15 August 2013.

³³ Lowenthal, op. cit.

³⁴ Orhon Myadar, ‘Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads’, *Inner Asia*, vol. 13, no. 2, Cambridge University, 2011, pp. 335–362.

contemporary Mongol identity, threats to tangible and intangible heritage and opportunities arising from heritage related tourism. The revision of the cultural sector has been influenced by Mongolia's membership of UNESCO. It is not the purpose to detail here the entire historical relationship with UNESCO, rather to consider some of the ways in which UNESCO membership, conventions and initiatives have influenced heritage legislation, and in particular to acknowledge that in the early post-socialist years the nature of this work was shaped by the preparation and ratification of World Heritage Listing documentation.

While Mongolia has been a member of UNESCO since 1962, its involvement has accelerated since 1990. For example in 1990 Mongolia signed the 1975 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and in 1991 Mongolia ratified the 1970 UNESCO 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property'.³⁵ In 2005, Mongolia became a state party to the UNESCO 'International Convention for The Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage' and in 2007 signed the 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions'.³⁶ UNESCO had been involved in potential World Heritage areas such as Kharakhorum and the Orkhon Valley since the 1960s but was not until the 1990s that sites were nominated.³⁷ Ten sites have been accepted to the tentative list since 1996 and three inscribed as World Heritage since 2003.³⁸ Important work has also occurred in the field of intangible world heritage and in 2005 Mongolia ratified the 'Convention on the Safeguarding

³⁵ Yet theft issues continue. The case of the theft and repatriation of *Tyrannosaurus Baatar* is an example and official rhetoric surrounding its return indicative of the growing awareness of the outflow of cultural objects and of their value to tourism and to national identity.

³⁶ 'Oyu Tolgoi Report on Phase 1 Activities of the Cultural Heritage Programme 2011' Website of Oyu Tolgoi LLC, <http://ot.mn/sites/default/files/reports/Oyu_Tolgoi_Cultural_Heritage_Programme_Design_EN_0.pdf>, retrieved 22 October 2013.

³⁷ K. Godlowski, 'Archaeological research at Karakorum (3 June – 1 – July 1981), Technical Report', United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 1981, <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000461/046170eo.pdf>>, retrieved June 6, 2012.

³⁸ Ibid.

of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.³⁹ UNESCO programs have influenced the areas in which the Mongolian Government has evolved its legal framework for managing cultural heritage in museums. In 1994, the government issued a new law on the protection of items of historical and cultural value, which was renewed in 2001, as the ‘Law of Mongolia, Protection of the Cultural Heritage’.⁴⁰ The Law, amended in 2004, regulates relations arising from collection, preservation, protection, research, promotion, ownership, possession and usage of items of historical and cultural value.⁴¹ The Law identified categories of tangible and intangible heritage, regardless of their age and items are being classified as ‘common’, ‘valuable’ or ‘unique and valuable’.

In recent years in response to theft, vandalism, interference by mining activities and in awareness of heritage tourism, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism has sought to centralise control of cultural heritage items and to extend the heritage inventory.⁴² Article 1.7 of the Constitution of Mongolia requires that all items of historical and cultural importance are property of the state. Further articles stipulate procedures relating to the survey, excavation, and research of archaeological and palaeontological sites.⁴³ The emphasis on these areas has been driven by the rapid increase of large scale mining and associated environmental impacts, in particular in the sensitive south Gobi desert region. In terms of museums, recently the Ministry has embarked on the compilation of a registry of cultural heritage and ‘national treasures’ and is prioritising the list.⁴⁴ The Ministry has also attempted to

³⁹ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, ‘Mongolia–Intangible Cultural Heritage’, <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?cp=MN&lg=en>>, retrieved 22 October 2013.

⁴⁰ Article 6.17.10 of the ‘Law on the Protection of Cultural Properties of the Mongolian People’s Republic Mongolia’ in ‘Oyu Tolgoi Report on Phase 1 Activities of the Cultural Heritage Programme 2011’, Oyu Tolgoi LLC, <http://ot.mn/sites/default/files/reports/Oyu_Tolgoi_Cultural_Heritage_Programme_Design_EN_0.pdf>, retrieved 22 October 2013, pp. 224–225.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Article 6.17.10, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

harness control of all international loans from museums through an approvals process based on the level of significance of objects.⁴⁵

Recently UNESCO has become directly involved with museums. Since 2003 the Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum in Ulaanbaatar has had direct UNESCO/Beijing involvement in fixing its storage areas and capacity building through staff training resulting in the publication of a series of training manuals in Mongolian.⁴⁶ From 2010 to 2013, UNESCO/Monaco undertook a project with museums titled 'Strengthening Mongolian Capacities for the Fight Against Illicit Traffic of Cultural Objects' aimed at raising awareness of and capacity building for museum staff and professionals.⁴⁷ From 2012 to 2014, the NMM is participating in a UNESCO/Japan cooperation called 'Capacity Building for the Sustainability of Mongolian Museums' based upon its nomination by the government in 2008 to become the national training centre.⁴⁸

While refining the legislative and bureaucratic structure of cultural heritage management is a necessary 'macro' priority this has had side effects. Museums have lost access to the funds and resources generated by collaborating directly with foreign partners as income is received by the Ministry and not necessarily devolved back to the individual institutions. Also, collaboration can be more complex due to increased bureaucracy creating the disincentive of extra workloads without the individual institution receiving direct benefits that they once had. From the perspective of the international collaborator, this can also lead to a lack of bureaucratic stewardship of complex negotiations leading to projects simply losing traction. Such was the case of two planned exhibitions of Mongolian

⁴⁵ B.Anu, 'Ts. Tsendsuren: Remnants of our history will be destroyed over the years if we don't take any action', *The UB Post*, 11 August 2013, <<http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/?p=5380>>, retrieved 15 August 2013.

⁴⁶ Website of Museum of Fine Arts, <http://www.zanabazarfam.mn/index.php?language=english§ion=projects&page=unesco-project>., retrieved 15 August 2013.

⁴⁷ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 'Asia-Training Activities', <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-traffic-of-cultural-property/capacity-building/asia/>>, retrieved 22 October 2013.

⁴⁸ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, Beijing Office, <<http://www.unescobej.org/culture/movable-heritage-museums/museum-development-in-mongolia/>>, retrieved 15 August 2013.

artefacts that were in planned for the Art Gallery of New South Wales for 2014. I assisted with brokering training programs for Mongolians associated with the project. The exhibitions and associated activities were abandoned due to high loan and training fees, bureaucratic demands for travel and changes in Mongolian bureaucracy due to change in government disrupting planning.⁴⁹

It is not only UNESCO that has been a powerful foreign influence on the cultural heritage sector. As discussed in chapter three rapid increases in foreign investment, trade, aid and tourism quickly influenced the economic and social life of Mongols. Coupled with physical visitation of foreigners was the introduction and rapid spread of non-Mongolian cultural imports, such as commercial television, print media and cinema. The introduction of the internet facilitated rapid globalisation and culture exchange. For museums the impacts were numerous and at times contradictory. Though foreign aid and investment grew and began to fill the void left by Soviet aid withdrawal. Little of this reached or assisted museums in the early years as more urgent or diplomatically desirable matters took precedence.⁵⁰ Also museums had neither internet presence nor the resources to generate them while Western and Asian popular culture infiltrated and beguiled particularly the young and thus museums missed out.⁵¹ For example, during 2001-2, the NMM had only three computers among its staff and intermittent internet connectivity on one or two, meaning staff not only predominantly worked on paper, they were not connected professionally to colleagues or the public.⁵² When the new education room for secondary school students was installed with three computers and the internet as part of the *Mongolian History Alive!* project it was common to find staff members there emailing friends and colleagues. So too, it was quickly discovered that school students permitted to use the computers for research were primarily accessing sites of music, social media and pop culture. The *Mongolian History Alive!* project also secured funding for a NMM website, but due to problems with programming, and the

⁴⁹ Observations of the author during project work.

⁵⁰ Rossabi, op. cit.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Observations of the author 2001/2.

fledgling web provider, no comprehensive NMM website was established until the mid-2000s.⁵³

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Mongolia had strengthened and advanced its international diplomatic connections and in the post-socialist period more diplomatic missions were established in Ulaanbaatar. As well as cultural diplomacy programs significant numbers of non-government organisations began operations in Mongolia working in diverse areas from religion to social justice to health and open society as discussed in chapter three.⁵⁴ Each organisation apportioned funds and resources aid in accordance with its own program objectives. While clearly assistance for open government, health, infrastructure and education were paramount in the years of economic collapse, gradually cultural projects and museums began to find foreign partners.⁵⁵ As Minister Batbold S. described of relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK): ‘The most important aspect of Mongolian – ROK relations is human exchange’.⁵⁶ This case specifically impacted on the NMM in the form of the *Mon – Sol* archaeological research about the Hunnu that will be critiqued in subsequent chapters. The Republic of Turkey shares a similar view: ‘Historical ties connect us more than money, because Turkish and Mongolian people are connected to each other by history.’⁵⁷ This view will be demonstrated to have been borne out in museums.

The involvement of the United States Government in the repatriation of T-Baatar is another poignant indicator of the importance of culture and history in international diplomatic relations. Upon advice of the planned private sale of the illegally smuggled dinosaur remains the United States Government

⁵³ Observations of the author 2001/2.

⁵⁴ Rossabi, op. cit., pp. 58–60.

⁵⁵ Funding of the *Mongolian History Alive!* Education project at the NMM, for example, was made available through the Canadian Consulate as aid for North Korea had been curtailed for political reasons and these funds diverted to Mongolia that year.

⁵⁶ Remarks by Batbold S. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hudson Institute, Washington D. C., 8 June 2009, in Dr Alicia Campi, ‘Expanding Prospects for ROK–Mongolian Relations: A View from Ulaanbaatar’, *KoreaCompass*, Korean Economic Institute, Ulaanbaatar, December 2012, <<http://keia.org/publication/expanding-prospects-rok-mongolian-relations>>, retrieved 10 October 2013, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Badamdorj Batkhishig, Mongolian Ambassador to Ankara, Turkey, in Aydin Albayrak, ‘Turkish–Mongolian ties to reach new heights with Erdoğan’s visit’, *Today Zaman*, Ankara, 9 April 2013, <<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-312118-turkish-mongolian-ties-to-reach-new-heights-with-erdogans-visit.html>>, retrieved 10 October 2013.

commenced civil action to impound the remains.⁵⁸ Subsequently, the United States and the Mongolian Governments formed a team to manage the repatriation. The Mongolian Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, and the Office of the President eventually cooperated on making a temporary museum in Sukhbaatar Square to display the remains.⁵⁹ The flight of the skeleton was sponsored by the national airline of the Republic of Korea and the building erected by private companies for free.⁶⁰ The American Attorney General, Robert Painter who had led the case visited in 2013 and donated the mobile phone he had used during the process of arranging the seizure of the specimen.⁶¹ The collaborative approach of these governments around T-Baatar was celebrated at the highest levels with ceremonies in New York and Ulaanbaatar.⁶² While there has been a long relationship between politics and culture, as reflected in the collections of international gifts held at the NMM, Statehood and the Winter Palace Museum, the case demonstrated a form of cultural diplomacy that extended far beyond gift giving and international exhibitions.

Identifying and analysing some of the issues and occurrences in the cultural sector since democracy has provided a context in which to consider the museums of the study. It is also a body of information against which comparisons of the museums' reactions can be made. It has been demonstrated that while the cultural heritage sector has continued to expand and flourish, it has become much more complex due to the rapid increase in international engagement, both official and via the tourism sector and non-government organisations. The government as well as private companies have recognised the contribution that material heritage can make to the construction of a powerful and popular Mongolian history that is also potentially lucrative. Having understood this major trend, we now have the

⁵⁸ Ralph Blumenthal, 'Dinosaur Skeleton to Be Returned to Mongolia', *The New York Times*, 5 May 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/06/arts/design/dinosaur-skeleton-to-be-returned-to-mongolians.html?_r=0>, retrieved 31 January 2013.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ InfoMongolia, 'The 70 million year old T-Baatar is now available for viewing in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia' <<http://www.infomongolia.com/ct/ci/6106>>, retrieved 18 December 2013.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

basis upon which to critique the four museums of the study in detail to understand what has occurred since 1990 and what this demonstrates.

Museums After 1990

In addressing the question of how Mongolian museums responded in the post-socialist period I have grouped evidence into two areas. First, operations including staff structure, governance, naming and collections will be examined in this chapter as well as visitation statistics. The second group of indicators is interpretive activities including exhibitions (both permanent and temporary) and publications which will be discussed in chapter five and six. The study begins with an analysis of the NMM which is discussed at greater length than the other three museums of the case study as it is the foundation subject matter against which other museums are compared and contrasted. Globally when analysing any nation's constructed and changing view of itself the national museum in whatever form it may take should be a key indicator.⁶³ The NMM, established during the socialist period and reconfigured several times, currently has the awesome task of presenting a national history of Mongolia 'from geologic time to the present' – the story of Mongolia.⁶⁴ The NMM was created in 1991 by merging parts of the two major pre-existing museums, the State Central Museum and the Revolution Museum. These museum histories were discussed in chapter three and are briefly revisited here.⁶⁵ In 1991, the then named National Museum of Mongolian History (later renamed NMM) had a charter to be 'a cultural, scientific and educational organisation that presents Mongolian history and culture from the dawn of humanity to the present day'.⁶⁶ Records indicate that the historical collections of the State Central Museum, recorded as 23 885 items were moved (or at least ownership transferred) to the NMM in the

⁶³ Knell et. al. (eds), *National Museums, New Studies from Around the World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011.

⁶⁴ Saruulbuyan J., Eregzen G. & Bayarsaikhan J. (eds), *National Museum of Mongolia*, catalogue, National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2009, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Dr Idshinorov S. (ed.), *National Museum of Mongolian History*, catalogue, National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, undated, c. 2000, p. 1; Dr Bumaa D. was keeper of ex-Revolution Museum collections in 1992. At the time the object inventory was approximately 34 000. Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D., 20 May 2010, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

ex-Revolution Museum building.⁶⁷ The former State Central Museum building was renamed the Natural History Museum and retained natural history collections including palaeontology, geology, biology as well as Mongolia/Russia joint space program collections and also it retained storage of the ethnographic collection. Ownership of the ethnographic collection was eventually transferred to the NMM though parts of the ethnography collection remained housed in the Natural History Museum until that building was recently closed.⁶⁸

The entire Revolution Museum collection already housed in the building and partially on exhibition, included; 21 history related displays, 3 269 cultural displays including books and documents, 514 numismatics items, 1 787 medals and stamps/seals, 447 flags and pennants, 213 military uniforms (including all the guns currently held in the Museum), 60 ‘small objects’ and 42 work implements.⁶⁹ According to the Revolution Museum card catalogues, a substantial amount of research and collecting was undertaken in the years 1974 – 1981. During this time, the objects were grouped into photographs of heroes such as Sukhbaatar, Choibalsan, Bumbsted, Sambuu and then minor heroes and leaders. The collection is recorded as containing; MPRP objects, souvenirs and gifts to the state from famous people, and torture and interrogation equipment. Many of these objects have a recorded provenance.⁷⁰ Also in the collection were 6 413 photographic negatives and prints.⁷¹ These objects form the basis of the current socialist period collection of the NMM.⁷²

So the NMM at its moment of creation was an amalgam of parts at a time of great political, social and economic fragility. Once the new NMM was inaugurated work began on renovating existing displays and creating new exhibitions. The displays extant from the Revolution Museum were

⁶⁷ International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, *Nomadic*, Newsletter no. 68, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Discussion with Mr Ayush, Curator of Ethnography, November 2005.

⁶⁹ Registration documents supplied by Ms Baaska, Museum Registrar, 24 November 2005. ‘Small objects’ means exactly that.

⁷⁰ Original catalogues and papers of the Revolution Museum, housed in the National Museum of Mongolia, viewed 25 November 2005.

⁷¹ Ms Baaska, *Ibid*.

⁷² Author’s conversation with Dr Bumaa D., 25 November 2005.

renovated quickly forming the basis of the twentieth-century exhibitions. No record of this initial post-socialist display is known though the actual showcases left over from the Revolution Museum were in use until mid-2013.⁷³ Also in 1991, new exhibitions were introduced in the halls in lower floors of the NMM including; prehistory, the ancient states, the Great Mongol Empire and ethnography.⁷⁴ In 1998, the Museum's exhibitions were renovated once more, again with insufficient financial or human resources.⁷⁵ The main purpose of the 1998 renovation was to include more information representing activities in Mongolia that precipitated democracy in 1990 and subsequent democratic advancement.⁷⁶ The bulk of the twentieth-century exhibitions extant until August 2013 are understood to date from the 1998 renovation with some adjustments such as translated text panels and new information or objects.⁷⁷ Between 2000 and 2010, all halls were renovated again (not in chronological order) with the exception of the twentieth century and socialist halls. The renovation of each hall will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The halls were either renovated in collaboration with foreign institutions, often coupled with the results of new archaeological research (Ancient States and Great Mongol Empire), or through grant assistance (Costumes and Jewellery), or non-government organisation funding (Democratic Mongolia).⁷⁸ The halls pertaining to the socialist period remained the only unrenovated ones until 2013. Poignantly, the adjacent democratic period displays had been renovated extensively and produced not by the Museum but by a Mongolian politically aligned non-government organisation.⁷⁹ In August 2013, the NMM received government funding to renovate the socialist period hall and has dismantled the exhibition.⁸⁰

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ National Museum of Mongolia, 'Treasury Storage Preservation', Grant Application to Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, United States Department of State, Cultural Heritage Center, 8 November 2010, emailed to author by Dr Bumaa D., 21 May 2013, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Photographic documentation by author.

⁷⁹ The actual process of exhibition sign off did involve Museum curators in collaboration with party staff, emailed information from Dr Bumaa D. to author, 17 May 2013.

⁸⁰ Email Dr Bumaa D. to author 10 September 2013.

Museums and National Identity

Chapter two contained discussion of the development of thought about museums, national museums and archaeology and their role in shaping identity.⁸¹ The characteristics of the reinvention of the national museum in post-socialist countries and its role in reshaping new national narratives where they may or may have not previously existed was analysed.⁸² The national museum in post-socialist places is accepted as a place for either assimilating or uncoupling the grand, ancient or ethnic unifying past with recent difficult history.⁸³ In representing *all* of the national past, the national museum is confronted with the ambiguous task of incorporating difficult history, while ensuring the nation ‘owns’ all of its past and that all of the past contributes in some way to a unifying national identity.⁸⁴ While the NMM was created in the post-socialist era, it was created by a government and museum professionals who were socialist educated and experienced in socialist museology. The moment of transition posed the dilemma of what choices museums staff would make in reinventing history with no extra-socialist skills or knowledge to do so.

⁸¹ For example Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983, Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum; Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, Altamira Press, Oxford, 2004; P. Aronsson & G. Elgenius (eds), *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28–30 April 2011, EuNaMus Report no. 1*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, 2011, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064>, retrieved 16 June 2013; S. Macdonald & G. Fyfe (eds) *Theorizing Museums: representing identity and diversity in a changing world*, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, Oxford, 1996; J.A. Atkinson, Banks & O’Sullivan (eds), *Nationalism and Archaeology*. Cruithne Press, Glasgow, 1996; Lynn Meskell (ed.), *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritages in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, Routledge, London, 1998.

⁸² For example the work of recent EuNaMus reports and Peter Apor & Oksana Sarkisova (eds), *Past for the Eyes : East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums After 1989*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2008.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Izabella Main, ‘How is Communism Displayed, Exhibitions of Communism in Museums of Poland’, in Apor & Oksana (eds), *ibid.*, pp. 391–424.



Image 4.3
The National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, May 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

That the NMM has transformed is clearly indicated by relevant statistics, such as that the number of employees has risen from thirteen to thirty since 2002. In 2002 professional staff numbered thirteen including an Education Officer, an International Relations Officer and one Curator for each exhibition hall.⁸⁵ In 2005 the Museum still had thirteen professional staff including the Executive, four Archaeologists and three Curators, each responsible for a hall corresponding with their expertise.⁸⁶ The Education Officer position was deleted by the Director in 2002 these responsibilities given temporarily to the Middle History Curator who had an interest in and aptitude for schools education as well as expertise in Middle History. The Education Officer position would later be reinstated.⁸⁷ The Museum had sixteen professional staff by 2007 (this does not include operations staff such as guards, cleaners and drivers) and of these seven were designated curatorial positions, divided in relation to the halls they were responsible for.⁸⁸ The staff structure radically changed by 2010 partly due to the 2008 resolution

⁸⁵ Observations by author while working in the Museum 2001/2.

⁸⁶ Observations by author during field visit, 2005.

⁸⁷ Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D., 16 November 2005 and authors knowledge.

⁸⁸ Website of the National Museum of Mongolian History, <<http://www.nationalmuseum.mn>>, retrieved August 2007.

that the Museum would have responsibility for the welfare and development of museums nationally.⁸⁹ The Museum now has more than thirty employees, divided into several departments.⁹⁰ Departments include: Research and Display, (under which the Curators of Prehistory, the ancient states, Hunnu, Costumes and Jewellery and Democratic halls), Registration and Collections (overseeing Registrars and Keepers) and Public Relations, Marketing and Foreign Relations (under which are Guides, Marketing and Education Officers) and finally the Methodology department, which comprises two staff.⁹¹

So, the number of staff has grown, yet the fundamental structure of one Curator per exhibition hall has remained constant; so too has the general ratio of Archaeologists to Curators, though the number of Archaeologists has risen slightly, reflecting the preferences of recent Directors and of the long-term tradition of international archaeological activity underpinning in Mongolia.⁹² Associated activities support the notion of the power of archaeology in the dynamics of staffing; while the number of Archaeologists has grown by one, the number of archaeological field projects has increased also meaning the Curators of archaeological halls are frequently absent from the Museum, particularly in the summer months either in the field or working on research overseas in collaborating institutions. What is significant about the strong contingent of Archaeologists is the enduring importance from the socialist period of archaeological research and display. The work of Kohl, Shnirelman and Klejn was discussed in chapter three, including that belief in the objectivity of the sciences has been abandoned for an understanding that pure objectivity is not possible and that science cannot but process data through

⁸⁹ Ibid., retrieved 10 May 2012.

⁹⁰ Dr Bumaa D., 'Foreign relations of the National Museum of Mongolian History (1991–2007)', Conference Paper delivered at Asian National Museum Association, 2007, National Museum of Korea, Seoul, p. 1. Also conversations with Dr Bumaa D., 2010.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Author's conversations with Museum staff over the years about the attraction of international collaborations and travel and expeditions to countryside locations. Archaeology has a strong tradition and especially strong links to the collection of the Museum. In 2001, Dr Idshinorov was a key figure in negotiation the *Mon-Sol* project with the republic of Korea and this was seen as a bold gesture that challenged the hegemony of the Institute of History in the field, and marked a change in direction for the National Museum.

rubrics of the subjective.⁹³ Chapter three argued that the influence on Soviet museology and archaeology is heavy in the NMM and continues to be so due to historical legacy.

Returning to analysing the staff structure of the NMM, while new positions have been created an important nuance is that at times they are not decisive.

At first glance, for example, the establishment of the Department of Public Relations, Marketing and Foreign Relations seems to indicate an increased level of staff resource directed at these external engagement functions.

However, the Curator of Middle History is also Head of the Department and thus busy with high-level administration as well as curating a hall.⁹⁴

Similarly, though there are two Methodologists, one of the positions is held by the Curator of the Twentieth Century and Socialist Period halls.⁹⁵

Likewise, the Head of the Department of Research and Display is also Curator of the Prehistory Hall.⁹⁶ While staff structure and levels have changed and appear to follow contemporary structure for large museums, it would be uncommon to find Curators simultaneously undertaking high-level research and administration in similar sized museums in Europe and Australia for example. The significance of this is that while the amount of employees has expanded, the curatorial strength of key positions has been stretched thin due to employees simultaneously holding more than one role. If the NMM staff numbers have doubled since 2001, yet its senior curatorial staff continue to be overstretched there is the continued opportunity for under robust curatorial oversight of both collections and exhibitions. So too, the growth in marketing, international relations and guiding staff are key indicators of the path of growth in emphasis on international engagement and tourism the Museum has taken.

One of the most important changes in staffing of the NMM is the introduction of Museum Methodologist positions. Scholars have discussed the way in which Western museum constructs have been adopted in non-

⁹³ Philip E. Kohl, 'Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the reconstructions of the Remote Past', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, 1998, p. 225, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/223370>>, retrieved 22 August 2008.

⁹⁴ Author's conversations with Dr Bumaa, op. cit., as well as other colleagues about their roles at the museum, 2010.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Western places.⁹⁷ The notion that Western models have been adapted to incorporate cultural nuance has also been discussed.⁹⁸ It is widely understood that the modern museum and new museology is a Western construct that has been disseminated worldwide through processes of colonisation, socialism, appropriation and more recently globalisation.⁹⁹ In 2008 the charter of Museum was revised and among other changes (such as its name) it was assigned responsibility for improving professional standards nationally.¹⁰⁰ The NMM in response created a Museum Methodologist position and is currently establishing a national centre for museum excellence that provides networks, advice, training and publications about best practice to all Mongolian museums.¹⁰¹ The work has focused on creating national standards and templates for processes such as registration, loan documentation, condition reporting, storage and digital collections management – activities that are consistent with the ICOM definition of *museography*.¹⁰² The choice to prioritise methodology as a strategic direction is a guide to the level of application of the theoretical framework of the new museology in daily decision making. This example demonstrates that while a growing awareness of museology as a discipline has emerged among academic and museum professionals in the past decades, current museum modernising prioritises Westernising professional standards, methods and practice. This coupled with the fact that Mongolia has only one tertiary level museum studies course offered by the Culture and Art University, means many museum professionals take up their position from other disciplines such as archaeology, history and tourism and do not always carry museological scholarship training to the workplace.¹⁰³ For example the curatorial team of

⁹⁷ Christina Kreps, *Liberating Culture; Cross Cultural Perspective on Museums, Curation and Cultural Heritage Preservation*, Routledge, USA & Canada, 2003; Wan-Chen Chang, op. cit.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Dr Bumaa D., 'The National Museum of Mongolia: Creating an Institution for the Presentation and Dissemination of Cultural Heritage of Mongolia', paper delivered at ICOM International Committee for Museums Conference, Ethnography, Museums for Reconciliation and Peace; Roles of Ethnographic Museums in the World, Seoul, Korea, 19–21 October 2009, at The National Folk Museum of Korea.

¹⁰² Ibid., also knowledge of the author acquired during email correspondence with Dr Bumaa D. about useful resources and advice.

¹⁰³ Author's conversation with Dr Bumaa D., May 2005.

the NMM in 2013 consisted of six trained archaeologists, three historians and no ethnographer and no museologist.¹⁰⁴ If museological thought is relevant and useful *in* museums, then this is a deficiency that requires addressing. The next chapters that discuss interpretation in the museums support the notion that curators need further training not just in museum practice, but in curatorial and exhibition politics as they relate to communication and identity. Museum methodology is a necessary and important step toward filling the void left by the deficiency and eventual absence of socialist practices. However, I argue this is not enough and that critical thinking must become more central to interpretive activities if curatorial integrity is to be sustained in the long term.

Growth in Tourism and Visitation

Visitation by foreigners to museums was discussed earlier in the chapter. It was demonstrated that due to ongoing growth in inbound tourism, most museums have increased visitation.¹⁰⁵ Recent visitation by Mongols to the NMM presents a different picture. For example, in 2012, 32 997 Mongols are recorded as visiting their national museum, yet this represents just over 0.01percent of the population.¹⁰⁶ What this suggests is that even if the visitation data is an underestimation, the per capita visitation of Mongols to their national museum is low. When considered in context of notions of national identity and society, this is highly significant. Should 0.01percent of the population actually view the Museum annually, then how can it possibly be contributing to shaping national identity *among* the Mongols? The frequency of photographs posted by my Mongol friends on social media of family day trips to the Chinggis Khan equestrian statue at Tsonjin Boldog is an indicator of its popularity. By contrast images of visits to the NMM are extremely infrequent. This simple observation, coupled with visitation statistics strongly suggests the NMM is not a central player in deploying the past for Mongols. Also as foreign visitation has increased, then is it the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; ‘Museum structure’ document provided by Dr Bumaa D., email 24 July 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Oxford Business Group, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Email from Ms Erdmaa D. to author, 17 July 2013. Figures collected from National Museum Reception Office register.

identity of the Mongols as perceived by others that is ultimately the contribution the Museum is making? Without a strong web presence and with visitation increasing yet low the extent to which the interpretive activities of the Museum impact on popular notions of identity is questionable. I will argue in coming chapters that is precisely these influences from without, filtered through populist notions that have heavily influenced the museums.

International Programs

While visitation to the NMM remains low to moderate its activities outside its walls is have accelerated greatly. The NMM's international collaborations include travelling exhibitions and loans, research, education programs and conservation projects. In past decades it has cooperated on numerous projects aimed at enhancing and understanding its collections. Archaeology has been identified as a historical function of the Museum and a number of major initiatives continue to extend this tradition. These include: from 1994, the Museum worked with the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency on the *Turkish Monuments Project*, excavation and conservation program that resulted in new displays in the Museum; from 1997–2003, a collaboration with the Mongolian Institute of History and Republic of Korea and the NMM on the *Mon – Sol* project researching Hunnu archaeological sites resulted in new acquisitions, exhibitions and publications for the Museum. Also, work with the Smithsonian Institution researching deer stones continues.¹⁰⁷ And from 2000 onward, the Museum has intermittently accepted funding from Australian Volunteers and subsequently Australian Youth Ambassadors to develop education services, holiday programs and a conservation report and has worked with various researchers and local collaborators.¹⁰⁸ More recently, foreign involvement in museum capacity building has begun such as a project funded by the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Heritage to upgrade its traditional costume storage areas and displays and also a program with UNESCO Japan Funds-In-Trust called 'Capacity Building for the Sustainable Development of

¹⁰⁷ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Mongolian Museums 2012–2014’.¹⁰⁹ This project is part of an ongoing initiative in which the NMM was nominated in 2008 as the national training provider.¹¹⁰ While these are only a few examples of international engagement with the NMM, what they indicate is the high level and diversity of the engagement since the end of socialism with external parties. When considered in the context of limited engagement before the 1990s, this demonstrates a major transformation in the activities of the Museum and indicates an unprecedented level of connectedness with foreign institutions and agencies. This results not only in international loans but in tangible outcomes in the Museum itself and in training and travel for staff. Reflecting the increasing globalisation of Mongolia discussed previously, the Museum like Mongolian society has sought to engage in bilateral international agreements that democracy has afforded. The post-socialist context has both necessitated and facilitated an unprecedented diversity of international contact for the NMM. The effect has been that collections have been enhanced, research extended and Mongolia’s profile raised internationally. The result of this is that the Museum has necessarily allowed outside opinions and influences in in the form of research goals or curatorial vision. The compromise this has necessitated will be further extrapolated in coming chapters in relation to interpretive activities. Just as these international collaborations reflect a growing in interest by foreigners, the periods of history that they focus on are, again, those popular in the nationalist heroic narrative.

¹⁰⁹ Monhtogoo D., *Museum News*, no. 7, February 2013, p. 40.

¹¹⁰ UNESCO, ‘Museum Development in Mongolia 2012–2014’, UNESCO, Beijing, <<http://www.unescobej.org/culture/movable-heritage-museums/museum-development-in-mongolia/>>, retrieved 30 July 2013.

The Memorial Museum of the Victims of Political Repression



Image 4.4

Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, Ulaanbaatar, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Having discussed the macro changes to the NMM, I now analyse the Victims Museum in order to demonstrate how different the situation has been there and why. The sharp contrast between the fates of the two museums during the democratic period will be demonstrated in the coming chapters as an indicator of the strength of popular and political influence on museums. The way in which the purges have been represented in history and thus in museums has changed radically since 1991. Before I describe the recent travails of the Victims Museum, it is essential to reiterate that it is one element of a complex range of purge related activities such as political debate about blame and compensation, legislation revision, identification of sites and memorialisation through monuments and events. Since 1991 Mongolia has commemorated the purges and since 1996 has conducted official commemoration of the victims of political repression on 10 September, the anniversary of the day of mass arrests in 1937, which is commonly recognised as when the purges began.¹¹¹ A tangible example is that in December 2003 a memorial sculpture was erected in the forecourt of the NMM, a focal point for the annual laying of wreaths (pictured in chapter

¹¹¹ Sumya Ch., 'Mongolia Remembers its Purge Victims', *The UB Post*, 15 September 2005.

three).¹¹² Sometime between 2010 and 2013, the words ‘No to Death Penalty’ were applied to the centre of the sculpture in Mongolian and in English, making its message both more visible and more accessible to foreigners as well as Mongols.¹¹³ While the national commission that oversaw claims for compensation and exoneration took submissions until 2006, the debate is ongoing.¹¹⁴ The persecution itself has been widely acknowledged, it has been considered in the context of apportioning blame, in claims for official exoneration and for compensation.¹¹⁵ Considering the Victims Museum in light of Kaplonski’s assertion about apportioning blame for the purges is telling. Apportioning blame is controversial as it requires either recognised Mongol non-self-determination (the purges orchestrated by Russia) or Mongols self-inflicting atrocity, either outcome being uncomfortable within the wider historical narrative is a key theoretical rubric demonstrated to ring true in the fate of the Victims Museum.¹¹⁶

In 1996, the Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression officially opened in the wooden house of ex Mongolian Prime Minister Genden P. The Museum was a branch of the NMM. Genden had been executed in 1937 while in unofficial exile in Russia. His house had been confiscated at the time. The Museum was conceived of and established by his daughter, Mrs Tserendulam Genden as a place to collate and disseminate information about the purges. Mrs Tserendulam was the inaugural Director and undertook a program of collecting interviews from purges victims and creating displays.¹¹⁷ The original ground floor displays consisted of; a recreation of Genden’s office and the history of the Museum, a Memorial Wall that listed the names of all of the victims, a reconstruction of an interrogation cell and some socialist propaganda posters and artwork.¹¹⁸ The

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Photographic documentation by author, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Sumya Ch., op. cit.

¹¹⁵ Christopher Kaplonski, ‘Neither Truth nor Reconciliation: Political Violence and Singularity of Memory in Post-Socialist Mongolia’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Routledge, 2008, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14690760802094941>>, retrieved 13 June 2008.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Author’s conversations with Museum Director Mr Bekhbat S., 2005 and 2010, as well as observations and documentation by author since 2001.

¹¹⁸ Photographic documentation author, 2001-2, 2005, 2010.

first floor of the Museum housed information about the purges, show trials and victims in mostly chronological order. There were also areas devoted to groups such as religious, intellectual and ethnic. The displays charted the purges from the 1930s to the 1970s.¹¹⁹ Mrs Tserendulam passed away in 2003, and in 2004 her son Mr Bekhbat S. took Directorship of the Museum.¹²⁰

During a discussion in 2005, Mr Bekhbat expressed his wish to keep the Museum operating and to improve its relevance, particularly for children. Mr Bekhbat was concerned about the precarious nature of the Museum in relation to the power balance of socialist and democratic parties in government at the time. Apart from the delicate political nature of its contents, the Russian-style wooden building was in disrepair and in need of major structural conservation works.¹²¹ The building had been inspected and earmarked to be condemned due to slumping caused by rising damp on its north side.¹²² During the period between the passing of Mrs Tserendulam and the appointment of Mr Bekhbat, some of the displays had been removed or renovated by a caretaker, including the Memorial Wall. Mr Bekhbat was not pleased and described how much had 'been destroyed'.¹²³

By 2010, while the layout and appearance of the displays remained mostly unchanged, the introduction of extended labels, many translated into English and enriched archaeological displays were noticeable.¹²⁴ Mr Bekhbat had also introduced an education room and instigated an active public program.¹²⁵ Externally, the once empty backyard of the Museum now housed a multi-storey building which visually altered the ambience of the site. Indeed the entire suburb south of Sukhbaatar Square once predominantly low rise was now densely populated with new Western style buildings, adding to

¹¹⁹ Observations and photographic documentation by the author during visits 2000/2002, 2005, 2010.

¹²⁰ Author's conversations with Museum Director Mr Bekhbat S., op. cit.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Author's conversations with Museum Director Mr Bekhbat S., 2005 and 2010, as well as observations and documentation since 2001 by author.

¹²⁴ Photographic documentation by author 2010.

¹²⁵ Author's conversations with Museum Director Mr Bekhbat S., 2010, as well as observations and documentation since 2001 by author.

the aged appearance and sense of fragility of the wooden Museum building.¹²⁶ Changes to the displays will not be described in detail as overall they have remained thematically consistent throughout the period of study. It is at the macro level that the Museum has changed most dramatically. Signifying a significant shift in its authority the Victims Museum was devolved in 2008 from control of the NMM and thus state ownership and transferred to the stewardship of a non-government organisation called the Genden Foundation.¹²⁷ Privatisation had been for some years an option that Mr Bekhbat saw as an opportunity for survival and growth.¹²⁸ While state funding ceased, the objects on display at the Museum remained predominantly from the collections of the NMM on loan (thus state-owned), supplemented by recent acquisitions of the Genden Foundation.¹²⁹



Image 4.5
Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, exhibition on first floor of Victims Museum, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

The devolution from public to private ownership proves that by preserving and presenting this contested period the Museum is contested ground and like the purges themselves remains ambivalent within the broader official historical narrative. The Museum presents difficult issues and has been clearly demoted out of the official public narrative. The demotion and its repercussions are important as a reflection of broader sociopolitical and popular notions in modern Mongolia. The place of the Victims Museum

¹²⁶ Photographic documentation, op. cit., 2010.

¹²⁷ Author's conversation with Museum Director, op. cit., 2010.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Author's conversation with Museum Director, Mr Bekhbat, 2010.

within the Mongolian history museum network is vital, and its interpretation of events of the twentieth century perhaps most interesting of all in relation to periods of 'dark history'. Thus the Victims Museum stands in contrast to the NMM, in that the NMM has been promoted to have national roles, while the Victims Museum is no longer part of the state network. Even though the Victims Museum has a charter to not only interpret and memorialise the purged, its pedagogical purpose of ensuring memory prevents repetition of the acts has not been deemed by the state to warrant funding. What this demonstrates in relation to museums and identity is though the Victims Museum has sought to extensively interpret the purges, they (as a product of socialism) are not comfortable in ongoing nationalistic revisionism. In the case of the NMM interpretation of the entire socialist period, including the purges will be demonstrated to reflect a similar level of discordance of these issues in the wider narrative.

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum



Image 4.6
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, the Green Palace,
Ulaanbaatar, May 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Today, the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum is a complex of seven temples, ceremonial gates, courtyards and the Palace building itself,

sometimes referred to as the Green Palace. The Winter Palace Museum houses and exhibits the personal effects, official inheritance, artworks, library and symbols and religious ceremonial belongings of the last Bogd Khaan of Mongolia, head of state and head of the Buddhist faith. The Bogd Khaan was also a key welcomer of socialism to Mongolia in the early twentieth century.¹³⁰ As such, this Museum represents a complex nexus of civil, personal and religious history of national significance.

In the democratic period activity has increased. From 1996, the World Monuments Fund collaborated on restoration projects designed to stabilise and restore architectural elements such as roofs, gates and walls.¹³¹ China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage has also funded the restoration of a gate and pavilions in the complex's second courtyard.¹³² A new building (pictured below) has also been erected at the rear of the complex, providing contemporary museum standard display areas, archival storage and office space. The building houses exhibitions of valuable artworks, placed side by side in linear modern art gallery style.



Image 4.7
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, new gallery building,
International Museums Day, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

¹³⁰ Emgent Oookhnoi Batsaikhan, *Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, The Last King Of Mongolia*, Institute of International Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

¹³¹ Enquiries have not yielded information of major renovations to exhibitions.

¹³² World Monuments Fund, *Bogd Khan Palace Museum*, <<http://www.wmf.org/project/bogd-khan-palace-museum>>, retrieved 24 June 2013.



Image 4.8

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, exhibition opening ceremony in the new gallery building, International Museums Day, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Like the Victims Museum, the displays in the buildings in the Winter Palace complex have changed slowly yet they have been transformed significantly. As temples have been restored and collections consolidated, displays in the temples and libraries have been enhanced and more richly interpreted. In particular, the Lavrin Temple now contains twenty-one *tara* (goddess) figures sculpted by the first Undur Gegeen, Zanabazar. The *tara* are celebrated as are *tankas* (religious artworks) and *sutra* (books) for their fine craftsmanship and uniquely Mongol aesthetic characteristics. By contrast, an analysis of photographic evidence from 2000 to 2010 (see images below) suggests that the displays of the Green Palace building, the actual residence have changed the least on the site. For example, several images follow that illustrate that while English translations have been added to labels the level of interpretation of the objects themselves remains scant. One set of images depicts the display and label relating to the regalia used by the Bogd Khaan during important religious ceremonies. This could be illustrative of his symbolism as spiritual leader and be used to interpret Mongol Buddhism but it is merely described. The second set of images is an object that is the declaration of Mongol independence from the Manchu of 1911 and its label. Its label does not interpret the events of 1911, yet they are of high national

significance. The final image of the taxidermy collection of the Bogd Khaan is similarly scantily interpreted, and it has also been included to evidence how little the displays have changed since the socialist period when compared to the image of display in chapter three. In 2013, at the time of writing, the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum was granted state funding to renovate displays so this situation may change.¹³³



Image 4.9
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, religious regalia of the Bogd Khaan, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

¹³³ Email from Dr Bumaa D. to author, 20 August 2013.

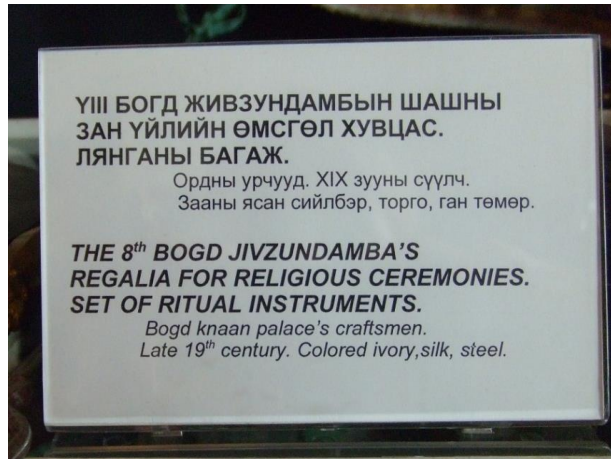


Image 4.10
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, object label, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 4.11
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, Declaration of Mongolian Independence, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

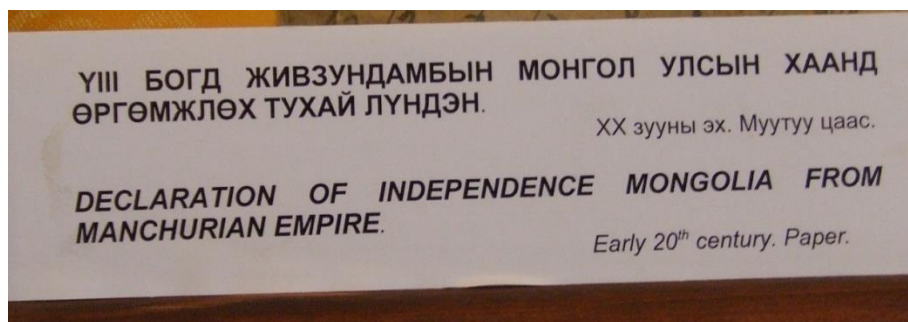


Image 4.12
The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, object label, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 4.13

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, taxidermy collection, 2010
 Photograph Sally Watterson

The impression the recent changes to the Winter Palace complex impart is complex. In terms of the dynamics of the site as a whole, while the Palace building has been restored, the contents of the building retain their under interpreted status, thus are underemphasised. The spiritual nature of the site is heightened due to the sense of well cared for temples painted vibrant colours, sufficiently interpreted for their function and symbolism. Second, the extant interpretation lends the viewer to consider the artistic productivity of the site as achievements of sophisticated aesthetics and skilled Mongol craftsmanship. The Palace building contains state, ceremonial, religious and personal objects mainly pertaining to the significance and personal life of the last Bogd Khaan yet the overall impression is not the role of the Bogd Khaan in leadership, revolution and independence. Rather it is of an eclectic and curious collection of finery and personal effects. Finally, the display and interpretation of much work of the artist and first Undur Gegeen Zanabazar links him and the high age of Mongol arts to the site, somewhat confusing this with the fact that his work and life significantly predate the Palace. So too, while Zanabazar is emphasised as facilitator of Mongolia's exalted place

in the classical Asian/Buddhist artistic world, the persona and accomplishments of the Eighth Bogd Khaan, the actual resident of the complex is less emphasised. While the Bogd Khaans place in ongoing revisionist debate about Mongol independence and subsequent adoption of socialism is of high significance, it is artistic, architectural and aesthetic concerns from a previous era that have taken precedent in the complex.¹³⁴ In considering how the museum has changed since the democratic period, it is clear that the aspects of the site that link it to traditional religion and culture have taken precedence over the complexities of the politics that took place there, reflecting a populist approach, and simplifying the complex layers of the site. Chapter five will demonstrate that this approach to culture, religion, Zanabazar and the Bogd Khaan is also reflected at the NMM.

The Mongolian Statehood Museum



Image 4.14

Sukhbaatar Square, Ulaanbaatar, facade of Parliament House – the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex which houses the Statehood Museum of Mongolia, note the National History Museum mid-ground, left, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

While the aforementioned museums have been greatly affected by democracy and have exhibited some general commonalities in particular funding deficits continuing to impact on exhibitions and operations, the new Statehood Museum contrasts to this trend. In November 2005 the mausoleum of socialist revolutionary leaders Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan, directly in front

¹³⁴ Batsaikan, op. cit.

of Parliament House was closed and their remains moved to the state burial ground, *Altan Olgii* (Golden Cradle). The mausoleum was subsequently demolished. These activities were in preparation for the construction of the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex (also known as the State Reverence Palace Complex and the State Ceremonial Complex) that would become a new facade for Parliament House. A foundation stone for the complex was laid on 6 October 2005.¹³⁵ The Complex was one of many activities undertaken by the government in preparation for celebrations to mark the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Great Mongol Empire and the 850th anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khan.¹³⁶ The celebrations were considered of such significance that the sixtieth United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 60/16 that called upon its members and organisations to participate in the celebrations as a moment of world historical significance.¹³⁷ The Mongolian Statehood Museum, to be housed in the complex was established by the thirtieth decree of the government on 4 February 2009. The Museums goals are to:

...collect, conserve and preserve the historical, cultural and archaeological objects which are related to Mongolian State history and advertise and distribute information to public.¹³⁸

The history of the Statehood Museum is brief as the Museum itself is young, having only opened in 2012.¹³⁹ The Museum represents a very recent, state-funded version of the concept of the nation. I was granted permission to undertake a site visit during construction in 2010. The curatorial vision as expressed by the Curator, Mr Altantugs was to present the development of Mongol statehood or governance from ancient times to independent

¹³⁵ Oyundelgur, B. 'Remains moved to Altan-Olgii', *The Mongol Messenger*, Ulaanbaatar, 16 November 2005, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Tzu-ying Han, 'Chinggis Khaan Worship in Mongolia: Focus on the Great Mongolian State 800th Anniversary Celebrations', *Bi-monthly Journal on Mongolian and Tibetan Current Situation*, vol. 15, no. 2, Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, Taipei, 2006, <<http://www.mtac.gov.tw/mtacbook/>>, retrieved 10 July 2013.

¹³⁷ 'Address by Enkhbayar H.E, President of Mongolia', International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, *Nomadic*, Newsletter no. 68, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Virtual Collection of Asian Masterpieces database, Mongolian Statehood Museum, <<http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/museum/detail.nhn?museumId=1051>>, retrieved 6 June 2013.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

democratic state.¹⁴⁰ Though the Museum had a very small collection, it was planned to use multimedia and to borrow and acquire objects to recognise the development of statehood resulting in democracy. Since 2012 the general public have been permitted access to the Museum yet due to water damage, large sections of the Museum are closed at the time of writing thus the extant exhibitions are only part of the planned vision.¹⁴¹ The water penetration due to flawed construction methods has necessitated truncating the content of the displays which has impacted on the authority and comprehensive narrative which the Statehood Museum was planned to project. The displays of the Museum when it actually opened will be discussed in chapter five, but in essence, the very existence of the Museum, aside from its contents is proof of the ongoing revision of notions of political and civic heritage among the Mongols.

Conclusion

This survey of macro changes to museums and specific operational and strategic changes to the NMM, Victims Museum, Winter Palace and the Statehood Museums explains what happened to museums after socialism. It describes how they came to be in their current form today, which provides the context for critical analysis of their interpretive activities in the following chapters. It has been widely discussed how post-socialism affects museums and culture; Kuutma and Kroon point to the phenomena of hastily installed temporary exhibitions having a longer than expected life due to paucity of funding in post-socialist nations.¹⁴² Importantly, Atai identified the way in which the lack of an afore adhered to ideological framework meant that cultural institutions very basis for existence was unclear until state ideology and new national identity began to emerge.¹⁴³ Some powerful conclusions

¹⁴⁰ Author's conversation with Museum Curator Mr Altantugs N., 2010.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Kristin Kuutma & Paavo Kroon, 'Museum Policy in Transition from Post-Soviet Conditions to Reconfigurations in the European Union Museum Policies in Europe 1990–2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia', *EuNaMus Report no. 3*, Lill Eilertsen <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:557284/FULLTEXT01.pdf>, retrieved 7 August 2013.

¹⁴³ Atai, op. cit.

emerge in the case of Mongolia; as museums were suddenly confronted with deregulation and the free market, the entire *culture* of museum operations was forced to adapt or fall behind, resulting in some museums forming new allegiances and embarking on new types of work. The steady growth in the importance of tourism to Mongolia has meant museums are afforded opportunities for higher public and political exposure and in doing so must provide for new audiences. In the case of the NMM this has resulted in a staff restructure to accommodate international requirements. Concurrent with the financial and economic changes to museums coupled with governance rearrangements has been the opportunities that cultural diplomacy has afforded. Museums have been increasingly able to undertake work that connects to the international cultural community. The way in which this reflects current trends is twofold; while aid, expertise and equipment from overseas has facilitated improvements to back of house, conservation and research and interpretive activities, it has predominantly focused on popular historical ideas.

Revisiting Vukov's critique of the general acceptance of the duality of memory, the 'remembering' and 'forgetting' and his introduction of a third paradigm, the notion of 'unmemorable' when referring to the 'blankness' or absence of interpretation of the socialist period in museums in Bulgaria.¹⁴⁴ While this chapter has not addressed the interpretative activities of each museum in detail, it has identified an unevenness of change in the museums and proposed that this is due to the popularity of certain subject matter over other. Should the museums be considered holistically as points of visual, verbal and organisational interpretation, then application of Vukov's categorisation is telling. For example the subject matter of the Statehood Museum, given the Museum's existence, funding and prominent profile can justifiably be confirmed as 'memorable' within current Mongolian official historical narrative. The Victims Museum by contrast has been devolved from public ownership and thus does fall dangerously close to the category of official forgetting. In the overall scheme of public museums and how they

¹⁴⁴ Nikolai Vukov, 'The Unmemorable and the Unforgettable: Museumizing the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria', in Oksana & Apor (eds), op. cit., pp. 307–334.

speaking to national identity, its devolution seems to align best with what Vukov refers to as a 'restraint' of representation. The Victims Museum being no longer part of the public system has been officially dematerialised, yet it continues to display state-owned collections thus in this sense thus becomes unmemorable officially, even though it remains a memorial museum for remembering.¹⁴⁵

The NMM and the Winter Palace Museum support Vukov's theories. While both museums have changed, the ways in which changes have occurred has direct connections to their collections and thematic strengths. The Winter Palace, in undertaking an architectural and fine art conservation program has chosen (or taken the opportunity) to remember the aesthetic and artistic achievements associated with the site. What is still 'restrained' is the presence of the Bogd Khaan as a political figure. While the displays are materialised, the lack of associated improvement in interpretation by contrast to the architecture and artistic elements of the site renders them somewhat unmemorable or at least projecting less power or 'worth'.

This chapter has situated the museums in their context and explained and analysed some changes, noting such aspects such as governance, staff and international projects. Together this evidence demonstrates significant, yet uneven change to the museums of the study. The next chapter moves further inside the museums to examine specific areas of interpretation and what they say about influences on museums in the democratic period.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Chapter V

Legitimisation and Identity

This chapter and the next will consider some interpretive activities of museums in relation to key popular issues that feed into nationalist notions; the ancient states period, the Great Mongol Empire, traditional culture and the place of the democratic period in Mongolian history. It will consider the ongoing revision of national identity as reflected in the interpretive activities (exhibitions, catalogues and publications) presented by the NMM and the Mongolian Statehood museums. Emphasis in the first part of the chapter is on the NMM as its display pan all of these themes and changes have been extensive. First, the international exhibitions and activities generated by the Museum are noted and analysed as indicators of what themes and periods have been emphasised. This information demonstrates how the proliferation of international exhibitions that the NMM has participated in are indicative of the popularisation of Mongolia internationally and concur with populist notions of Mongol identity. It is not only the Mongols who have revised their sense of self; the world has also formed new opinions. Like Tibet, for example, the traditional orientalist views of Mongolia as isolated, traditional and ‘preserved in anabiosis’ has been pervasive in the west.¹ However as demonstrated by the plethora of new international interest in Chinggis Khan, the Great Mongol Empire and in Mongol culture the revised view is much more positive and increasingly illustrated in international exhibitions. The core section of the chapter moves inside the NMM and analyses in detail parts of its exhibitions and key publications. Following this, small sections about the Winter Palace and the Statehood Museum exhibitions serve to illustrate synergies. The Victims Museum is not discussed in this chapter as it

¹ The notion of anabiosis may be found in Russian State Archives of Social-Political History, 495. Sch2.D 188.1.48, quoted in I. Morozova, *The Comintern and Revolution in Mongolia*, Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge, White Horse Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 14. A full discussion of the complexities of Tibet, which has many synergies with Mongolia, may be found in Clare Harris, *The Museum on the Roof of the World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012.

does not interpret the themes or periods listed above. While the existence of the Victims Museum implicitly serves as a nemesis for the positivist national narrative, its interpretive activities are strictly delimited to chronicling and describing the events of the purges.

This chapter ultimately argues that there has been a focus of attention on these themes in the museums which has resulted in renovated and new displays at the museums, though at an uneven pace. Coupled with new exhibitions a proliferation of interpretative materials such as catalogues and guidebooks that interpret and celebrate these themes supports the notion of both their popularity and their political importance. The NMM will be demonstrated to have generated a wealth of revised interpretation of the ancient states, the Great Mongol Empire and traditional life and culture that constructs a lineage between ancient nomadic steppe culture and the present day with Chinggis Khan at its fulcrum. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Statehood Museum by its very existence and charter does the same and its exhibitions strongly reflect this sense of developmental history. The Winter Palace has been slower to transform and the transformations have been subtle by comparison for reasons which have already been identified; the complexity of the site as a political, religious and artistic nexus. The Winter Palace interpretive activities have not been dramatically overhauled textually. Aestheticisation of the site and of the religious objects, particularly those associated with Zanabazar as opposed to more complex interpretation of the role of the Bogd Khaan in inviting socialism and Russian influence has resulted in a confusing celebration of ancient culture and religion and its uniqueness and development. Though the Winter Palace displays objects that could be utilised to interpret some of the most important political moments of the twentieth century I argue it is the hesitant revision of the Bogd Khaan himself in supporting socialism that ultimately led to a period of less glorious history that has impeded the deployment of this interpretive path. Put more simply, celebrating the uniqueness of Mongol Buddhism and its artistic legacy has won out over interpretation of a more contested period in history. Limiting this chapter to analysing celebratory themes in the master narrative in museums would be reductive if not considered in the context of the chapter to follow. The themes that have been omitted from this chapter have

been deliberately reserved precisely because they have been ‘left out’ to an extent in museum interpretation. These two chapters when considered together argue that in the democratic period, Mongolia’s museums, like Mongols themselves have yet to fully resolve the tension between glorious periods of the past with those less so. As such, Mongolian museums contribute to populist notions of tradition, continuity and development, yet fail to substantially address and integrate the complexity that difficult periods bring to the master narrative. This leads to the question of why Mongolian museums in these days of the new museology and notions of many stories are retaining the traditional master narrative. I argue that, just as the deployment of the ‘science’ of archaeology has been demonstrated to be a significant and still powerful socialist legacy so too is the compulsion to present a mono narrative of progress that gives reason for and therefore legitimises the present. In turn this validating of the present feeds into a positivist, celebratory national story that is deliberately devoid of ambiguity that is reflected in popular thought.

International Exhibitions

Previous chapters have described various forms of increased international engagement from the 1960s onward, due to relaxation of state control and entry of Mongolia into the international (as opposed to socialist) community. The area of international engagement that has not been discussed in detail is the international exhibition of Mongolian objects. The history and extent of international exhibitions in the democratic period is vast and will not be recounted here as it is the museums *in* Mongolia that are the core subject of this paper. However as they are key interpretive activities and frequently cause changes to the permanent displays in the museums they need to be acknowledged. Objects from many museums have travelled internationally and often exhibitions draw upon collections of more than one museum as well as collections held in other countries. Statistics indicate that the NMM is prolific in this field, so a snapshot of its international activities is outlined here.

Since the mid-1990s, the Museum has participated in twenty-eight exhibitions in seventeen foreign countries and achieved support from fourteen international organisations (Embassies, aid funds, grants).² In 2007 alone, it collaborated with international organisations on eight joint field expeditions.³ The level of importance of international collaborations is summarised by Museum Curator Dr Bumaa Dashdendev in describing one of the key missions of the Museum being ‘development of relations and collaborations with other museums and organisations, both domestic and abroad’.⁴ Since 1989, the NMM has participated in several international exhibitions including: *Chinggis Khaan– The Exhibition* (United States, Turkey 2012–2013), *Genghis [sic] Khan and His Heirs – The Empire of the Mongols* (2005–2006, Germany), *Modern Mongolia – Reclaiming Genghis [sic] Khan* (2001–2004 USA), *Gold of nomads from Alexander the Great to Chinggis Khaan* (2000–2001 France, Spain) *Mongolia – Heritage of Chinggis Khaan* (1997–1998 Italy), *Treasury of Mongolia -Legend of Chinggis Khaan* (1996 Japan), *Mongolia of Chinggis Khaan*.(1996 South Korea), *Heritage of Chinggis Khan* (1995–1996 USA), *Great Mongol* (1992 Japan), *Mongols* (1989 Germany and Switzerland). Aside from the number of exhibitions and collaborations being indicators of a busy program of international engagement, a cursory survey of the names of the exhibitions points to the nature of these collaborations. Only three of international exhibitions listed on the Museum website up to in 2012 do not have ‘Chinggis Khan’ in their title and only two of these did not deal with Mongolian history from ancient times to the present.⁵ This demonstrates that Chinggis Khan is central to the Mongol story for foreigners as well as for Mongols themselves.⁶ As the ratio of objects relating to the period of Chinggis Khan and his successors to objects representing other themes in the

² Dr Bumaa D., *Script on NMMH co-operation*, unpublished preparatory notes for conference paper, 2009, emailed to author 10 August 2009.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dr Bumaa D., ‘Foreign relations of the National Museum of Mongolian History (1991–2007)’, Conference Paper delivered at Asian National Museum Association, 2007, National Museum of Korea, Seoul, p. 1.

⁵ National Museum of Mongolia, <<http://www.nationalmuseum.mn/>>, retrieved 16 January 2012.

⁶ Ibid, note that the spellings of the exhibition titles are as they appeared on the website, but do not always accord with how they were spelled in exhibition catalogues and publicity.

Museum's actual collections is not high, the emphasis on Chinggis Khan is not generated from the collections themselves.⁷ Catalogues and documentation of these international exhibitions indicate that objects from other parts of the collections such as costumes, traditional lifestyle objects are employed to supplement archaeological content.⁸ So too, while the titling of the exhibitions may use the name Chinggis Khan, in many cases, the exhibitions were actually about Mongolia over time. *Modern Mongolia* is a good example of this. The exhibition is about Mongolia now but situates it as a continuum of cultural and democratic development from ancient times.⁹ Thus the conclusion can be drawn that there is intense international interest in exhibitions about Chinggis Khan and his role in world history. The issues that arise from this are complex and raise the question; does this plethora of exhibitions reflect, to borrow Keynesian economics terminology 'demand pull' from outside of Mongolia, or 'supply push' from within or if neither exclusively then what combination of the two? If it is the former, are depictions of Mongolian history in alignment internationally with those domestically?

Collections and Layout of the National Museum

Before proceeding to analyse the exhibitions in the NMM itself, it is important to pause to remind the reader of the collections of the Museum and to understand the layout of the exhibitions. It is widely understood that most museums exhibit and interpret only a small portion of their collections. Taking in to account logistical constraints and curatorial choice or museum politics, this means that those objects that make it into display cases may not reflect the nature of the collection but rather reflect the narratives that the museum wishes to construct.

The largest category of the NMM's collection of more than 48 000 objects is paper based objects and photographs, the second largest the ethnographic

⁷ See chapter three for a description of the collections.

⁸ For example Don Lessem, *Chinggis Khaan: An Exhibition in Mongolia*, Ulaanbaatar, 2011.

⁹ Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan*, University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2001.

collections. However, while 0.04percent of the paper based objects are on exhibition, 5.0percent of the ethnographic collections are on display. Meanwhile 3.0percent of the archaeological collections are on display, though they are a quarter of the size of the ethnographic collections.¹⁰ What this suggests is that the ethnographic collections of the Museum are proportionately large and a sizeable portion is on display. Secondly, that due to the percentage of them on display, in relation to other areas of the collections, ethnography holds a significant place in the exhibitions of the Museum. Only archaeology takes an equally significant role. Other parts of the total Museum collections are under 1.0 percent on exhibition.¹¹ As well as remembering the collections of the Museum a brief description of the design and layout of the exhibitions serves as orientation for the reader who has not visited and also illustrates the spatial and curatorial relationship of the halls to each other and the order in which the viewer encounters them which all influence transmission of the interpretative message. As hall names have changed during the study period and there is some disparity between hall names on signage and in publications, the naming and spelling standards used in the most current Museum guidebook, 2012 have been employed.¹²

¹⁰ Dembereldorj G., *Museum Survey*, Survey compiled for UNESCO–ICROM Asian Academy for Heritage Management, Museum Capacity Building Programme for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO Bangkok, March 2009, p. 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² National Museum of Mongolia, *National Museum of Mongolia*, guidebook, English version, Ulaanbaatar, 2012.

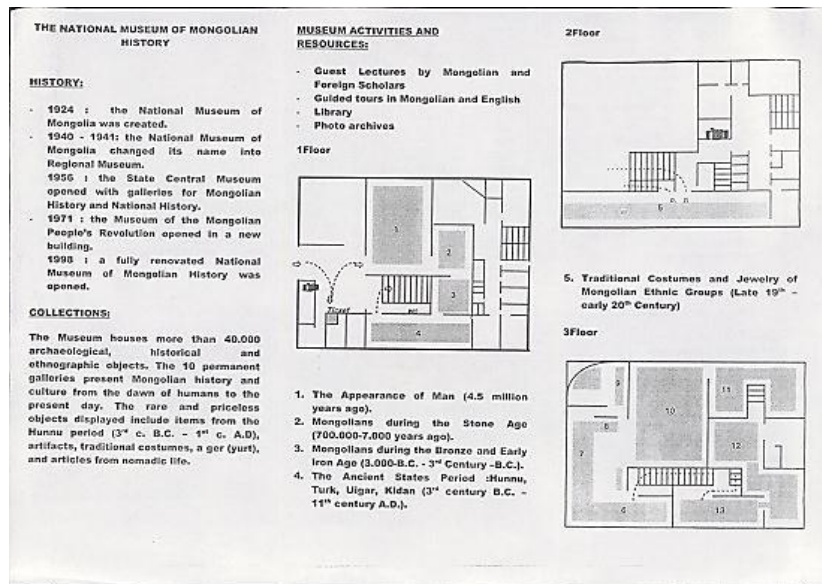


Image 5.1
National Museum of Mongolian History, brochure, 2001/02

At the outset of the research from 2000 the NMM contained thirteen exhibition halls arranged chronologically from ancient times until the present day.¹³ The NMM currently retains a majority of its displays in the same physical spaces and in the same chronology, with some notable exceptions that will be described and critiqued (see image of 2012 guidebook below)¹⁴. In the current version of the NMM guidebook, the halls are renumbered one to ten and grouped into three sections; *Prehistory and Ancient States* (one and two), *Mongolian Empire and Tradition* (three to six) and *Modern Mongolian Historical Periods* (seven to ten).¹⁵ The current NMM catalogue does not group its chapters into themes, but the information presented follows the same chronology as the exhibitions.¹⁶

¹³ National Museum of Mongolian History, 'National Museum of Mongolian History', brochure, National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, undated, c. 2000.

¹⁴ National Museum of Mongolia, *National Museum of Mongolia*, op. cit.

¹⁵ *National Museum of Mongolia*, guidebook, op. cit. 2012.

¹⁶ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit.

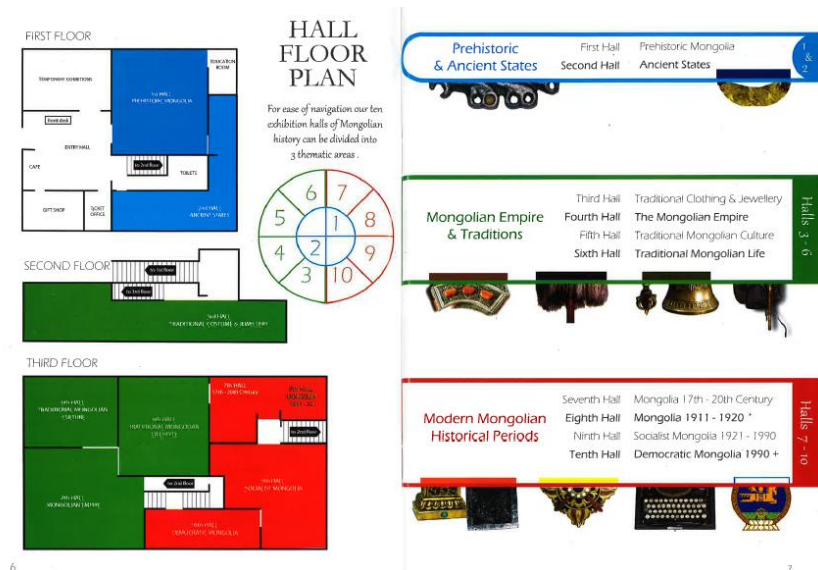


Image 5.2
National Museum of Mongolia, Guidebook, English version, p. 7, 2012

The visitor enters the NMM on the ground floor where there is a foyer with ticket office, book shop and occasional temporary exhibitions. As the building is from the socialist era there are no directional choices so all visitors proceed in a linear manner. On the ground floor are Halls One and Two, *Prehistory* and *Ancient States*. After this the visitor is directed to proceed up a central staircase to level two which houses Hall Three, *Traditional Costumes and Jewellery*. The visitor then proceeds up a short stair case to level three and into Hall Four, *Mongolian Empire*, Hall Five, *Traditional Mongolian Culture*, Hall Six, *Traditional Mongolian Lifestyle* and Hall Seven, *Seventeenth to Twentieth Century Mongolia*. Up another few stairs are Hall Eight, *Mongolia 1911–1920*, Hall Nine, *Socialist Mongolia* and Hall Ten *Democratic Mongolia*. Upon completing the historical chronology, the visitor exits after Hall Ten and descends the central staircase back to the foyer, completing the visitation path.¹⁷ The sequence of the halls means the visitor path follows a traditional chronological narrative. The approach to describing and analysing the exhibitions in this case study has been adopted as it generally corresponds to the order in which they are located. One exception is the Hall Three, *Traditional Costume and Jewellery Hall* which has been grouped with Halls Five and Six, *Traditional Culture*

¹⁷ *National Museum of Mongolia*, guidebook, 2012, op. cit., p. 6.

and *Traditional Life*. It is the only one considered out of the physical sequence as doing so allows the ethnographic displays to be considered as group and the NMM catalogue displays the same this grouping.¹⁸

Hall One – Prehistory of Mongolia

Hall One interprets the Palaeolithic Age to early Iron Age, ancient geography and cultures of Mongolia (800 000 to 209 BC).¹⁹ In 2005, the hall was renovated to improve aesthetics with higher light levels, new display cases and text panels. The renovation also facilitated incorporation of new acquisitions from increased archaeological field work discussed in the previous chapter.²⁰ In 2013, this entire permanent exhibition was removed to allow for a temporary exhibition titled *The Heritage of (or treasures) Chinggis Khan*. The exhibition was part of celebrations of the eight hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khan.²¹ Since the removal of the temporary exhibition, the permanent exhibition has been reinstated and while the aesthetics of the hall have changed since 2000 and objects and associated interpretive labels added, the same archaeological taxonomy and themes remain today. That is, the displays are divided using common archaeological terminology; Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic followed by Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, incorporating images, archaeological materials and interpretative panels.²² Objects include stone tools, replicas and pictures of deer stones, a diorama of a burial, plaster casts of petroglyphs and rock paintings, cultural objects and objects related to animal husbandry. The predominant interpretive theme is that each phase is a natural progression of development and increasing technical and cultural sophistication of man.

¹⁸ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰ Fieldwork conducted in the Museum at time of renovation in 2005.

²¹ Photographic documentation supplied by Steven Alderton, 2013.

²² *National Museum of Mongolia*, guidebook, 2012, op. cit., p. 17.



Image 5.3
National Museum of Mongolia, superseded panel and props Hall One,
Prehistory, during renovation, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

There are some fundamental points to be noted about this hall. The territories of Mongolia are framed as a place rich in archaeological evidence where man appeared very early in the global context and because of the influence of and connection to landscape and climate developed an increasingly sophisticated cultural complexity.²³ Aspects of prehistoric environment such as landscape, flora and fauna as well as cultural practices, such as hunting, cart making and spirituality are presented as fundamental and enduring aspects of life on Mongol territory. As summarised by ex-Museum Director Dr Saruulbuyan J.,: ‘our ancestors’ creations are dated, but they are also a means to understanding ourselves.’²⁴ Thus the modern territories are framed to have a distinctively long and continuous history of cultural and technical development, one that is connected to the land and to Mongols today.

²³ Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

Hall Two – Ancient States

Hall Two, *Ancient States* like its predecessor has been renovated and objects added over time. The states are displayed and interpreted in chronological order which has not changed: Hunnu, Turkic, Uighur and Kidan.

Interpretation of the ancient states, however, has changed quite significantly. In 2009 Dr Bumaa described the NMM's approach to the 'earlier cultures' as such:

The reconciliation that the NMM deals with is more a reconciliation of the past to the present. The NMM presents earlier cultures, for example, Hunnu and Turks and Khitans [sic] as powerful empires that helped shape modern day Mongol identity.²⁵

This notion encapsulates the changed way in which the NMM interprets the ancient peoples on Mongol territory as part of contemporary Mongol identity that will be described and analysed in the following paragraphs.



Image 5.4
National Museum of Mongolia, Hunnu Hall 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

²⁵ Dr Bumaa D., 'The National Museum of Mongolia: Creating an Institution for the Presentation and Dissemination of Cultural Heritage of Mongolia', paper delivered at ICOM International Committee for Museums Conference, *Ethnography, Museums for Reconciliation and Peace; Roles of Ethnographic Museums in the World*, Seoul, Korea, 19–21 October 2009, at The National Folk Museum of Korea, p.6.



Image 5.5
National Museum of Mongolia, Hunnu Hall 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

The first ancient state interpreted is the bronze age Hunnu, also known as Hun and Xiongnu.²⁶ From 1997 to 2001, as previously noted, the Museum conducted a major collaboration with the National Museum of Korea and Institute of History of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences called *Mon – Sol* to undertake archaeological research related to the Hunnu. Since then many objects have been acquired and incorporated into an enriched display accompanied by more complex interpretation comprising explanatory graphics as well as text.²⁷ The impact of the *Mon – Sol* project on the interpretive displays has been great as the richness and diversity of primary sources on display has expanded and so too has associated research and knowledge. This reflects a significant historical tradition of research related to the Hunnu peoples as well as the ancestral connections of Koreans to the Hunnu. From the early twentieth century joint Mongolian-Russian archaeological expeditions were undertaken that yielded substantial caches of objects. The early excavation in 1924, directly after the revolution, by Russian S.A. Kondratiev of Tomb Six at Noyon Uul in Tov Aimag produced

²⁶ Dr Eregzen G. (ed.), *Treasures of the Xiongnu*, catalog published in commemoration of the 2220th anniversary of the establishment of the Xiongnu Empire: Mongolia's first Great Empire, Institute of Archaeology Mongolian Academy of Sciences and the National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2001.

²⁷ *Special Exhibition, Mon–Sol, Korean–Mongolian Joint Project in Mongolia 1997 -2001*, National Museum of Korea, Seoul, 2001.

among other objects an exceptional felt embroidered carpet that remains on display in the NMM today.²⁸ Many objects were acquired by the Hermitage Museum but the ones that remained in Mongolia are some of the earliest collected. Since the 1920s, more than five hundred burials have been identified as well as thirteen settlements and more than ten rock art sites, which is indicative of the amount of research that has been undertaken in this field.²⁹ Director Saruulbuyan J., described in the 2220th anniversary catalogue, the mass of archaeological evidence ‘places Mongolia at the center of Xiongnu studies’.³⁰ Though Hunnu displays remain in a small space relative to some other halls, the objects have been enriched in number, diversity and complexity visually suggesting a more sophisticated culture than previously displayed. Secondly, an interpretive transformation is discernible. In the 2000 catalogue, the Hunnu were introduced briefly as ‘the tribes, known as the Hunnu [which] founded the first empire in north-eastern Asia’.³¹ In 2011, the NMM and collaborators published the aforementioned *Treasures of the Xiongnu* with over four hundred images of Hunnu objects and sites discussed.³² The publication is testimony in itself to the significance of the Hunnu with forewords by high officials including Mongolian President Elbegdorj who describes how even Chinggis Khan himself acknowledged the Hunnu as the Mongol Empire’s ancestor, extrapolating that Mongols ‘can proudly say that the Xiongnu was and is Mongol, Mongol is Xiongnu’.³³ Following on from this statement Director Saruulbuyan J. concludes that: ‘We believe that the catalog [sic] will more assist in presenting the treasures of the Xiongnu, great ancestors of the Mongols, to the world.’³⁴ While the space devoted to Hunnu in the NMM is physically unchanged, the status of the Hunnu in Mongolian history has been heightened and transformed to extend the notion of continuity and enrichment of steppe culture and make explicit the link between the current state and its historical precedence on Mongol territory.

²⁸ Dr Eregzen G., op. cit., p. 246.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³¹ Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit., p. 14.

³² Dr Eregzen G., op. cit., p. 9.

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

The *Turkic Period* hall and associated interpretive materials have, during the study period shared a similar interpretive approach to the ancient states before and after it in that archaeological artefacts and archaeological language are deployed to describe developmental features of Turkic society. The one-page entry in the 2000 catalogue introduces the Turkic Empire simply as: ‘Turkish tribes established their empire in the territory of Mongolia. Remains of shrines, cities, monuments and graves as well as rock paintings are found throughout the country.’³⁵ The sense implicit in this interpretation of the Turkic tribes and subsequently Turkic Empire is that they were Turkic, on Mongol territory. A major change to the hall and interpretation of the Turkic period was precipitated by an international collaboration which was a direct result of soft or cultural diplomatic strategy.



Image 5.6
National Museum of Mongolia, Turkic Empire Hall, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

³⁵ Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit., p. 16.

While the Turkish Republic has had diplomatic relations with Mongolia since 1964, its involvement increased rapidly in the early post-socialist period. From 1994, the Government of the Republic of Turkey through its agency Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) commenced funding the *Turkish Monuments Project in Mongolia*. The Turkish Government subsequently, in 1996 opened a diplomatic mission in Ulaanbaatar and the project continued, involving archaeological excavations of Turkic sites in the Orkhon Valley in Arkhangai Aimag.³⁶ A suite of complex settlements, objects, burials and stele were found, researched and conserved.³⁷ One element of the cooperation was that TİKA funded the total renovation of the Turkic displays in the NMM which introduced new objects and associated interpretation to the permanent exhibitions.³⁸ In particular, a gold diadem, gold ornaments and a pitcher from the reigns of Bilge Khan and Kutlug Tiegn and noble lord Tonyukuk interpreted the wealth and sophistication of the Turkic Empire on Mongol soil.³⁹ The project also funded the production of plaster casts of important large scale stele and a museum near the archaeological dig in Arkhangai Aimag was also created to preserve and interpret Turkic history for tourists in the Orkhon Valley.⁴⁰

The Turkic hall was the first during the period of research to be fully renovated and the first renovation that involved significant international collaboration.⁴¹ The exhibition space walls were painted white, new display cases installed, light levels increased and spotlights installed and directed on key objects, giving an overall impression of modernness by comparison to the unrenovated halls.⁴² Adding to the impression of the hall being different, modern and grand was the display of the aforementioned precious,

³⁶ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Ulanbator Büyükelçiliği, Website of the Turkish Embassy in Mongolia, <<http://ulaanbaatar.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission.aspx>>, retrieved 3 October 2013.

³⁷ Republic of Turkey, 'Relations between Turkey and Mongolia', Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-mongolia.en.mfa>>, retrieved 15 May 2013.

³⁸ Observation of the author, 2001-2.

³⁹ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit., pp. 48-49.

⁴⁰ Republic of Turkey, 'Relations between Turkey and Mongolia', op. cit.

⁴¹ Observation of the author, 2001-2.

⁴² Photographic documentation by author, 2001-2, 2005 and 2010.

aristocratic objects polished to maximum lustre and lit aesthetically.⁴³ In years subsequent to renovation the hall was visually incongruent with other unrenovated halls giving a visual impression of prominence.⁴⁴ While the content of the displays remains today similar since the 2001 renovation, the impression of difference has diminished due to other halls having been renovated that employ even more contemporary museum techniques, yet the distinctive, aesthetic/connoisseurist presentation of the precious objects remains.⁴⁵

The Turkic displays and their interpretation are reflective of a number of influencing factors in post-socialist Mongolia that permeated the NMM. Due to the growth and extension of diplomatic cultural exchange, the strong presence of Turkic material heritage on Mongol territory has been both recognised and made more accessible to researchers and hence to museums. This is encapsulated in the notion that ‘Turkey considers Mongolia as a strategically important country with its huge landmass and vast resources.’⁴⁶ Specifically for the NMM, the renovated displays are a direct result of Turkish Government aid aimed at both appropriating the history of Turkic people on Mongol territory into its own national narrative, while also fostering intense and potentially lucrative cultural diplomacy with Mongolia reflecting the official Turkish political position.

Permanent exhibitions about the Uighur and Kidan states follow in the same physical space as the Turkic. Given the complexity, sedentary nature and longevity (eighth to twelfth centuries) of the Uighur and Kidan states and the significant amount of archaeological remains known, they are allocated modest floor space and emphasis by comparison to other periods. The exhibitions have been modernised since 2001 with new display cases, more contemporary lighting and more labels and text panels. Some change has also been made to actual objects on exhibition during the study period.

⁴³ Observations of the author during renovation and in conversations with colleague, Turkish archaeologist Mutlu Gunhan-Bozkurtlar. The objects on display are facsimiles as is the practice in Mongolia to store gold in Treasury.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Photographic documentation, 2013, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Website of the Turkish Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Relations Between Turkey and Mongolia’, op. cit.

Interpretation of these states in both the 2000 and 2009 Museum catalogues is consistently bland, describing the establishment of each Empire, the development of cities and of script and culture.⁴⁷ This section of the Ancient States is the one that is least changed and this is a direct result of absence of international collaboration. While since 2005 archaeological research into the Uighur has been undertaken by joint Chinese/Mongolian teams, these periods have not yet been the subject of the level of renovation and reinterpretation in the way the Hunnu and Turkic have.⁴⁸ As both states have left substantial archaeological evidence and cultural legacy (such as the Uighur script which is the basis for traditional Mongol script) on Mongol territory, the minimal reinterpretation and enrichment are notable when compared to other historical periods.



Image 5.7
National Museum of Mongolia, Kidan and Uighur Empire Hall, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

Hall Four – Mongolian Empire

As previously flagged, in order to consider how the ethnographic collections are interpreted in the NMM and their overall position in the body of exhibitions as a whole Halls Three, Five and Six are considered together.

⁴⁷ Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit.; Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit.

⁴⁸ Odbaatar Tserendorj, 'Ancient Uighur Mauzolea Discovered in Mongolia' *The Silk Road*, vol.8, 2010,
<http://www.academia.edu/2439237/Ancient_Uighur_Mauzolea_Discovered_in_Mongolia>
, retrieved 3 October 2013.

Thus we now move to consider Hall Four, reserving discussing of Hall Three until later in this chapter.

Remembering Kaplonski's work about what forms of national identity existed during the socialist period builds upon that of Mongolist Robert Rupen who wrote in 1964 during the socialist period when discussion of Chinggis Khan was officially suppressed: 'His name continually appears in Mongolian nationalist movements, in all Mongol areas; he represents the one truly universal Mongolian symbol.'⁴⁹ This remains the case half a century later and over two decades in to the democratic period but has been magnified due to Mongolia's democracy and subsequent re-evaluation of identity. As Hall Four *Mongolian Empire* contains actual artefacts from the time of the Great Mongol Empire it is an important keeping place of primary source evidence of the period and the 'heritage' of Chinggis Khan. This hall is crucial as it should lead in not only interpreting this period within the national narrative but also in reflecting new, objective and scientific research in its interpretation.

The hall, which is the first that the visitor enters on the third floor is divided into two large sections; the establishment and of the Great Mongol Empire by Chinggis Khan and his successors and then culture, traditional life and religion during the Empire. The hall is large and complex and presents themes such as; establishment of Empire, technologies and strategies, important events, international context, establishment and organisation of the Empire's capital Kharakhorum and the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to Mongolia.⁵⁰ The section of the hall that will be analysed in detail is the former, the establishment of Empire. As it pertains specifically to the actions of Chinggis Khan it is core subject matter for questioning what changes have occurred in the post-socialist period and the extent to which alterations reflect wider issues in present-day Mongolia.

Moving in to the Hall in 2000 the visitor first encountered stone stele with texts in various scripts that illustrated historical periods and events and

⁴⁹ Robert A. Rupen, *The Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, Uralic and Altaic Studies, vol. 37, part 1, Indiana University, Mouton and Co., Netherlands, 1964, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Photographic documentation, 2013, op. cit.

aspects of lives of the Khans.⁵¹ The visitor then entered a mezzanine, the first exhibit on this level was a Shaman costume related to interpretation about the genealogy, birthplace, mythology and early life of Chinggis Khan. The next display cases contained archaeological artefacts such as examples of weaponry and armour, with special emphasis on the use of horses and bow and arrow as distinguishing advantages of the Mongols in building empire. Nearby cases exhibited coins, remnants and architectural fragments from excavations at the capital of Empire, Kharakhorum, most of which had been sourced from archaeological research during the socialist period.⁵² The visual focus of this hall (pictured below) was a large white plinth on which a life-size wax figure of an enthroned, portly Chinggis Khan dressed in a cream and gold *del*, was flanked by the Black and White Banners.⁵³ Douglas had noted the Banners on exhibition during his 1964 visit to the State Central Museum so they had been on display for some time.⁵⁴ This corner display was cordoned off, so visitors viewed it from the base of the plinth.



Image 5.8
National Museum of Mongolia, Museum Director, Deputy Director and the author convening a Teachers Conference in front of the figure of Chinggis Khan, 30 July 2001
Photograph Erdmaa Dagvaa

⁵¹ The slate stele of Munkh Khan with traditional Mongol *bichig* (script) and script in Chinese, the Khugshin Teel monument of the period of Khubilai Khan in Chinese script and another described as ‘Stone with Chinggis writing’, Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit., p. 23.

⁵² Photographic documentation and memory of the author, 2001-2, 2005.

⁵³ The provenance and history of the Black and White banners was described in chapter three.

⁵⁴ William O. Douglas & Dean Conger, ‘Journey to Outer Mongolia’, *National Geographic*, vol. 121, no. 3, 1962.

After this display, the visitor path proceeded through exhibitions relating to later periods of the Great Mongol Empire chronologically represented by archaeological artefacts, reproductions of images of subsequent Khans and important documents and a large model of Erdene Zuu Monastery used as a centrepiece for interpreting the importance of Buddhism. The associated text panels and catalogue text were characteristically brief.⁵⁵ In 2011, the NMM replaced the old exhibition with a new one called *Chinggis Khaan*. The exhibition, extant at the time of writing is an installation of parts of a larger exhibition that travelled internationally during 2012 and 2013 to mainly science museums in cities in North America and also Singapore and Istanbul.⁵⁶ The exhibition was a collaboration between the Mongolian Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, the NMM, the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Archaeology, the Mongolian Arts Council and a private exhibition company called Genghis Khan Exhibits Incorporated. Genghis Khan Exhibits Incorporated is a division of a private North American company called Dino Don Incorporated which produces predominantly dinosaur themed international travelling exhibitions.⁵⁷ Objects on display in the NMM permanent version of the travelling exhibition come from the NMM and the Mongolian Military Museum.⁵⁸ It has replaced while partially integrating the previous ‘Chinggis’ section of the hall.

As well as interpretive text and illustrations in the hall itself, the immediately discernible change is the exhibition devices employed. Prior to 2011 the hall was relatively bright. It was lit with fluorescent tubes, had light coloured walls, a white ceiling, neutral carpet and static displays.⁵⁹ The revised presentation of the hall is darker, theatrically lit, segmented with coloured false walls and incorporates evocative interpretation methods such as murals painted by artists, audio visual displays and soundscapes.⁶⁰ The romanticised visual language of the exhibition space aesthetically contrasts with other areas of the NMM. The first section of the hall now contains panoramic

⁵⁵ Photographic documentation by the author.

⁵⁶ Website of Dino Don Inc., <<http://www.dinodon.com/>>, retrieved 3 June 2013.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Don Lessem, *Chinggis Khaan: An Exhibition in Mongolia*, catalogue, Ulaanbaatar, 2011, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Observations of the author.

⁶⁰ Photographic documentation supplied by Steven Alderton, 2012.

display cases (pictured below). Artefacts in the cases are set against evocative backing panels with images of mounted Mongol archers galloping in full flight across a steppe landscape, the sky behind them awash with ominous clouds and fire. Artefacts highlight aspects of Mongol military skill including the use of the bow, arrow and quiver, horsemanship and components of armour and military costume.⁶¹ Barnacle encrusted vessels recovered from the Sea of Japan evidence the ‘marine department’ of Khubilai Khan’s Empire. In the centre of this area on a plinth is a spot-lit life-sized mannequin of Chinggis Khan in full military armour, mounted on a horse, flanked by the Black and White Banners.⁶²

So in terms of continuity from the displays of 2000 (pictured above), the Banners and Chinggis Khan remain central to the display yet the interpretation of Chinggis Khan has shifted from being a seated statesman, King of Empire, to skilled Mongolian warrior, tactician and empire builder. The interpretation now reflects the notion of Chinggis Khan as a powerful, dynamic figure that contrasts with previous depictions and serves to highlight the image of the penultimate Mongol horseman who ruled the world. Supporting Uradyn E.’s argument (discussed in chapter two) in a visual and highly literal sense that the ‘all-to-glaring drum beating and trumpet blowing in the modern Chinggis Khan cult ... is a direct effect of ‘complex international relations’ is the interpretive treatment of Chinggis Khan in the museums of this study.⁶³ While Chinggis Khan since the study began has held a prominent place in interpretation, the dramatisation inherent in new displays serves to heighten the ‘theatre’ surround in the aura of the Great Khan. Further, when recalling the history of the Black and White Banners in the NMM and in Mongolian psyche noted in chapter three interpretation has connected the Banners physically to the Khan more and more explicitly.

⁶¹ Ibid., the significance and provenance of the Black and White banners was discussed in chapter three.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Uradyn E. Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., Plymouth, 2010, p. 66.



Image 5.9

National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Four, Chinggis Khan mannequin presented in military dress. Note the two Banners from earlier exhibit flank Chinggis, 2013

Photograph Steven Alderton

Interpretive text in catalogues provides more evidence of transformation and increasing emphasis on the period as text about the Great Mongol Empire has become more extensive and more compelling. Quantitatively this is evidenced in associated catalogues entries; the 2000 catalogue has six pages out of a total ninety devoted to the Great Mongol Empire, two of which are text, one page of these explains the establishment and disintegration of the Empire. This page summarises the achievements of the Empire the following way:

The Mongolian Empire subordinated many nations of different ethnic origins, religions, history and languages, making it possible to link the Orient and the Occident, while also exerting influence on the political, economic and cultural development of these nations.⁶⁴

The 2009 catalogue by contrast has twenty-six pages of a total of two hundred and sixteen interpreting the Great Mongol Empire with Chinggis Khan's achievements summarised as such:

Chinggis left a remarkable legacy after his death in 1227. The Government of the great Mongolian State was an elective monarchy.

⁶⁴ Dr Idshinorov S., (ed.), op. cit., p. 20.

Under Chinggis Khan was written fundamental law.....Chinggis Khan undoubtedly was a military genius and great politician of his time.⁶⁵

The catalogue for *Chinggis Khaan an Exhibition*, which is also sold in the NMM gift shop adds even more dimensions and is quoted at length here as it encapsulates an wholly evolved interpretation of the man and his legacy:

Chinggis Khaan (1162–1227), the founder of the Great Mongol Empire was not only a military leader of singular genius, but a brilliant administrator. He remains the most enduring symbol of Mongolian National unity.

Chinggis Khaan is unique. His kingdom the largest land empire ever, more than three times the size of the next greatest conqueror – Alexander the Great. The empire of most conquerors decayed even before they died. But Chinggis Mongol Empire continued to expand its range in power for a century after his death.

Chinggis organized his world on political, military and commercial power, rather than religion, tradition or inherited privilege. He realised that the source of power lay in education, communication and organization, not in obligation, fears and isolation.

The peace, the freedom of trade and religion, the open commerce that Chinggis brought to the world are known to this day as the ‘Pax Mongolica’ – the era of Mongol-led peace and tranquillity across the civilized world. Chinggis’ innovations in economics, culture and religious tolerance were the true beginning of ‘globalization’. With these achievements in mind, CNN and the Washington Post voted Chinggis as <Man of the Millennium>.⁶⁶

Thus, analysis of the exhibitions in Hall Four and associated interpretation demonstrates significant transformation in the interpretation of Chinggis Khan and the Great Mongol Empire. Interpretation has developed from him being portrayed as a conqueror with high ancestry and spiritual links to the

⁶⁵ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit., p. 67.

⁶⁶ Don Lessem, op. cit., pp. 8–9.

land to being a brilliant military leader, administrator, politician, visionary lawmaker, peace maker, globaliser and ‘the most enduring symbol of ‘Mongolian national unity’.⁶⁷ This demonstrates a great shift when considering that William O. Douglas described in 1962 that while Mongols remembered Chinggis Khan, there were no memorials to him at that time, save the ruins of Kharakhorum and the Banners on display in the State Central Museum.⁶⁸ When compared to the current deployment of information in the NMM, this is illustrative of how much transformation has occurred and this in turn is reflective of the revival of interest in Chinggis Khan discussed in previous chapters.⁶⁹ Foremost, in the democratic period the NMM has responded by interpreting Chinggis Khan and done so with increased intensity and complexity. Further, this hall illustrates the way in which, in response to financial instability and to the availability of increased international connections, the NMM has employed cultural diplomacy and public and private partnerships to foster research, improve collections and change interpretation. The evolution of the hall illustrates the NMM’s increased ability and willingness in the democratic period to engage internationally and to engage in populist notions of history in order to extend audiences and be competitive in the tourism market. In considering the extent to which these responses reflect issues current in Mongolia a number of parallels can be drawn with the issues identified in chapter four. These include the influx and influence of foreigners and their involvement in collaborative developmental projects. Secondly, increased participation of foreigners is reflected in this hall in the substantial employment of Western style interpretive techniques. Most significantly, the transformation of the hall reflects a much broader reconfiguration of both the life and legacy of Chinggis Khan and his successors that is central to the aforementioned ongoing reappraisal of national identity and political legitimacy.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Douglas, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Halls Three, Five and Six – Ethnography

Having journeyed through the NMM to the end of Hall Four, the visitor exits the chronological history of Mongolia and enters two large halls displaying ethnography and traditional culture. For the purpose of addressing the ethnographic interpretation as a group this thesis backtracks to begin this discussion at Hall Three. Before analysing the halls, it is important to reiterate the historical and quantitative importance of ethnography to the NMM. The ethnographic collections were first exhibited in 1956.⁷⁰ The first major exhibition of Mongolian objects to travel internationally in the socialist period was comprised of a majority of ethnographic objects from the State Central Museum and the Fine Art Museum.⁷¹ Currently ethnography collections comprise approximately one-quarter of the entire NMM collection.⁷² In recent years the NMM has actively augmented the ethnographic collections and since 2008, it has actively acquired ethnographic artefacts because the Museum Acquisition Plan 2009–2015 places greater emphasis on collecting ethnography.⁷³ The NMM has made replicas and undertaken substantial research and publication programs related to clothing and jewellery, including a two hundred and thirty page catalogue of traditional costume funded by the Danish Prince Clause Foundation titled *Garments of Mongols*.⁷⁴ Of the ten exhibition halls of the NMM, three halls display and interpret ethnography; *Traditional Costume and Jewellery*, *Traditional Mongolian Culture* and *Traditional Mongolian Life*, meaning just under one-third of the exhibitions of the NMM are of ethnographic material signifying its importance.

⁷⁰ International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, *Nomadic*, Newsletter no. 55, Ulaanbaatar, May 2004.

⁷¹ Walther Heissig & Dominique Dumas, *Die Mongolen: the Mongols*, exhibition catalogue, Staatliches Museum für Volkerkunde, München, Pinguin Verlag, Innsbruck, 1989, p. 5.

⁷² Dr Bumaa, 2009, op. cit., p. 2.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁴ Dr Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit., pp. 17–18.

Hall Three – Traditional Costume and Jewellery



Image 5.10
National Museum of Mongolia, Traditional Costume and Jewellery, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 5.11
National Museum of Mongolia, Traditional Costume and Jewellery, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

The *Traditional Costume and Jewellery* Hall has been renovated and improved in the past decade, yet retained much of the curatorial character and content it had in 2000. It is lined with display cases housing mannequins dressed in male and female traditional costume of Mongol ethnic groups. The hall also contains pre-socialist period ornate jewellery, distinctive women's headdresses and noble and religious costumes. The costumes are presented

by ethnic group, religious rank or social rank and labels indicate each ethnic group's location and population. As the costumes were both confiscated and collected, they are mainly nineteenth to twentieth century.⁷⁵

As summarised by Dr Bumaa, Museum Curator and Methodologist:

By telling the stories of the costumes, we are telling the story of Mongolia. By learning about costumes children can gain understanding of different parts of Mongolian history and traditional custom. Promotion of traditional costume is a way of reviving and preserving cultural heritage and to respect the traditional culture, heritage and history.⁷⁶

The 2000 catalogue provides insight into the importance of ethnography to the NMM at that time. The catalogue is ninety pages long and just under one-third (pages one to twenty-nine) introduce the NMM and describe prehistory to twentieth-century history. The majority of periods are represented on one or two pages; the Great Mongol Empire is represented on seven. Pages thirty to eighty-nine, hence 65 percent of the publication, however, is about ethnography. There are thirteen pages on costume alone.⁷⁷ The balance has shifted in the current 2009 catalogue which devotes fifty-three pages or approximately 27 percent of its content pages to ethnography. Rather than reflecting a downgrade of ethnography this reflects more extensive documentation of the collections of other periods such as ancient states.⁷⁸

Revisiting Uradyn E.'s 'symbols and preoccupations' of Mongol national identity, it is useful to apply the characteristics Uradyn E. identified to examine the role of the ethnography collections in constructions of identity.⁷⁹ The *Traditional Costume and Jewellery* Hall has developed in appearance and content in the past decade, with more extensive text and a greater emphasis on the richness of cultural diversity of the Mongols as a common

⁷⁵ Author's knowledge.

⁷⁶ Dr Bumaa, 2009, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷⁷ Dr Idshinorov S., op. cit.

⁷⁸ Saruulbuyan et al., op. cit.

⁷⁹ Bulag, op. cit.

traditional value. As Dr Bumaa notes when discussing the place of ethnography in the NMM:

[I]t is interesting that the population of Mongolia is mostly Mongols, who speak one Mongolian language. Statistics from 2005 show the total population of Mongolia as 2.6 million which consists 95.7% of the population of the Mongolian nationality and 4.3% are Kazakh people of Turkish origin. The main group of Mongolian nationality Khalkh comprise 81.5% of Mongolian population. There are over 20 ethnic groups in Mongolia. So issues of race and ethnic groups seems less a problem and museum does not strongly face reconciliation of ethnic groups yet.⁸⁰

The displays of the hall are arranged by ethnic groups and present a male and female costume for each, the majority being the *del* (traditional dress) in its various configurations. While the *del* is seen increasingly infrequently particularly in urban areas with youth preferring denim and Western style clothes, the *del* continues to be a symbol of both the past and tradition and of national pride. This is evidenced by its use during traditional festivals, graduation ceremonies, political events and by Mongolian folk rock bands. In Mongolia the *del* increasingly loses its practical application while it is frequently reinterpreted by the young to mark special occasions.⁸¹ The displays reflect this reverence for the *del* and traditional adornment and also the non- problematic nature of ethnicity, or the perception of ethnic unity that Dr Bumaa describes. While the costumes represent ethnic differences, the underpinning message is that they present the complexity and diversity of Mongol culture. In the context of the NMM interpretation, the space and interpretation allocated to the *del* and traditional costume are significant indicators of the importance of traditional dress in the meta-narrative. The *del* is symbolic of ancient customs and encapsulates the influence of steppe life and is thus celebrated for its cultural continuity meanings. This will be demonstrated, when coupled with *Traditional Culture* and *Traditional Life*

⁸⁰ Dr Bumaa, op. cit., p. 2.

⁸¹ As discussed in chapter three.

interpretation to be part of a strong message about the connection of Mongols to their past.

Halls Five and Six – Traditional Culture and Traditional Life



Image 5.12
National Museum of Mongolia, Mongolian Traditional Life Hall, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton



Image 5.13
National Museum of Mongolia, Mongolian Traditional Culture Hall, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

The *Traditional Mongolian Culture* and *Traditional Mongolian Life* Halls have changed less than other halls and demonstrate similar types of changes to those observed in the other ethnographic hall, *Costume and Jewellery*. The main changes to these halls are additions of more bilingual information and display of Buddhist religious sculpture in a more aesthetic way. The

aestheticisation of the objects in this hall seen in the use of targeted lighting suggests to the viewer a level of status as art objects as well as religious and cultural ones.⁸² Other changes have been necessitated by practicality and consolidation of the new narrative. For example, the Shaman costume has relocated away from the birth of Chinggis Khan display case to be grouped logically with other religious and spiritual objects. Also objects relating to the Manchu period, including a wooden gaol cell were moved to the beginning of the *Twentieth Century* Halls thus resettling the period in the chronology. The significance of which will be discussed in the next chapter in detail, but in short, this visually and interpretively separated ancient Mongolia, the Great Mongol Empire and traditional culture from Manchu and also linked Manchu more to 'modern' history.

While the substantial size and content of the halls reflect an interest in traditional ways the actual location of the halls is significant as they are the last viewed before the visitor proceeds through the *Modern Mongolia* halls (see 2012 floor plan pictured previously). As such they signify the end point in the story of connection to the ancient past and herald that a different era follows. The 2009 catalogue reinforces this notion as, rather than following the sequence of the halls themselves, its contents page indicates the chronology as; *Prehistory to Mongol Empire*, *Chapters Traditional Costume, Culture and Life* and *Seventeenth Century Mongolia* [the Manchu period] *to present day*. The implication of this being that the development of ancient culture culminated before Manchu rule.

Hall Ten – Democratic Mongolia

After leaving the traditional life and culture sections the visitor path tracks through halls that present the Manchu period, the Bogd Khaan state and socialism. These halls will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus, Hall Ten *Democratic Mongolia* is the last one on the visitor path. It is medium sized and was first opened in 1993, containing objects and information that had

⁸² Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 43, no. 4, 1990, pp. 11–34.

been collected following the events of 1989 and 1990.⁸³ At the outset of the research period in 2001 the hall contained information and objects relating to the activities that precipitated the end of socialism.⁸⁴ The displays were installed in the ‘false wall’ structures left over from the Revolution Museum. They chronologically recounted the period from the protests and hunger strikes of 1989 through the first elections in 1990 and subsequent issues. These included the advancement of international relations, establishment of a constitution and Parliament, the issuing of passports for citizens, establishment of a stock exchange and privatisation, for example, which were discussed in this work in chapter three.⁸⁵



Image 5.14
National Museum of Mongolia, Democratic Mongolia Hall, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

⁸³ Email from Dr Bumaa to author, op. cit.

⁸⁴ Photographic documentation by author, 2001-2, 2005, 2010.

⁸⁵ See chapter three for a discussion of the events that occurred during transition 1989–1991.

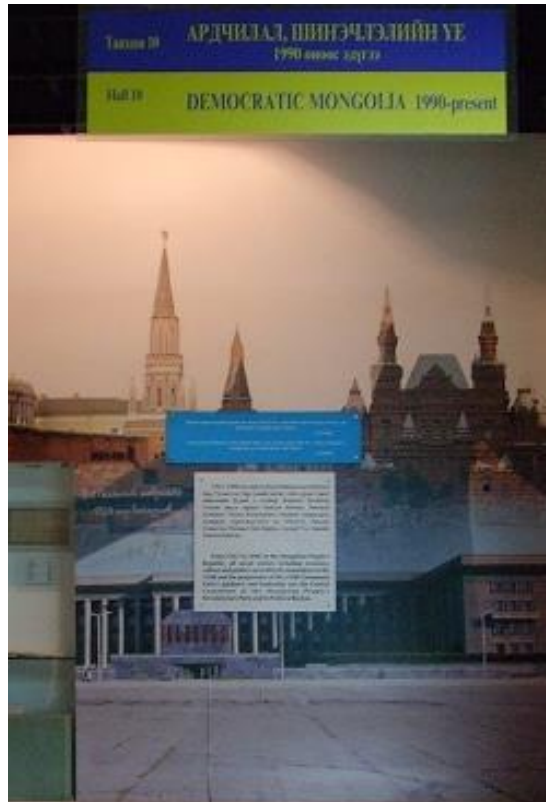


Image 5.15
National Museum of Mongolia, Entry to Democratic Mongolia Hall, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

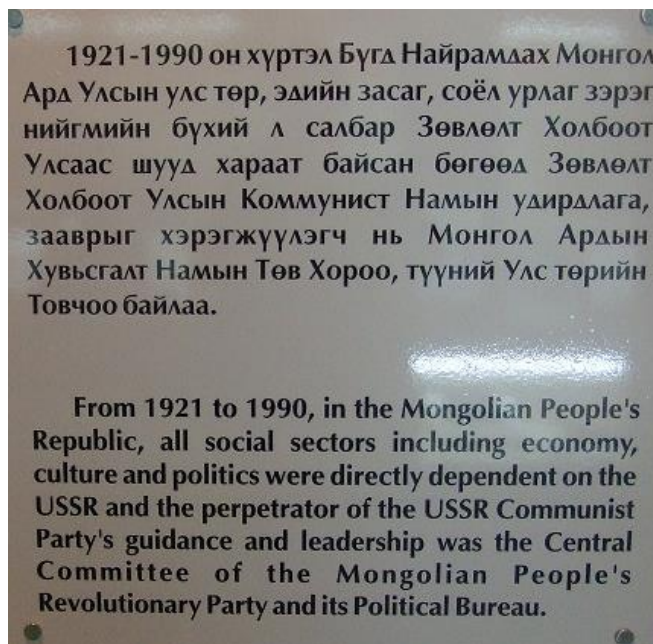


Image 5.16
National Museum of Mongolia, Entry text panel to Democratic Mongolia Hall, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 5.17

National Museum of Mongolia, Democratic Mongolia Hall, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

In 2007, seventeen years after the revolution and fourteen years after the hall opened it was radically renovated for the first time since its initial installation.⁸⁶ A non-government organisation, the Democratic Movement applied to the then named Ministry of Science, Education and Culture to renovate the hall and gained approval to do so.⁸⁷ The Democratic Movement has its roots in the Democratic Union of fledgling political parties in 1990. When the Democratic Movement made their application to renovate the halls, there was a legislative election due for 2008 and the Mongolian People's Party were expected to take power again.⁸⁸ Representatives of the Democratic Movement collaborated with NMM Curators to select content and objects and Democratic Movement staff wrote interpretive text that NMM staff checked and approved when satisfied with accuracy.⁸⁹ The project was entirely funded by the Democratic Movement.⁹⁰ As has been discussed because the NMM had been chronically underfunded so the renovation of displays was sometimes funded from exterior sources. In this

⁸⁶ Email from Dr Bumaa to author 17 May 2013 containing information supplied by Ms Egimaa who coordinated the project.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia, from Khans to Commissars to Capitalists*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005; and authors knowledge.

⁸⁹ Email from Dr Bumaa to author, 17 May 2013, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

case however, the funds were unique in that they were not explicitly foreign, but rather Mongol and from a politically affiliated organisation.⁹¹

The renovation of the hall was comprehensive and the new display mechanisms employed modern and Westernised techniques, marking a significant change from the anachronistic representation of the past incarnation of the hall. The first text panel the visitor now encounters when entering the hall (pictured above) reads:

From 1921–1990 in the Mongolian People’s Republic, all social sectors including economy, culture and politics were directly dependent on the USSR and the perpetrator of the USSR Communist Party’s guidance and leadership was the Central Committee of the MPRP and its Political Bureau.⁹²

Displays in the hall extensively interpret the development of the underground democratic movement groups from 1988 to 1990 and events leading up to the protests and hunger strikes.⁹³ The display incorporates images and objects, underground newspapers and open letters to the MPRP calling for change.⁹⁴ It also highlights protest movements in the *aimags* and the role of music in the protests. In particular, the displays about the period 1988 onward highlight and describe revolutionary activists.⁹⁵ A significant display, for example, is given over to interpreting leader Zorig S. who was a key figure in the protests and in fledgling government and was subsequently assassinated in 1998. His murder remains unsolved and his ‘martyrdom’ is celebrated in contemporary society. The exhibition describes Zorig as ‘a symbol of democracy in Mongolia’. The panel describes Zorig’s legacy as such: ‘he was a leading force in the democratic revolution and in directing the dictatorial communist society onto a democratic path without bloodshed.’⁹⁶

From this quote and the introductory text panel (pictured above) we can see that the interpretation in the NMM makes explicit the dual ideas that the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Photographic documentation by the author, 2010.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

socialist period was one of dictatorship (and is therefore demonised) and that the democratic movement caused the revolution, rather than internal reform in the latter years by the socialist government and therefore is 'heroic'.⁹⁷

The second half of the new exhibition interprets aspects of the reorganisation of Mongolia post 1990 with more diversity and in a more contemporary way than previously. Themes such as issuing of passports, high-level international diplomacy, privatisation, economic growth and Westernisation collectively present a picture of growth, modernisation and progress in the democratic period. This is heightened by the use of contemporary images of happy people and the use of bright colours and super-graphics.



Image 5.18
National Museum of Mongolia, Democratic Mongolia Hall, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

The style of language employed in the hall is conveyed in the label regarding foreign relations;

The notable progress has been achieved in promoting the history, culture and present development of Mongolia in foreign countries and in strengthening the positive image of Mongolia abroad.⁹⁸

The final section of the hall pictures and describes legislation and preparation for the 800th anniversary celebrations. Images of the demolition of

⁹⁷ Irina Y. Morozova, *The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Revolutions In Asia, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, 2009.

⁹⁸ Photographic documentation by the author, 2010.

Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan's mausoleum, resolutions of the *Ik Hural* and the architects vision for the State Ceremonial Complex are accompanied by a quote from American President George Bush Jr delivered at Parliament House during his visit to Mongolia in 2005. President Bush describes the democratic revolutionaries: 'By the force of their convictions, they drove the communist leadership from power.'⁹⁹ By including the statement from Bush, the leader of the world's most powerful democratic nation, the exhibition creators reconfirm the notion of the heroism of the democratic revolutionaries against the oppression of socialism.

Thus the *Democratic Mongolia* hall has changed significantly both aesthetically and curatorially. In addressing the question of the thesis of how the NMM has responded to the post-socialist period, this hall is exemplary. First, it has introduced displays about democracy as there clearly were none before 1990. Later, it has renovated the displays by entering into a partnership with a non-government organisation, as a means to address a lack of funds to undertake the work alone. The result of this partnership has been that it has incorporated a curatorial vision from an external organisation. While this may accord with the NMM's research and collections, the fact remains that the democracy exhibitions were heavily influenced by an external organisation which has a politicised agenda. In turn, this has resulted in a new display that is biased in its positive approach to democracy and negative in its approach to socialism. The clear curatorial message of the displays now is that democracy has meant progress and is a direct result of the actions of grass roots democratic activism by Mongols. Second, democracy was a popular movement that broke the stranglehold of Soviet influence on Mongolia during the socialist period. Finally that socialism is explicitly acknowledged as heavily orchestrated by the Soviet Union and thus the period represents a lack of freedom for Mongols. The changes to this exhibition have moved it distinctively away from its previous blandness toward constructing a division and dichotomy between the socialist period and the democratic in which negativising the former serves to elevate the latter.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

As discussed in chapter three, the democratic period has not been entirely peaceful, nor the transition to democratic government and free market been always progressive. Aspects of the democratic period such as economic collapse, social and political instability resulting in the post-election 2008 riots and corruption in business and land ownership resulting in the growth of a divide between rich and poor are all equally important aspects of the past two decades. The interpretive activities of the Museum (including its current catalogue) do not mention these issues, but depict progress and development for all. In this way, I argue it can be concluded that they do not represent an accurate historical picture of Mongolia today. However, the projection of progress, growth and freedom that democracy has afforded have already been demonstrated to be aspects of popular culture and political rhetoric today which recalls Sabloff's conclusion that the ideal of Chinggis Khan 'forms the basis of a political culture that greatly favors independence and democracy'.¹⁰⁰ When considered in the context of the NMM, Sabloff's conclusion is supported in objects and words as the NMM's displays deliberately interpret linkages between the ancient past and contemporary society as evidence of development and true Mongolness.

The Mongolian Statehood Museum

Further evidence of the tendency in museums to interpret notions of continuity from the ancient past as evidence of the legitimacy and rightfulness of contemporary democracy is found in across the road from the NMM in the new Statehood Museum. In critiquing the ways in which the NMM has changed in the past decades, with particular reference to its materials relating to ancient to middle history and the linkage of Chinggis Khan and democracy, it is enriching to make comparisons with the Mongolian Statehood Museum which also exhibits the course of Mongolian history but through the specific rubric of statehood.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Sabloff, op. cit., p. 118.

¹⁰¹ Mongolian Statehood Museum, Virtual Collection of Asian Masterpieces database, <<http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/museum/detail.nhn?museumId=1051>>, retrieved 6 June 2013.

The Organising Committee for the 800th anniversary celebrations describe the intention of the Statehood Museum in the context of the construction of the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex, which fell under the division of the ‘Committee for Creation and Construction’:

...there will be Museum of the State History and exhibits such as relics and documents starting from Hun State and map of the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khaan; will be shown in modern way of museum arrangement. In connection with it, the opportunities to temporarily borrow the exhibits of foreign countries and make copies of the exhibits, related to the history of Mongolia, are being studied. The negotiations to make exhibit exchange with foreign museums are also the crucial issue along with borrowing exhibits.

The policy to create the Museum of the State History and Ceremonial and Honour Palace was developed by the well-known and eminent scientists and scholars and was approved by the meeting of the National Committee.¹⁰²

Concurrently, the Committee noted that three teams of eminent scholars had been assembled to study:

...the exhibits to be placed in the complex and the Museum of the State History, were established by the resolution of the Head of the national Committee and the works of investigating, studying, compiling and copying the relics, manuscripts and findings, related to the History of Mongolia, are successfully conducted. Also the complete golden family tree of the Mongol Khaans is compiled and written.

Agreements, negotiations, notes and documents in the Central Archive of the National History are counted and it totalled [sic] over 500. 137

¹⁰² Mongolia800, ‘Brief introduction of the activity of the National Committee to organize the 800th anniversary of the establishment of the Great Mongol State’, <<http://mongolia800.mn/eng/index.php/content/view/28/51/1/1>>, retrieved 5 December 2012.

documentaries from the Central Archive of the National History were selected to be shown in the complex and 115 film news were selected to be copied among others which were shown monthly since 1954. Over 1000 photos were selected for the Historical photo album [sic] of since 1900.¹⁰³

Therefore the Statehood Museum represented the most tangible recent state sponsored version of Mongol history available. It was built from ‘green space’ and therefore had very few collections, was not subject to the constraints (such as pre-existing displays, pre-existing buildings/space or a collection or pre-existing staff) that other museums by virtue of their age had. It was planned to be free entry to all when opened and visitors would enter via the Chinggis Khan Memorial Complex stairs, from Sukhbaatar Square. Although the Museum itself had few collections, it was planned to exhibit around nine hundred objects and to purchase others and to apply to borrow supplementary ones from such museums as the NMM.¹⁰⁴ In 2010, when first observed the Statehood Museum staff consisted of seven employees; three Scientists/Curators, one Information Technology Officer, one Guide, one Secretary and one Director. The Museum fit out was underway with exhibition spaces, a library and staff room, two touch screens and two televisions as well as some props, display cases and interpretive paintings.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.



Image 5.18
Statehood Museum, map, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

In order to understand the significance of change in this Museum when it opened one must understand the original curatorial intent in the planning phase to 2010. The planned exhibition spaces consisted of two long halls leading in opposite directions from a large atrium. The visitor would circulate around the eastern hall, re-enter the atrium and then proceed to circulate around the western hall.¹⁰⁵ There were to be sixteen themes dispersed throughout; the eastern hall would interpret ancient history, the western twentieth-century history, the central atrium with the Great Mongol Empire.¹⁰⁶ Upon entering the eastern hall, the visitor would encounter an overview of Mongol territories and the various natural environments within.¹⁰⁷ The next interpretive information was to be about the twelve ancient and modern states of Mongolia, emphasising each states distinctive nomadic culture and displaying both archaeological objects and cultural objects such as the *Morin Khour* (horse-head fiddle), *Naadam* (festival) and

¹⁰⁵ Field notes and photographic documentation by author during a guided visit to the unopened Mongolian Statehood Museum 25 May 2010. Visit guided by Curator Mr Altantugs N.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Hoomi (throat singing) that drew continuums between ancient times and the present.¹⁰⁸



Image 5.19

Statehood Museum, hall planned to contain exhibits one to eight. The case far left contains a diorama pertaining to Golden Lineage of the Mongolian Khans, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

The final exhibit in the hall, partially installed at the time of visitation was a diorama of a young Chinggis Khan and his siblings in a *ger*, with their mother holding five arrows. The scene (pictured below) depicted a well-known Mongol legend about Chinggis Khan's mother describing to her sons that brothers united (five arrows) are far stronger than signally (one arrow). The diorama was to be a prelude to the next hall which would describe the Great Mongol Empire.¹⁰⁹ The title of this section was the 'Golden Lineage of Mongolian Khans'.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Francis Woodman Cleaves (ed. and trans.), *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Harvard University Press, 1982, sec. 6–9.

¹¹⁰ See image of Museum map signage above, exhibit number eight.



Image 5.20

Statehood Museum, exhibit number eight, Golden Lineage of the Mongolian Khans, under construction, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

The next hall theme colour was planned to be white which has strong traditional associations for Mongols with good fortune, peace and very closely with Chinggis Khan. In 1206, according to *the Secret History of the Mongols*, the White Banner was established and it continues to be a key symbol of Mongol statehood today.¹¹¹ The hall would display a large painting depicting some of Chinggis Khan's main empire-building activities, a large panel with diagrams depicting the genealogy of the Khans and also reproductions of images and portraits of the Khans from Persian miniatures and medieval portraiture.¹¹² A reproduction of a stone turtle shaped sculpture from Kharakhorum had also been fabricated and delivered.¹¹³ Eventually, the hall was planned to contain the nine White Banners symbolic of Mongol statehood that were at the time situated elsewhere in Parliament House.¹¹⁴ The last planned hall would be about the twentieth century and interpret contemporary state processes such as law and taxes, government structure and governance principles, currency, international relations and state

¹¹¹ Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A cultural history of Islamic textiles*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 59; see also chapter three for information about the Banners of Chinggis Khan in relation to museums.

¹¹² Field notes and photographic documentation, op. cit.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

symbols and flags.¹¹⁵ In summary, the proposed layout of the exhibitions in 2010 indicated some strong curatorial messages; the physical division of the past from the twentieth century, the pivotal point linkage between modernity and ancient times being the Great Mongol Empire and thus, the genesis of current democracy being part of an ancient lineage of statehood on Mongol soil. Democracy was to be presented as part of a process begun in ancient times, consolidated by Chinggis Khan and finally achieved in contemporary Mongolia.

As part of a reorganisation of the structure of museums under the newly created Ministry of Culture Sport and Tourism, the Statehood Museum was made a branch of the NMM. In 2012, the Statehood Museum opened to the public in a much altered form. Water damage necessitated the closure of some areas and thus partial relocation of parts of the displays to another room in the State Ceremonial Complex.¹¹⁶ The implication of this is that the curatorial intention was not able to be realised in full and therefore was 'edited' and the visitor experience altered. Now that the Museum is opened the visitor ascends the central steps of the State Ceremonial Complex from Sukhbaatar Square and following directional signage then descends stairs and passes the entry to the planned location of the Statehood Museum, which is closed. The visitor is directed to a different room and circulates around the room from north. There are displays around all walls and some objects and display cases in the centre of the exhibition space.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Photographic documentation, 2013, op. cit.



Image 5.21
Statehood Museum, general view, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

The current exhibitions include elements from the original planned space including the two touch screens and computer monitors. The first touch screen the visitor encounters enables the visitor to search the states on Mongol territory, divided into ancient, mediaeval and modern.¹¹⁷ The ancient states include the same states interpreted in the NMM including; Hunnu, Turkic, Uighur and Kidan, the period being the Great Mongol Empire and Manchu domination and the modern period being from 1911 to the present.¹¹⁸ From here, the Museum traces the evolution of the Great Mongol Empire. The visual feature of the space is an entire wall dedicated to the Khans comprising reproductions of portraits of the successive Khans and their Queens (pictured below), with relevant state seals on plinths in front.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Photographic documentation, 2013, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.



Image 5.22
Statehood Museum, general view, 2013
Photograph Steven Alderton

Subsequent sections of the Statehood Museum display the evolution of state symbols such as the national flag and national symbol, nine symbolic attributes of state, state seals, national anthem and seven treasures of the state. There is also a section on diplomatic relations and gifts, the democratic revolution and the first Mongolian Constitution. As the Statehood Museum is young, aside from the curtailment of its exhibitions due to a leaking ceiling, there has been no evolution of the displays. In assessing the overall message the Statehood Museum projects, analysing which objects and themes have been transferred from the original plan to the temporary exhibition is indicative of a combination of their importance in the national narrative and the practicalities of their acquisition and installation. For example, the replica stone turtle from Kharakhorum is on display and many reproductions of images of the Khans from Persian manuscripts are on display. The diorama of Chinggis Khan and his mother and siblings in the *ger* (pictured previously) is absent as is a section on the natural environment of Mongolia. The overall message, though somewhat truncated remains that statehood has a long and unbroken history on Mongolian soil and the Great Mongol Empire as a golden age drew these separate and successive states together. The democratic period is thus positioned as the culmination of an ancient tradition of Mongols governing Mongols. Similarly, minimisation of

information about the Manchu period and about the negative aspects of Mongolia during the socialist period serves to make them seem insignificant in the grand lineage. The democratic period, though a very recent and unprecedented form of governance is presented as the culmination of a noble history.

The Statehood Museum by its very existence is a response to the democratic period. The creation of a museum about the history of Mongolian statehood is evidence of the need of the government to create a description of lineage for the Mongols that anchors and legitimises its current democracy. By creating a lineage, the Statehood Museum attempts to present the contemporary Mongolian state as an evolutionary development from ancient times and preserving the traditions established by successive nomadic peoples. The effect of this is twofold; it leads the viewer away from considering that democratic governance on Mongol territory is unprecedented and very recent and secondly, it serves to construct a history of statesmanship that is politically hereditary bringing today's government officials in to direct governance lineage with Chinggis Khan, his predecessors and his heirs.

Conclusion

During the award ceremony of an Intangible Heritage Certificate for the traditional Mongolian *Naadam* festival in 2011, the Director-General of UNESCO stated: 'Genghis [sic] Khan's nation includes vibrant intangible expressions that are extraordinary contributions to the culture of humanity as a whole.'¹²⁰ By referring to Mongolia as Chinggis Khan's nation Ms Bokova encapsulates a notion that is core to modern identity – that today's Mongolia

¹²⁰ UNESCO, 'Address by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the handover ceremony of intangible heritage certificate of the Naadam, Mongolian traditional festival; Ulan Bator, 11 July 2011', <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=&set=51F70344_0_182&look=default&sc1=1&sc2=1&ref=http://www.unesco.org/eri/cp/cp-nav.asp?country=MN%26language=E&lin=1&pn=1&nl=1&gp=1&ll=1&title=Mongolia%20and%20UNESCO%20-%20%3Cspan%20class=small%3E%20for%20assistance%20contact:%20library@unesco.org%20%3C/span%3E&hist=0&mc3=1&mc4=1&scroll=0>, retrieved 3 September 2013.

is directly connected to the time of Chinggis Khan and is a product of him, his actions and his lineage.¹²¹ As Kaplonski summaries in considering the evolution of Chinggis Khan in the literature of the latter socialist period:

In effect, as we have witnessed in writings about Chinggis Khan, there is a transformation from a rather ‘bland’ recitation of events to a couching of the narration in clearly nationalist terms.¹²²

Both museums when considered together reveal that, over the period of the study Chinggis Khan himself has come to be presented in a more prominent and complex way, as notions of him as statesman, law maker, tolerant fosterer of culture and religion, riser against oppression have been overlayed upon earlier interpretations as warrior king and ancestral figure. Kaplonski situates the creation and consolidation of Mongol national identity during the socialist period yet this period has been until recently overlooked in museums.¹²³ While he acknowledges forms of collective identity pre-existed such as familial, local, ethnic, regional, he argues it was during the socialist period that the notion of ‘nation’ was created as a mechanism for fostering a sense of collective struggle.¹²⁴ Further he suggests that the socialist regime repeatedly deployed aspects of history and culture to foster a sense of the legitimacy of the regime and its ideology and to foster a sense of belonging to a common cause among the general public.¹²⁵ Kaplonski argues that over time and particularly in the post-socialist period Chinggis Khan has become portrayed more overtly politically, that is, less as a uniter of the peoples of Mongol ethnicity and more as the creator of the first Mongol state.¹²⁶ This view is echoed by other scholars including Campi and Munkh-Erdene Lhamsuren, the latter describing in relation to even pre-socialist Mongolia: ‘the Chinggisid lineage was not only the source of legitimacy and the symbol of the unity of the Mongol nobility but also was the everlasting stem of the

¹²¹ Bulag, op. cit., p. 111.

¹²² Kaplonski, op. cit., pp. 35–49.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 35–49.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 40–41.

Mongolian “nation”.¹²⁷ The museums analysed in this chapter support these arguments as Chinggis Khan himself is interpreted as ‘father’ of not Mongolian democracy, but of Mongolia itself. Where this research nuances Kaplonski’s notion of the ‘unblanding’ of Chinggis Khan and Uradyn E.’s ‘symbols and preoccupations’ discussed earlier is that the museums have actively sought to develop and physically, rather than solely textually represent the notion of Mongol statehood as a result of a nomadic steppe tradition. The museums under consideration do so by employing the display of, for example, archaeology and ethnography to legitimise the narrative. They differ from pure literature or political rhetoric in that they selectively employ objects and images from the past and modern interpretive devices to construct a narrative which accords with popular and political culture. Though operating in a democratic environment the legacy of the socialist museological tradition means they continue to attempt to construct meta narratives of progress and development. In this sense, museums do not support Meskell’s notion of: ‘The familiar postmodern project of deconstructing master narratives, unsettling binaries and acknowledging marginalised knowledges...’¹²⁸ By contrast, the museums in socialist museological manner chart strong associations between the ‘unbanded’ Chinggis Khan and symbols of ‘true’ steppe culture to underpin a strong message of development and continuity.¹²⁹

Distinctly also, the revision of the national story in museums has occurred only recently relative to democracy as the majority of exhibitions and catalogues that present the new narrative have been produced well into the second decade of the democratic period. The new interpretation and therefore

¹²⁷ Munkh-Erdene Lhamsuren, ‘The Mongolian Nationality Lexicon: From the Chinggisid Lineage to Mongolian Nationality’, paper delivered at the American Centre for Mongolian Studies, 23 February 2006,

<http://www.mongoliacenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=94>, retrieved 10 July 2013; Dr Alicia J. Campi, ‘Mongolian identity Issues and the Image of Chinggis Khan’, *Bi-monthly Journal on Mongolian and Tibetan Current Situation*, vol. 16, no. 3, Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, Taipei, 2006, <<http://www.mtac.gov.tw/mtacbook/>>, retrieved 10 July 2013.

¹²⁸ Lynn Meskell (ed.), *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritages in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Nikolai Vukov, ‘The Unmemorable and the Unforgettable, Museumizing the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria’, in Sarkisova, Oksana & Apor, Peter (eds), *Past for the Eyes, East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2008, pp. 307–334.

story is due to a significant extent (most pronouncedly the case of the NMM) to accepting the benefits of cultural diplomacy and recognising and responding to the economic opportunities afforded by inbound tourism and thus has been heavily influenced by external involvement. It has opportunistically engaged in a very active collaborative program with partners that have in turn heavily influenced when and how exhibitions and interpretation have changed. This is not demonstrative of deficiency as the physical interpretive products of the museums are the result of seeking funding, seeking more and richer collections, undertaking research and writing and in arranging fabrication. The overriding conclusion is that the sections of the museums studied in this chapter demonstrate a complex response to the democratic environment, both in their motivations and in the representations they make. The museums have managed to remake or make themselves and to present strong curatorial narratives. Conversely the external influences upon them financially and politically have resulted in some problematic outcomes such as infiltration of the rhetoric of external parties into the interpretation of the national story and to moving close to the border between 'history' and 'heritage'.¹³⁰ These notions will be tested in the coming chapter that deals with the Manchu and socialist periods and shown to be applicable to these periods for the opposite reason. While parts of history that are popular, locally, politically and internationally have been the subject of magnification in museums, periods that remain contested or difficult to assimilate have been subject to less international and political attention and thus, less funding for change.

¹³⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

Chapter VI

Difficult History and ‘True Mongolian’ – Manchu, Socialism and the Purges

This chapter continues the analysis of the NMM over the past two decades by critiquing and analysing the exhibitions and interpretive activities related to Halls Seven to Nine; *Mongolia Seventeenth to Twentieth Century*, *Mongolia 1911–1920* and *Socialist Mongolia 1921–1990*.¹ The chapter describes changes and critically examines how, if at all the changes have revised the place and nature of these periods as represented in the NMM narrative. An analysis of these halls, their relationship to each other and to the NMM in its entirety reveals that while some areas of history have been revised to enhance a new cohesive national narrative, others remain less well integrated or have yet to be addressed at all. Halls Seven to Nine of the NMM represent periods of three distinct changes in governance on Mongol territory; colonisation, independence and socialism. Each period brings with it issues within the wider national narrative, some of which are uncomfortable or difficult to incorporate beginning with the loss of self-determination following the disintegration of the Great Mongol Empire. The chapter will also draw analogies and contrasts with two other museums, the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum and the Victims Museum which exhibit the aforementioned historical periods to underpin the argument that difficult history has to a significant extent remained sidelined.

Hall Seven – Mongolia 17th to 20th Century

In 1961, American William O. Douglas described the displays relating to Manchu at the State Central Museum as such:

¹ National Museum of Mongolia, *National Museum of Mongolia*, guidebook, English version, National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2012, p. 7.

The Chinese [Manchu] administration bore heavily on the people, Ochirbal [Douglas' Mongolian translator] said. Nine methods of torture were devised. These are on display at the State Museum in Ulan Bator [sic]. We had tried to take photographs, but permission was not forthcoming.²

An unnamed curator of the State Central Museum (now essentially the NMM) is quoted as saying: 'It is a part of our history that we try to forget.'³ The physical position of the Manchu period in the NMM is not noted in Douglas' essay though photographic documentation of the State Central Museum has recently been digitised confirming the nine methods of torture featured prominently including images and objects pertaining to torture, such as a gaol cell, whips, canes and shackles.⁴



Image 6.1

One of the Nine Methods of Torture on display at the State Central Museum, c. 1930–1950, British Library, Endangered Archives, 'EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia', <<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

² William O. Douglas & Dean Conger, 'Journey to Outer Mongolia', *National Geographic*, vol. 121, no. 3, 1962, p. 316. The State Central Museum was a different building to the current National Museum, however, the relevant part of the collections of the State Central Museum are now housed at the National Museum as described in chapter three.

³ Ibid.

⁴ British Library, Endangered Archives, 'EAP264: Preservation through digitisation of rare photographic negatives from Mongolia', <<http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP264>>, retrieved 7 November 2013.

The Manchu period is a subject of much contemporary debate. Baabar's opinions of this period in his revisionist *History of Mongolia* are harsh. In 1999, he summarised the Manchu period:

So Mongolia ended the eighteenth century, oppressed by Manchu China and weakened by the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Mongolia remained in seclusion throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with neither strong Mongol leaders nor the opportunity to shake off its oppressors.⁵

Further, in his description of 'The Social Decline of Mongols' Baabar discusses the influence of Buddhism on Mongol society and is particularly scathing about Buddhism under the Manchu regime:

When this religion was brought to Mongolia in the period from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the rich body of Mongolian myths, legends and magic tales was inevitably added to it, further enhancing its ritual aspect. This teaching whose lofty intellectual and philosophical essence was only open to the elite few, reached the people only as a form of superstitious worship and hindered their development.⁶

...The more superstitious the people were, the more powerful the church was and the more temples and monasteries were set up, the more people flocked to become lamas.⁷

...As an ultimately conservative doctrine, Lamaism not only shuts off every sphere of society from progress, but also fiercely fights anything new.⁸

Thus Baabar discusses a number of key aspects of Manchu alteration of Mongol society (administrative reorganisation, elitism and the decline of

⁵ Bat-Erdene Batbayar (Baabar), *History of Mongolia*, The Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge, Monsudar Publishing, Ulaanbaatar, 1999, pp. 99–100.

⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

military and hunting skills) and includes Buddhism as a definitively negative influence during this period.

The place of the Manchu period and indeed its association with modern China in the popular Mongol psyche has been investigated widely by scholars and several schools of thought coexist. Baabar wrote of the Manchu period: 'The Mongols, this spirited people who for generations had led lives of wars, victories and defeat, began to degenerate.'⁹ In addition, he went on to note that:

Mongols were cut off from the developed world by Lamaism which, although a school of Buddhism, a reputedly undogmatic religion had turned into perhaps the most dogmatic teaching of all.¹⁰

More recently, in discussing an investigation of the motivations of ultra-rightist nationalist groups in post-socialist Mongolia, Billé describes: 'While most people feel far-right discourse is too extreme, there seems to be a consensus that China is imperialistic, 'evil' and intent on taking Mongolia'.¹¹ Uradyn E. in discussing the notion of identity among Mongols also describes a 'general anxiety' that 'Halh-centric nationalism frightens people with the spectre of the imminent swallowing up of Mongolia by China'.¹² Whichever the extremity of the view of modern China, it is generally understood that the uneasy relationship of Mongolia to China in the national psyche has its roots in the Manchu period and in particular in the idea of the threat of 'assimilation'.¹³

This period represents several significant historically poignant moments in Mongolian history; the end of Empire and loss of independence, the segregation of Mongol peoples into 'Outer' and Inner Mongolia, threats to

⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹ Tania Branigan 'Mongolian neo-Nazis: Anti-Chinese Sentiment Fuels Rise of Ultra-Nationalism', *The Guardian*, Monday 2 August 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/02/mongolia-far-right>>, retrieved 19 May 2011.

¹² Uradyn Erden Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 1.

¹³ Ibid.; Branigan, op. cit.

Khalk-centric traditional culture and the threat of ‘hybridity’ that Uradyn E. identifies as core to Khalk nationalism.¹⁴ The simple fact of the precarious geopolitical position being a landlocked between two significant powers is historically central to the Mongol identity.¹⁵ Without the population to compete and with isolation from other neighbours, Mongol identity has been strong affected by threats and realities of colonisation.

Moving back to the exhibitions of the NMM as indicators of revised history and identity, the most significant change in the exhibition of the Manchu period since the beginning of the study period has been its physical relocation. It has been moved away from the intersection of the *Mongolian Empire* and the *Traditional Life* and *Traditional Culture* Halls. Objects and interpretation relating the Manchu period were relocated before 2005 to immediately precede the displays pertaining to 1911 and establishment of the independent Bogd Khaan state, thus altering their chronological place in the exhibition narrative. Previously, as the Manchu period objects were physically close to displays that interpreted medieval history, ethnography, Buddhism and flourishing of culture, they were thus physically disconnected from the exhibitions pertaining to the twentieth century. Moving the Manchu period has disassociated it from the decline of the Great Mongol Empire and as a result traditional life and culture are more closely located and thus strongly associated with Empire. The rearrangement and its meaning is reinforced in the NMM guidebook: ‘For ease of navigation, our ten exhibition halls of Mongolian history can be divided into 3 thematic areas.’¹⁶ These thematic areas are listed as *Prehistoric and Ancient States, Mongolian Empire and Traditions* and *Modern Mongolian Historical Periods*, thus affirming the Manchu period belongs to modern history.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ There is general consensus that the location of Mongolia has had an overwhelming influence on its history and the psyche of its people. As evidenced by the very recent publication; Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2011; Bulag, op. cit.

¹⁶ *Guidebook*, 2012, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.



Image 6.2
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Seven entry (section), 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.3
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Seven entry (entire), 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.4
National Museum of Mongolia, Western Revolutions Hall, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

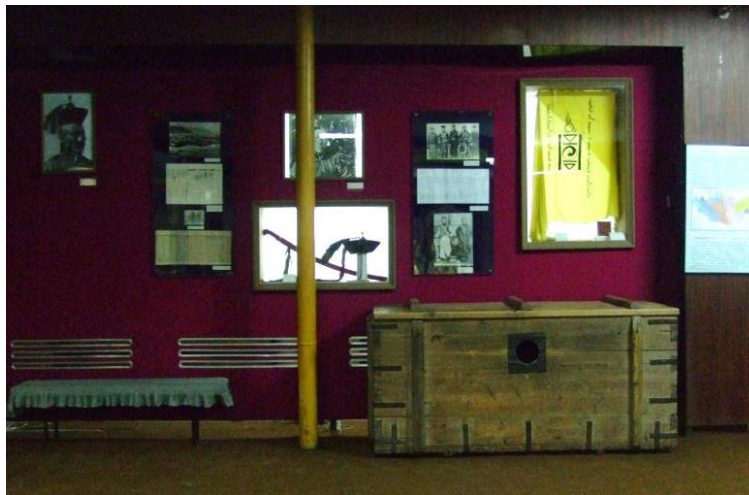


Image 6.5
National Museum of Mongolia, Western Revolutions with Manchu gaol
moved from Hall Five, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

After exiting the *Traditional Life* Hall the visitor enters a large hall that is thematically divided into the periods listed above and the first displays they encounter relate to the seventeenth to twentieth century. A small amount of floor space is currently allocated to the Manchu period and exhibits comprise four display cases, text panels and labels and a wooden gaol box (pictured above).¹⁸ The larger three display cases include objects belonging to Undur Gegeen, Zanabazar that illustrate his craftsmanship and influence as well as

¹⁸ Photographic documentation supplied by Steven Alderton, 2013.

currency, *paiza* (border passes) and seals and symbols used during the Manchu period administration. There is also an illustrated text panel describing the power of the *lama* and nobles during the period. The displays do not interpret torture (at the time of documentation the gaol label was missing) and employ generalist language. For example, in describing the active fostering of Buddhism by the Manchu as a form of subjugation the display text reads by contrast to Baabar's account discussed earlier:

By the end of Manchu rule the position of the khutukhtus [sic] of Lamaism became stronger in Mongolia and their influence outweighed that of the noblemen.¹⁹

Extending interpretive content regarding this period, the 2009 catalogue describes the richness and diversity of the period and includes increased interpretation of the positive aspects of struggles for self-determination such as growing commerce and the growth and sophistication of artistic and spiritual culture. While the period is represented as a dark time, it is also interpreted as one of growth and enrichment of traditional Mongolia, and of 'great cultural gain'.²⁰ In particular, the catalogue emphasises not only the growth of Tibetan Buddhism and the contribution of religion to Mongol culture, it devotes two pages to the life and works of the Undur Gegeen, Zanabazar and concludes that he is 'being highly esteemed as a national poet, painter, architect and famous sculptor'.²¹ Thus there is a contrast between the displays and the written interpretation, with the catalogue presenting the period as more complex and focusing more assertively on the positive aspects of the period. The significance of this is that should the visitor not read the catalogue, the interpretation of the period is brief. The catalogue, however, attempts more successfully to link the Manchu period and a narrative of development and perpetuation of traditional culture and religion that underpins notions of Mongol identity as an unbroken continuum. Where in the past the period was interpreted as one Mongols 'wished to forget'; it is

¹⁹ Photographic documentation by the author, 2010.

²⁰ Saruulbuyan J., Eregzen G. & Bayarsaikhan J. (eds), *National Museum of Mongolia*, Catalogue, National Museum of Mongolia, 2009, pp. 140–141.

²¹ Ibid., p. 142.

now one that has been reinterpreted as one to be remembered for some positive occurrences.

Baabar's work when considered in relationship to the NMM catalogue is one example that reinforces the position that the NMM does reflect a wider trend of reappraisal and critiquing of the significance of the Manchu period on the continuity and development of Mongol culture. However the NMM critique differs from Baabar's in that it seeks to recognise not only continuity through Buddhism, but also to credit Buddhism as the nexus for fostering a strong, more sophisticated Mongol culture in spite of oppression. Buddhism and Mongol culture are constructed as an ancient strength that could not be subsumed despite Manchu assimilation policies. The 2000 catalogue describes oppression and reorganisation of state but carefully balances this with acknowledgement of Mongols keeping their own traditions alive, seeking their independence and the flourishing and sophistication of Buddhism without mentioning torture:

...Mongolia became somewhat isolated from the rest of the world and therefore felt behind world development. However, the Mongolians kept their own traditions of culture and animal husbandry that had been preserved for thousands of years.²²

...Hundreds of monasteries were built and they became centres of political, religious, commercial and cultural activities.²³

Likewise, the exhibition catalogue produced for the NMM travelling exhibition *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis [sic] Khan* published in 2001 paints a dark, yet balanced picture:

The Mongols sought to gain independence, staging numerous uprisings and the local and national levels...The Manchu rulers employed several strategies to keep the Mongols weak,

²² Dr Idshinorov S. (ed.), *National Museum of Mongolian History*, catalogue, National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, undated, c.2000, p. 26.

²³ Ibid.

disjointed and isolated both from each other and other nations.²⁴

The NMM *Self-Guiding Brochure* uses a similar style of interpretation, as well as interpreting the Manchu gaol:

...under Manchu rule was a dark time in Mongolia's history. It was a time of great oppression for the Mongolians and throughout they fought the superior Manchu forces for their independence.²⁵

The brochure depicts the gaol box and interprets:

This wooden box is an example of an instrument of punishment that the Qing forces used against Mongolians who rose up against them. Those who weren't killed for committing such a crime might be put into a box like this for the rest of their life.²⁶

The evolution of the Manchu period hall has been subtle in terms of its constituent artefacts, yet significant due to its physical relocation and more extensive and complex interpretation in catalogues, guidebooks and text panels. The changes to this seemingly succinct display demonstrate that the NMM has revised the place of Manchu. However, the conclusions do not accord with those of historians such as Baabar who place the period in a generally negative light, along the lines of the interpretation William O. Douglas encountered in 1961. The period is one that has been interpreted to demonstrate the strength of Mongol tradition and culture, while minimising the fact of subjugation and imperial decline, according with popular notions of the unbroken lineage of the Mongols.

²⁴ Munhtuya Altangeres, 'My Mongolia' in; Paula Sabloff (ed.), *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2001, p. 29.

²⁵ National Museum of Mongolian History, *Self-Guiding Brochure*, colour brochure, National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, 2004, p. 11.

²⁶ Ibid.

Hall Eight – Mongolia during the Bogd Khaan State 1911–1920

Hall Eight, *Mongolia 1911–1920* is large and comprised of a number of sections. Displays interpret international diplomatic arrangements and agreements, regional revolutionary uprisings and key figures of the complex period until the end of 1920. Upon entering the hall the visitor is directed to turn right into an alcove in which the period of establishment of the Bogd Khaan state is interpreted as *Independent Mongolia*. In analysing Hall Eight for the purposes of the study, the focus is on the section pertaining to the Bogd Khaan state because the role of the Bogd Khaan as both a religious figure and symbol of Mongol leadership and self-determination is under revision in wider scholarship.

Images of the Bogd Khaan section of Hall Eight (pictured below) demonstrate that while some adjustments to the placement of display case, objects, images and interpretative signage has occurred during the study period, the layout and themes of the space remain the same between 2001 and 2013. The visual focus of the hall remains an elaborately decorated plinth and canopy featuring wax models of the Bogd Khaan and his Queen Dondogdulam enthroned and dressed in replica state ceremonial costume, flanked by two items of official clothing in display cases.



Image 6.6
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Eight (section), 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.7
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Eight (section), 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Between 2005 and 2010, the major change to the display has been changing the costumes of the wax models. In the 2005 incarnation of the display, the Bogd Khaan is in religious dress and his Queen in traditional Khalk married women's attire. By 2010, the models were attired in more elaborate and ornate gold *del* and crowns. The effect of this has been enhancement of the visual centrality and obvious esteem in which the Bogd Khaan and the Queen

are held. They are more explicitly King and Queen. Other artefacts on display are an early twentieth-century Mongolian flag featuring the *Soyombo* (symbol) and the Seal of State (pictured below) which have not changed.



Image 6.8
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Eight (section), 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.9
National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Eight (section), 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

The 2000 catalogue includes this historical period in less than two pages devoted to ‘The 20th Century of Mongolia’ that describes 1900 until the democratic period. No objects from the Bogd Khaan state are pictured or interpreted and the Bogd Khaan is not directly named, nor is the period classified as a ‘period’. The most direct comments regarding the temporal period the hall represents are general;

After the revolution of 1911, Mongolia made attempts to break its isolation and to free itself from the backwardness in the rest of the world and sought to establish trade and cultural links with the western countries on the basis of the relationship with Russia that was already existed.²⁷

By contrast, the 2009 catalogue offers greatly extended information and emphasis on the period. The twentieth century is discussed in forty-eight pages and divided into; *1911–1920, Socialist Period and Democratic Mongolia*. The introduction to the 2009 catalogue chapter ‘Mongolia during the 1911–1920’ states:

In 1911, a new chapter of Mongolian History began with the declaration of Mongolia’s independence and the formation of a theocratic government under the auspices of the 8th Bogd Khaan.²⁸

The next nine pages interpret the situation at the outset of the twentieth century and such objects as the wax models and their costumes and the state flag 1912 yet they do not interpret the Bogd Khaan himself.²⁹ Rather they interpret political and symbolic activities that took place such as replacement of Manchu with Mongol symbolism in costume and state symbols, conferment of titles on independence activists and diplomatic and political manoeuvrings of the period.³⁰ To the non-Mongolist viewer it is clear from the full page image of the enthroned and elevated wax models in the catalogue that the Bogd Khaan and his Queen are significant and revered figures, yet explanation of their significance is not present thus the catalogue is scantily enlightening. The smaller 2012 guidebook by contrast features four pages explaining the complex political machinations of the period that preceded the enthronement of the Bogd Khaan and interprets three objects as indicative of changes and official developments of the period.³¹

²⁷ Dr Idshinorov S., 2000, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁸ Saruulbuyan J., an et al., op. cit., p.152.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Guidebook*, 2012, op. cit., pp. 62–65.

The interpretive materials related to this section of Hall Eight illustrate some salient points in relation to a wider question of how the Museum has changed in the democratic environment and how changes reflect issues. This exhibition has changed minimally, both in its physical manifestation and in interpretation both ‘on the floor’ and in associated interpretive texts. While it has always been implied by the arrangement and ornateness of the wax figures that there is a heightened level of significance about the Bogd Khaan and this period, these levels of significance have not been greatly elucidated. By contrast, the Bogd Khaan himself has been revised in many ways. As discussed in chapter two, historical revision in the democratic period has noted his denouncement as a debauched ‘feudal’ during socialist times. And that he has been as king, religious leader, cultured and sophisticated thinker and statesman and visionary, nationalist leader in the democratic period.³² The Bogd Khaan’s place in political ideology has changed greatly between the period of independence, through socialism and now in democratic Mongolia.³³ Scholars now generally agree upon the important strategic role the Bogd Khaan played in the political and diplomatic events preceding 1911 and this has been recognised as a view that existed at the time that was cautiously deconstructed during the socialist period.³⁴ Alongside the focus on the personality, spirituality and political strategising of the Bogd Khaan himself, the place of Buddhism in debates about Mongol national identity continue, particularly in the post-socialist period and in relation to the revival of independence and Buddhist practices and the role of religion in legitimisation of state.³⁵ Indeed, critiquing of the place of religion and the

³² Emgent Ookhnoi Batsaikhan, *Bogdo Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, The Last King Of Mongolia*, Institute of International Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

³³ For example; Caroline Humphrey ‘Remembering an “Enemy”’: The Bogd Khaan in Twentieth-Century Mongolia, in R. S. Watson (ed.), *Memory History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, 1994; Baabar, op. cit.; Diluv Khutagt, The, *Political Memoirs and Autobiography of a Buddhist Incarnation*, Owen Lattimore (trans.), Polar Star Books, Ulaanbaatar, 2009; Batsaikhan op. cit.; Buyandelger Manduhi, ‘Tricky Representations: Buddhism in the Cinema during Socialism in Mongolia’, *The Silk Road*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, <http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/vol6num1/srjournal_v6n1.pdf>, retrieved December 2008.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For example Uradyn Erden Bulag, ‘Mongolian modernity and hybridity’, *MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter*, no. 19, 2004, pp. 1–3; Vesna A. Wallace, ‘Mediating the Power of Dharma: The Mongols’ Approaches to reviving Buddhism in Mongolia’, *The Silk Road*, vol.

Bogd Khaan has a substantial tradition in the twentieth century that has relevance today.

The other museum that presents substantial displays about the Bogd Khaan and about religion is the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum. As the nexus of the political, religious and personal life of the last Bogd Khaan and as keeper of religious artworks from the period of Zanabazar, the Winter Palace is an important place to test theories of how these issues have been revised and how they reflect popular notions of identity. In his memoir of 1920 Ossendowski recounts a statement by the Bogd Khaan:

Our neighbors [sic] hold us in contempt. They forget that we were their sovereigns but we preserve our holy traditions and we know that the day of triumph of the Mongol tribes and the Yellow Faith will come. We have the Protectors of the Faith, the Buriats [sic]. They are the truest guardians of the bequests of Jenghiz [sic] Khan.³⁶

An analysis of the Winter Palace Museum supports the notion of the connection of contemporary faith to the Great Mongol Empire and also to the faith as protector of tradition and freedom are as relevant today as they were in the 1920s. The overall impression the recent renovations and conservation works to the Winter Palace complex present are important as discussed in chapter four. The displays of the Winter Palace have changed slowly in the democratic period. Temples have been restored and collections conserved and displays in the temples and libraries have been enhanced and more richly interpreted. The information included in the current guidebook about Zanabazar concludes: 'It is clear that Zanabazar is a leading figure in the 17th and 18th century art not only of Mongolia, but of the Orient as a

6, no. 1, 2008,
<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/vol6num1/srjournal_v6n1.pdf>, retrieved December 2008; David Sneath, 'Political Mobilization and the Construction of Collective Identity in Mongolia', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 3, November 2010,
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2010.518009>>, retrieved 1 February 2011.

³⁶ For example; Ferdinand Ossendowski, *Beasts, Men and Gods*, Nuvision Publications, 2006.

whole.³⁷ The introduction to the current guidebook for the Museum supports the historical/cultural emphasis that the site itself projects: ‘The palace museum of last King of Mongolia is one of the most valued complexes with incomparable value of exhibits of history and culture of Mongolia.’³⁸ Further, the situation of Zanabazar as the leading figure in art from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Asia references the ideas inherent the NMM interpretation alluding to the strength and uniqueness of Mongol traditional culture (in this case religious) that led to its flourishing even in the ‘dark period’ of Manchu domination. To make clearer the point about the Museum under interpreting the political nature of the site, pictured below is a parasol used in the ceremony to mark independence from the Qing in 1911.³⁹ The ceremony is recorded in detail and comprised both enthronement and religious blessings. The high significance of this period and what ensued has been described previously. The parasol is one of several objects in the collections of the Winter Palace that pertain directly to the political upheavals that began the twentieth century. Other objects include documents, religious regalia and state symbols. Some of these are pictured in chapter four. Though the parasol has significant interpretive potential, its label (pictured below) is merely descriptive.

³⁷ Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, *The Guidebook of the Bogd Khaan Palace Museum*, Ulaanbaatar, date unknown, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁹ Batsaikhan, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–170.



Image 6.10

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, peacock feather parasol used in the 1911 independence ceremony, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

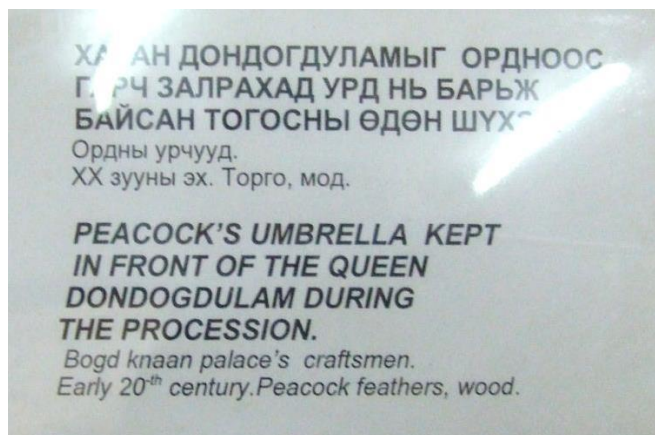


Image 6.11

The Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum, label for peacock feather parasol, 2010

Photograph Sally Watterson

While the minimal change to displays in the Palace building can be contributed to lack of funding to renovate the displays it is the reason why there has been a lack of funding that contributes to this argument.⁴⁰ As the events of the early twentieth century, including the adoption of socialism remain debated, these objects retain a level of ambiguity. Was the Bogd Khaan right to support socialism, and did he do so in self-interest?⁴¹ Was his role in the revolutions of the early twentieth century one of leadership or opportunism? Was he debauched, or a visionary leader? Ultimately, his reign represents a final chapter in a long lineage of Khaans and therefore a moment of disjuncture in Mongolian history.⁴² This disjuncture is complex, debated, political and technical and thus difficult to assimilate. As discussed in chapter four the Museum has in the past secured funding for projects. However, it has been directed toward interpreting the spirituality artistic achievements of Zanabazar (who was never actually at the Palace) and to celebrating Mongolian Buddhist architecture. I argue the reason for lack of funding directed at reinterpretation of the persona of the last Bogd Khaan and his political functions reinforces the notion that the revolutions of the early twentieth century and resultant socialism and suppressions of religion are embodied in the Museum collections. Ultimately, the Bogd Khaan, though under historical review, represents the end of a lineage and almost end of a religion that is core to modern Mongol identity.

Having considered the interpretation of the period of independence following 1911 and the place of the Bogd Khaan in the interpretive activities of the NMM and the Winter Palace Museum, similarities and differences emerge which reflect significantly divergent approaches to the period in the post-socialist era. The NMM has taken steps to situate the period from 1911 as the beginning of modern Mongolia and to acknowledge the role to the Bogd Khaan in the establishment of that state. Further, the NMM has made explicit links between medieval Buddhism, the flourishing of traditional culture and the role of religion as a manifestation of Mongol's cultural endurance during

⁴⁰ Caroline Humphrey, 'Remembering an "Enemy": The Bogd Khaan in Twentieth-Century Mongolia' in R. S. Watson (ed.), *op. cit.*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

the period of Manchu subjugation. Therefore, the NMM has drawn links between the ancient past and the early twentieth century that comment on cultural and ancestral continuity. By doing so, the Museum has begun to make the Manchu period an acceptable one in the linear narrative of progress rather than focusing on the disjuncture that previous interpretation alluded to.

The Winter Palace, by contrast, has taken a more aesthetic/religious approach to its collections. In undertaking architectural restorations and in enhancing interpretation of the religious uses of the site, the artistry of Zanabazar and the cultural products of the site, the Museum has been diminished the role of the last Bogd Khaan in the political life of the early twentieth century. While references are made in the interpretation of the personal curios, ceremonial objects and state effects of the Bogd Khaan in the Palace building itself, they are not well contextualised within the broad geopolitical context that they are significant to. In a strong sense they still project an impression of an eclectic somewhat eccentric palace collection, rather than a collection that illustrates the period of Mongol independence. The Winter Palace interpretation reflects both a growth in the notion of the centrality of the ‘trueness’ and uniqueness of Mongolian Buddhism in modern Mongol national identity and reinforces the notion of the continuum of the ancient.

Hall Nine – Socialist Mongolia, 1921–1990

The socialist period interpretation at the NMM in its minimally changed form stems from 1991 when the socialist period hall displays were recycled from those of the Revolution Museum with some alterations. In 1993, the hall came under the control of then Curator, Dr Bumaa D.⁴³ Dr Bumaa described how she removed photographs with purged people’s faces scratched off or obscured by cut-outs of other people’s heads that had been a feature of socialism. She also introduced a small display to the socialist period hall about the purges.⁴⁴ The hall was not extensively renovated during the period of research, however, at the time of writing in 2013 some twenty years after

⁴³ Email from Dr Bumaa to author, 21 May 2013.

⁴⁴ Author’s conversations with Dr Bumaa, 2001-2.

its initial installation state funding was allocated to renovate the hall and it has been dismantled.⁴⁵

Chapter three discussed the place of socialism in Mongolia's national narrative and the meaning of the purges. Narrative about twentieth-century Mongolia is not limited to displays in museums but as demonstrated, has permeated political rhetoric associated with legitimisation and the notion of 'true' Mongolness and legitimacy of the incumbent government. If, as this paper argues, difficult history is underrepresented in museums the question arises as to why. As Mongolia is rich in accessible sites and objects that reflect recent difficult history, one could naively extrapolate it would not be difficult to acquire and interpret these in museums. Clearly the absence of interpretive activities surrounding these issues then is indicative of a much more complex situation.

While difficult periods will be demonstrated to be under interpreted in museums, there has been much activity and debate in recent years. Execution sites and mass graves containing the remains of purged *lamas*, revolutionaries and nobility as well as graphic forensic evidence of the way in which they were executed have been found and excavated, both within and around the city of Ulaanbaatar.⁴⁶ Almost every village has evidence of a destroyed monastery. The most prominent of these was the monastery Erdene Zuu, once the largest and oldest in Mongolia partially destroyed during the socialist period and now part of the World Heritage listed Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape. The remains of another monastery Manshiir Khiid, are extant in a valley near the entrance to the Bogd KhaanUul Strictly Protected Area are considered a pleasant day trip from Ulaanbaatar. There are also sites pertaining to the administration of terror in central Ulaanbaatar, such as the Headquarters of the Mongolian Ministry of Internal Affairs with its underground detention cells (the building next door to the National History Museum, still headquarters of the Ministry), as well as known show trial sites and places of incarceration. In recent decades memorialisation has occurred;

⁴⁵ Email from Dr Bumaa, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Bruno Frohlich & David Hunt, 'A History not to be Forgotten: Mass Burials in Mongolia', *Anthronotes Museum of Natural History Publication for Educators*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2006.

two important examples being a stupa installed at the instigation of a senior Lama Purevbat at the mass grave at Hambiin Ovoo and a memorial placed on Songino Hairihan Mountain in 1997 marking the execution place of twelve government officials.⁴⁷ However, though sites such as this are highly accessible from Ulaanbaatar, none of these sites of painful history have been managed or interpreted in the sense of being a tourist destination about atrocity, and certainly none are visited frequently by foreigners for that purpose. I was included in the annual NMM workers holiday (a socialist-era sanatorium at the base of the Songino Hairihan. Activities of the weekend reflect the ambiguity of some events in Mongolian history. As well as singing, dancing and playing games, our group took a brisk walk up the snowy mountain to take pictures of each other arm in arm at the memorial monument and then returned to the valley floor to cook a traditional outdoor feast. There was some discussion of the significance of the site, as one would expect among historians, but the mood of the group did not reflect having visited a murder scene, nor was there evidence of other recent visitations. What is significant in a scholarly sense about this example and indeed the purges is that they have not followed the ‘trend’ of becoming tourist attractions in the way others have internationally. Ashworth and Hartman suggest that ‘tourists are attracted to the sites and memorials of atrocity, which have thus become tourism attractions’, yet this is not the case to any notable extent in Mongolia to date.⁴⁸ The obvious reason being the scale of the purges was not great in comparison to for example the Holocaust nor as geopolitically resonant as for example the World Trade Center. Thus the emotive power of spatially concentrated darkness is not present to draw the viewer. The purges do represent however, the death of three to four percent of the population (mostly male) as well as dismantling of ancient nomadic cultural and religious systems thus the period of ‘dark history’ is highly significant domestically. Further the purges that took place in Mongolia are

⁴⁷ Christopher Kaplonski, ‘Blame, Guilt and Avoidance: The Struggle to Control the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia’, *History and Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, Indiana University Press, <<http://www.chriskaplonski.com/downloads/BlameGuiltAvoidance.pdf>>, retrieved 15 August 2006, p. 5.

⁴⁸ G. Ashworth & R. Hartmann, *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*, Cognizant Communications, New York, 2005, p. 1.

now understood and widely accepted as a part of an international network of vast Soviet directed victimisation that were orchestrated across the socialist international and thus, though underrepresented and under scrutinised in the Mongolian context, are of high significance internationally.⁴⁹

Having described some of the issues and activities surrounding the socialist period and the purges, we now return to question of how if at all these issues are reflected in the displays of Hall Nine. Following are images of areas of the hall from 2005, 2010 and 2013.⁵⁰ The first set of images is the view of Hall Nine from its entry point. The second set of images documents the first wall of information that the visitor encounters. These images are a few of thousands collected over the research period that document in detail both entire sections of the hall as well as individual objects, text panels, labels and graphics. They have been selected as they illustrate the restrictive and old fashioned nature of the display mechanisms and the very low level of change within the hall during the study period. Together, the images are evidence of little reinterpretation of the period, which supports the notion discussed in chapter three that the period remains contested in the national story, does not easily contribute to the heroic narrative and so therefore remains marginalised in the NMM.

⁴⁹ Christopher Kaplonski, 'Resorting to Violence: Technologies of Exception, Contingent States and the Repression of Buddhist Lamas in 1930s Mongolia', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 77, issue 1, 2012.

⁵⁰ Images from 2000 have not been included as at the time as pre-digital prints developed in Mongolia at the time are poor quality. This is not an impediment as the 2000 images would be almost identical to those of 2005, excepting the introduction of a few text panels, donated to the Museum from the University of Pennsylvania State Museum, which had been added to existing displays.



Image 6.13
 National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Nine viewed from base of entry steps,
 2005
 Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.14
 National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Nine viewed from top of entry steps,
 2010
 Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.15

National Museum of Mongolia, Hall Nine viewed from top of entry steps, 2013

Photograph Steven Alderton

Two observations can be made from these images. First, while some directional signage, text panels and graphics have changed, as have light levels, the layout and content of a majority of the exhibition has not. Second, cosmetic changes to the hall do not negate the pronounced visual difference of this hall from halls previously discussed. The hall continues to employ the old Revolution Museum display mechanisms of false walls coated in maroon felt, punctuated by small showcases at irregular intervals and heights that lend to the display of images, diagrams, poster and only small objects. Other halls in the NMM have a fresher, either brighter or more contemporary aesthetic. While there is not total aesthetic unity between other halls, the socialist period hall presents as distinctly dark and anachronistic. Put another way, the changes over time are so minimal they have not served to alter the general narrative. To describe the displays of the hall physically in any detail would be cumbersome as it contains a vast amount of objects, photographs, maps, diagrams, text panels and labels. Also, to do this and track changes to them would be somewhat futile as the minor nature of changes do not impact on the overall interpretation that the hall continued to present up to 2013. Rather, the approach taken is to identify strategic examples within the hall that highlight key developments. Qualifying this, a significant change for the

non-Mongol language visitor is the increasing amount of labels and text panels available in English.

Following are images of an example of one change that the visitor encounters early in the hall. The way in which the 'jewel case' interpreting the battle that took place to oust White Russian invader Baron Ungern Von Sternberg has been reconfigured is to include recent archaeological discoveries, more descriptive text and not include a boot once on display that had dubious provenance. The significance of this example is that the museum does seek to enhance interpretation and to provide historically accurate interpretation. This, however, is at a micro level and does not negate the overall message of the hall as old and aesthetically 'socialist' in appearance.



Image 6.16
National Museum of Mongolia, Baron Ungern Von Sternberg case, 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.17

National Museum of Mongolia, extra interpretive text added and objects changed, Baron Ungern Von Sternberg Case, 2013

The label in the case reads:

REMAINS OF WEAPONS FROM THE SITE OF BATTLE 'ULAAN KHADNII', Baron Ungern's troops and Mongolian troops under 'Beis' Baljinnyam and 'Gun' Sundui defeated Chinese forces in the battle called 'Ulaan Khadnii'. This was one of the important battles for Mongolian independence. March 1921.

Having considered the exhibition space analysing interpretive text about this period in publications provides insights into how this accords with that of the exhibitions. A brief analysis demonstrates that while in publications interpretation of the period has been extended and the place of socialism and the purges remains small in relation to interpretations of other more popular aspects of history. The NMM catalogue published in 2000 dedicates only a one-and-a-half-page essay to the entire twentieth century.⁵¹ The essay contains no images of or references to objects. The section of the essay about the socialist period is brief, cursory and attempts at a polite balance.

Every idea and worldview other than Marxism and Leninism was severely subdued in those years. However, on the other hand, Mongolia witnessed a remarkable progress in its development at the end of the

⁵¹ Dr Idshinorov S., 2000, op. cit., pp. 28–29.

20th century. A great number of national intellectuals have been produced, efficient health and educational systems established and the national literacy rate reached 100 percent and the science developed rapidly.⁵²

The NMM 2004 *Self-Guiding Brochure* takes a contradictory approach. The place of the socialist period is represented in the brochure by an image of Choibalsan's military uniform and a statement about him and the purges.

Choibalsan was the dictator of Mongolia from 1939 until his death in 1952. Even before he was the official leader of the country he oversaw the purges of people who were seen as enemies of the state, including intelligentsia and Buddhist leaders. Official records reveal that almost 36,000 were purged between 1922 and the 1950s.⁵³

The reason for this approach is not known, however, it is evidence that the NMM had begun experimenting with ways in which to interpret the period. The shift in interpretation reflects that the place of Choibalsan has been under review, particularly in connection with debates on who instigated the purges; Russia or Mongols led by Choibalsan.⁵⁴ In interpreting and apportioning blame on Choibalsan, this particular interpretation implies that the purges were not orchestrated by others but from within. By directly stating he 'oversaw' the purges, blame is ascribed to him personally, delimiting the guilt that a wider interpretation would imply for Mongols.

The 2009 catalogue is much larger and more extensive, so is able to present more information and diverse objects, images and interpretation. However, the clear bias about the negativity of twentieth century in the 2004 *Self-Guiding Brochure* is not repeated in the 2009 catalogue. The introduction summary to the chapter echoes its 2000 forerunners balanced approach in concluding that 'the intricate coexistence of positive and negative

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Self-Guiding Brochure*, 2004, op. cit., p. 16.

⁵⁴ Christopher Kaplonski, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: the Memory of Heroes*, Routledge, London & New York, 2004; Irina Y Morozova, *The Social History of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, Socialist Revolutions In Asia, Central Asian Studies Series, Routledge, New York, 2009.

developments characterizes this period'.⁵⁵ The chapter differs remarkably from the 2000 interpretation in that it is long and features numerous images and objects tracing the failures and achievements of the socialist period. In the 2009 catalogue Marshal Choibalsan features prominently as a long serving leader.⁵⁶ In the one-and-a-half paragraphs that deal with the purges Choibalsan is not associated with responsibility. In fact, the 'atmosphere of fear and uncertainty' that led to the purges is credited as being 'actively encouraged by Moscow'.⁵⁷ The material devoted to the purges in this catalogue employs generalist language, for example:

The purge targeted all levels of society including intellectuals, writers, scientists, and lamas with the accused being labelled [sic] 'Rightists'. In the years from 1933 to 1953 around 36000 people were affected by the purges.⁵⁸

By referring to the purge as targeting all levels of society, the interpretation avoids apportioning blame on either Mongols or Russia or on individuals. By stating that people were 'affected' by the purges, the text further avoids the specificity that, for example, stating they were killed, imprisoned or their possessions confiscated would have. The text, though including lamas in the list of 'affected' does not interpret the suppression of religion that their purging represents.

Further enhancing the impression of the purges being one of many events and changes of the socialist period and not necessarily one of the most important, is that the actual amount of interpretation. They are represented by less than two paragraphs in a chapter twenty-nine pages long. The catalogue does not seek to balance celebratory text as it does not contain any images relating to the show trials or victims, though they do appear in a section of the NMM exhibition. The next sentence of the same paragraph following the information about the purges moves forward in history and completely away from the topic to explain the Japanese attack on Mongolia during the Second

⁵⁵ Saruulbuyan J., et al., op. cit., p.170.

⁵⁶ Choibalsan is pictured at least nine times and two full pages feature large images of his military uniform, sword and medal. Ibid., pp. 170–185.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

World War and the battle of Khalkin Gol (discussed in chapter three) in which Mongol and Soviet troops fought side by side. It includes a double page image of Choibalsan's military uniform, identifying him as commander of this battle which has a high visual presence and aura of significance. By visually emphasising Choibalsan and the significance of the War effort, information about the negative aspects of the period is made less prominent, therefore appears to be less significant. This is in stark contrast to the interpretive text of the 2004 brochure, described previously, in which the purges are interpreted through Choibalsan.⁵⁹

That Hall Nine has changed little physically over a long period of time and remarkably little by comparison to other halls in the NMM is evidenced by both little change to the actual materials and objects on display, no change in the thematic arrangement of the materials and equally little change to the interpretation the visitor encounters. The operational reasons for this have been discussed and can be distilled down to lack of funding and human and physical resources. What these simple logistical barriers to change reflect about how the NMM itself has approached the socialist period since democracy is significant. Given that nearly every other aspect of exhibitions and interpretation have been altered in some way, as well as substantial improvements made in collections management practice, research and publications and international collaborations, it is logical to conclude the socialist period has been low priority. Following from this, the question as to why it has been a low priority can be answered 'internally'. That is, the NMM has managed to undertake much of its development works by collaborating with foreign governments and institutions and by securing aid and development grants.

Considering why then the socialist period displays have also not benefited from these external assistance streams leads back to the second part of the thesis problem of how this may reflect wider issues today and thus to factors external to the NMM. Why have certain periods benefited and others not? In particular, regardless of Mongol notions of their own history and identity,

⁵⁹ *Self-Guiding Brochure*, 2004, op. cit.

why has there been international interest in some periods and less in others? In Mongolia political and popular culture have been demonstrated to appropriate images of the grand and traditional past as fundamental foundations of Mongolia today. So too have foreigners and their influences arrived with their own agendas. In the case of the NMM the intersection of these two occurrences has manifested in funds and support for projects related to the traditional past and the glorious past, literally the things that is the real objects that represent perceptions of jinkhin Mongol/true Mongol. As evidenced in the 2000 and 2009 Museum catalogues, the socialist period, for complex reasons has not been either demonised or celebrated; it still retains an ambiguous position in the wider historical narrative as Mongols consider: 'The intricate coexistence of positive and negative developments characterizes this period.'⁶⁰

Aside from the impact of internal historical debate and identity revisionism and its reflection in the NMM and in this particular hall, the interests of the funders need to be considered. Have they come to Mongolia and the NMM and wished to undertake work on socialist history, but been rejected? Or have they come at all? Another paper could be written on the motivations of foreign governments and their cultural diplomacy programs, as well as non-government and religious organisations for channelling resources. Roy Chapman Andrews' expression upon confirming he would finally lead an expedition into Mongolia, encapsulates a sentiment common among foreigners even today:

When leaving Peking in late August, 1918, to cross the Gobi Desert in Mongolia, I knew that I was to go by motor car. But somehow the very names 'Mongolia' and 'Gobi Desert' brought such a vivid picture of the days of Kublai Khan and ancient Cathay that my clouded mind refused to admit the

⁶⁰ Saruulbuyan J., et al., op. cit.

thought of automobiles. It was enough that I was going to the land of which I had so often dreamed.⁶¹

The sentiment of Andrews illustrates an idea covered in chapter three; the idea that Mongolia has always fascinated foreigners because of its historical isolation, perceived exoticness and grand history (misrepresented in the West, often revered as ancestral in the East). In this sense, it is not oversimplifying to understand that foreign attention (be it that of tourists, governments, non-government organisations or religious or scholarly institutions), when focused on cultural heritage, would be on the periods of imperial grandeur and notions of exotic culture in an exotic ancient land. Finally, the stasis of the hall itself is not reflected in interpretive materials associated with it. On the contrary as has been shown, the NMM has in its publications sought to extend interpretation of the period, to consider a wider source of information and to write the socialist period into a linear narrative Mongolian history. The solution seems to have been to interpret a balance between good and bad that makes the period comfortable enough to be a part of historical progression, in a similar way to how the NMM's interpretation of the Manchu period has evolved.

The Victims Museum

The Victims Museum is the most logical point of comparison with the interpretative activities of the NMM relating to the socialist period and the purges for obvious reasons. As discussed in chapter four, having been opened as a branch of the NMM in 1996, in mid-2007 the Victims Museum was devolved from state ownership and transferred to the stewardship of the Genden Foundation. This action meant that it was no longer controlled by the NMM and that it had been demoted from the official narrative.⁶²

⁶¹ Roy Chapman Andrews, *Across Mongolian Plains; A Naturalist's Account of China's 'Great Northwest'*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1921. Project Gutenberg E-book number 29024, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2902>>, retrieved 15 May 2011, chapter 1.

⁶² Field notes on conversation with Mr Bekhbat, Museum Director, November 2005 and 2010.



Image 6.19
 Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, 2005
 Photograph Sally Watterson

Some discussion of the displays of the Victims Museum was included in chapter four and this section pinpoints some sections in detail as illustrative of the way in which the Museum has changed. The most noticeable change to the Museum exhibitions since 2001-2 when first observed is the hall on the ground floor that the visitor first enters. While Museum founder Mrs Tserendulam was ill, an interim Curator oversaw renovations. A display known as the Wall of Remembrance that had been inscribed with the names of twenty thousand victims of the repressions was removed. Also a diorama of an interrogation cell deconstructed and some structural renovations (including lining the building walls) took place. Reportedly, 30 000 000 Mongolian Togrogs allocated by the Ministry of Finance were spent on the works.⁶³ Museum staff subsequently expressed displeasure at the renovations of this time.⁶⁴ Mr Bekhbat in particular was disappointed at the loss of the Remembrance Wall and also with the fact that the newly applied wall lining promoted accelerated damp, which threatened not only the exhibitions and

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

collections, but the old wooden building itself.⁶⁵ Apart from the removal of the Remembrance Wall, other physical changes include more labels and extended text panels both in Mongolian and English. In particular, sections of official documents are transposed on labels that detail significant actions and directive of the purges.



Image 6.21
Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, downstairs display
of interrogation cell (exterior), 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson



Image 6.22
Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, downstairs display
of interrogation cell (interior), 2005
Photograph Sally Watterson

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Image 6.23

Memorial Museum to the Victims of Political Repression, downstairs display of interrogation cell door without mannequins, 2010
Photograph Sally Watterson

Overall the displays though changed continue to present a powerful picture of the extent and mass of personal suffering of the purged and their families. By nature of the objects on display – pictures of *lamas* at trial and purged young educated men and women, documents directing executions, political posters, artworks and human remains – the Museum presents a strong and detailed picture of the way in which the purges unfolded and the systematic loss they incurred. The displays also make strong links to the involvement of the Soviet Comintern and of the MPRP in orchestrating the purges. This message is, in the context of Mongolian politics, highly charged, as the Mongolian People's Party remains frequently in majority in Parliament. Thus Mr Bekhbat's acknowledgement in 2005 that the Museum could be closed at any time should the political situation change has, to a significant extent, been borne out by the act of devolution in 2007.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Christopher Kaplonski, 'Thirty Thousand Bullets: Remembering Political Repression in Mongolia', in Christie, K. and Robert Cribb (eds), *Historical Injustice and Democratic*

Conclusion

At the NMM, the role of the Bogd Khaan has become more richly interpreted as statesman and leader, linking the movement for independence to the spiritual destiny of Mongolia. The period of Mongol independence from 1911 and the role of the Bogd Khaan in fostering independence have become more exalted, reflecting revisionist trends that link the spirituality and monarchical wisdom aspects of his persona to the ancient Mongol past and to the Mongol 'struggle' for independence. Also, the place of the Manchu period has physically and interpretatively changed in the linear narrative from being connected to ancient times to being represented as the beginning of modern Mongolia. The period has been reinterpreted as one of some cultural development as a means for integrating it more satisfyingly into the broader construct of progress.

By way of comparison to the NMM, interpretation at the Winter Palace of the Bogd Khaan Museum of the Bogd Khaan and of Zanabazar was discussed. In the case of interpretation of the Bogd Khaan, though the Winter Palace Museum holds collections pertaining directly to the period of establishment of Mongol independence and to the 'last King of Mongolia', changes in the past decades have not focused on the politics of the period or its significance. Rather, the aesthetics and architecture of the site and the works of Zanabazar, though not created on this site are presented and interpreted as exemplary of the sophistication and spirituality of leaders have been emphasised. By highlighting the works of Zanabazar, the Winter Palace becomes a place of spiritual and religious progress, rather than emphasised for its significant links to a tumultuous period of two successive revolutions.

By contrast to the significant re-evaluation of celebratory aspects of Zanabazar, the Bogd Khaan and the Manchu period at the two museums, the socialist period hall at the NMM remained largely unrenovated for twenty years and did not attract international funding. This is in itself telling of a

broad indifference or discomfort concerning the events of the period and also little international interest.

Also, that the NMM collects little or nothing now pertaining to the socialist past is indicative of the level of embrace. Conflicting ideas about the purges and religious persecution versus the achievements of the socialist period and leaders as heroes or villains are all issues debated academically and more broadly in the media and among political parties.⁶⁷ Put simply, the lack of movement toward integrating the socialist hall in a cohesive, complex national narrative in the NMM parallels the lack of one today. Or, put another way, they reinforce Kotkin and Elleman's notion that:

So tenuous a connection do the Medieval exploits of empire-building seem to have with the twentieth-century subjugation of a tiny landlocked nation and related minority communities in adjacent states that Mongolia's modern history appears utterly discontinuous, if not a complete inversion.⁶⁸

Ultimately, the socialist period and the purges have been 'sidelined' in the NMM for an extended period for a complex intersection of reasons. The Mongols have not moved quickly, like many other post-socialist nations to thoroughly demonise that period. Yet the general unpopularity, or disinterest in this period means there has been little will or funding domestically to re-examine this period in terms of how it informs Mongol identity. Also, the revisionist reconstructions of national identity link the current democracy and 'free Mongolia' to the ancient past to a large extent leaving both the Manchu and socialist periods on the margins due to their ambiguity.⁶⁹ Aside from Mongol national identity revision, the hall has also not benefited from the largess of international cultural or soft diplomacy in the way other periods have. Chapter five demonstrated in the analysis of the popularity of periods of 'glorious past' that foreign fascination with these periods and with the notion of Mongol democracy as legitimate have led to significant attention in

⁶⁷ Kaplonski, for example, has written widely on Mongolian debates about the twentieth century.

⁶⁸ Stephen Kotkin & Bruce Elleman (eds), *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century; Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999, p. 3.

⁶⁹ For example Campi, op. cit.; Kaplonski, op. cit.

museums. In the case of difficult history, this chapter has demonstrated that further, the same fascination has resulted in neglect of ambiguous periods. Supporting the notion that the emphasis on the positive past is reflected in identity and in museums is the extremely precarious state of the Victims Museum, having been devolved entirely from public control, therefore, theoretically from the official history. Extrapolating from this a further problem is identified that if significant aspects of the past are either underrepresented in the collections and/or under-examined in activities that draw upon the collections then do gaps exist in the collections that need to be addressed if museums wish to accurately interpret and preserve Mongolian history? As has been the case the recent past particularly when uncomfortable or unpopular has been overlooked, to the detriment of sophisticated interpretation of all Mongolian history.

This chapter has explored the exhibitions and interpretive activities of museums that relate to the Manchu and socialist periods and the purges in Mongolian history. The exhibitions and interpretative activities of the NMM, the Winter Palace and the Victims Museum have been compared and contrasted. The chapter, in the most basic sense, demonstrated the complexity of the way in which museums have evolved. They have not all approached the same subject matter in the same way. Nor have they approached reinterpretation with uniform magnitude.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Political rhetoric surrounding the celebrations of both the anniversary of the establishment of the Great Mongol Empire and the 850th anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khan affords a mass of opportunity for analysis of current, official narrative and identity construction. So too, do the museums of Mongolia during the democratic period. In a very long address in the State Ceremonial Palace in Ulaanbaatar (excerpts of which are reproduced below), President Elbegdorj addressed key themes and positions Chinggis Khan as the ideological fulcrum between the ancient past and the present and as the epistemological justification for modern Mongol pride:

Heaven-sheltered Great Khaan Chinggis was not born out of void.
He was born of Mongol life.
Fed by the waters of Kherlen river, riding his horses, he worshipped
his land and the Sky.
Listening to his mother, roaming in the steppe packing his ger, and
feeding and raising his younger siblings.

And he left all his best for Mongolia.
In the quality of a Mongol man, in the beauty of Mongol land.
In the dignity of the Mongol State, in the way of Mongol life.
Left in decrees, teaching, in his credo and testaments.
He left them in the Dignity and Honor, Glory and History of
Mongolia.

The blue-spotted great grand children of the Lord Chinggis Khaan are
being born to their fathers and mothers, bringing joy and happiness.
The blessing for Mongols to grow more is carrying on.

In every herd of a Mongolian nomad, the short chestnut horses that
Chinggis Khaan's warriors rode are roaming serenely.

The felt ger, the home where Chinggis Khaan was born, rests humbly with its hearth burning warm; with the sunrays lighting up the life inside through its sun-shaped top every morning.

The mother, who he cherished so dearly, lives on with every Mongolian heart, with every Mongolian family.

The Deel Chinggis wore, the letters he wrote, the language he spoke are alive in us.

The Great White Banner and the Black Coat of Arms of Chinggis are to this date revered by the Mongol people and the Mongolian soldiers. To this date, the Rule of Law and Justice Chinggis Khaan established are honoured highly by the Mongolian State.

These sections of the speech not only encapsulate the nationalistic sentiments that the anniversaries fuelled but also crystallise fundamental themes underpinning revisionist national identity that has manifested in museums in Mongolia. The connection of modern Mongolia to the ancient past, the process of development of the modern democratic state from ancient times and the wisdom and power that Chinggis Khan harnessed due to respect for traditional culture and steppe life as a model for contemporary Mongolia and the *Tengri* (Blue Sky deity) ordained destiny of the Mongols are highly evocative claims.

The above excerpts taken on their own demonstrate a powerful appropriation of the past and traditional culture, bound together and embodied in Chinggis Khan that present a highly nationalistic justification for the ordained destiny of the present state of Mongolia. President Elbegdorj's speech however, posits a more complex notion that reminds the reader that Mongol responses in the democratic period to constructing a new, modern identity remain tempered by discomfort for the recent past and for periods of curtailed independence and domination by others:

Of the Mongols, there are some who diligently safeguarded Chinggis Khaan's State, and there are some who failed.

There are some who abused his name and smashed rule of law.

There were times in our past that the Mongols were scared to pronounce his name, praise him, celebrate his birthday, and would fall victims of punishment if those acts were attempted. Nonetheless, like a sharp golden arrowhead amid numerous other pikes Chinggis Khaan penetrated and prevailed through times.¹

Museologists understand that museums are places of contestation and debate and are both influencers and influenced. The notion of the museum as contact zone in which diverse influences such as cultures, politics, minority and majority voices as well as chance occurrences intersect. This means the traditional relationship of curator, object, audience has been recognised as not a neat process of message transmission, but rather a place that is shaped by more complex deliberate and non-deliberate dynamics.² Put another way, we understand that museums and the messages they transmit are engaged in making identity and history, but are also product of their society and increasingly of the global community. Mongolian museums are recent products of the proliferation of museums that spread across Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They are, however, like so many museums in Asia, a product of the filtering of this tradition through socialist ideology. They are in this context part of the community of museums that have negotiated the transition away from socialist museology to museology in a democratic environment. I do not go so far as to simplify the case by suggesting they have moved from socialist to western museology, as the case of Mongolia has demonstrated the situation cannot be distilled to be a simple dichotomy.

This thesis began by posing the question of how and why Mongolian museums changed in recent decades and how if at all have they reflected the reconfiguration of national identity. Further, the work was to consider if museums have sought to reinforce the popular notion that true Mongolia is

¹ Ibid.

² James Clifford, 'Museums as Contact Zones', in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford (ed.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 188–219.

situated somewhere in the traditions and landscapes the steppe, mountains, forests and desert. Or have they recognised the clear demographic and economic statistics that suggest Mongolia is decreasingly a nation of sparsely scattered nomadic herders and increasingly sedentary, industrialised and urbanised? Ultimately, the question leads to the broader consideration of the influence of society on museums and their responses – who manages the Mongolian past?

In order to approach the question, the thesis was divided into two discrete parts. Part one dealt with the history of Mongolian museums in the context of Mongolian history and of modern museology. Part two took the form of a case study of museums in three sections that presented an analysis of changes to such aspects as governance, organisational structure, visitation and interpretative activities as evidence of a range of complex phenomena.

Chapter one introduced the genesis of this research and outlined the methodology by which evidence was gathered, as well as the significance of the work. As a museologist may not be familiar with Mongolia, chapter one also included a very brief history of Mongolia that served to contextualise a discussion of the existence of a strong, indigenous keeping culture that existed before socialism and the introduction of soviet-style museums. Charting the history of Mongolia at the outset of the work not only served to assist a non-Mongolist reader, but to provide a brief overview of the history available for museums to interpret. By identifying that historically an indigenous keeping culture existed, the foundation was laid for understanding the environment in to which museums were introduced.

Having explained the genesis, methodical approach and historical context of this argument, in chapter two I discussed relevant international theoretical framework in order to demonstrate where the research fits and how it advances academic thought. This discussion revealed that there is a growing amount of works that examine cultural transition in post-socialist Mongolia, particularly in relation to national identity. The discussion also demonstrated that there is very little written about Mongolian museums in relation to their connection to society. As there are no critiques of Mongolian museums in

English, the situation thus necessitates drawing together multidisciplinary areas such as post-socialism and identity, socialist museology and Mongolian studies. Ultimately, the chapter argued that the lack of pre-existing critiques of modern Mongolian museums forced a highly interdisciplinary study.

Chapter three is the final component in the contextualising of the analysis of modern Mongolian museums. By providing a history of the twentieth century of Mongolia, into which the introduction of socialism and of museums is integrated, the chapter serves to prove how quickly museum culture developed and how strongly influenced it was by socialist museology. Ultimately, the chapter both lays a foundation for understanding the form that museums took on the eve of democracy and more importantly, the culture that existed of museums as agents of state ideology.

Part two of the work is based on the premise that the reader now has a sense of how museums developed, how they fit into Mongolian history and the style of museology that existed up until the democratic period. All of this knowledge is essential in analysing how and why museums have changed. The chapter began by describing the cultural context in which museums were forced to operate in the democratic period. It introduced and described the four museums that are the focus of this research and described and analysed how they had changed in form, charter, visitation and style of working. The chapter augments the notion of the previous chapter of the existence of a strong culture of socialist museology and suggests this endures in the democratic period. Most importantly, the chapter demonstrated that due to financial constraint coupled with external influences such as cultural diplomacy, politics and popular culture that periods of the glorious past have been increasingly emphasised in museums.

Completing the case study, chapters five and six examined and critiqued interpretive changes to the museums in relation to two thematic groupings. Chapter five looked at historical periods that are demonstrated to have been overtly linked, both in museums and in wider popular and political thought to notion of the legitimacy of Mongolia today. These were identified as the ancient states, the Great Mongol Empire and traditional culture and life.

Chapter six looked at other periods that I argue have remained less integrated, or uncoupled from the meta-narrative: the Manchu period, the socialist period and the purges. Ultimately both chapters support the argument that while museums have made efforts to improve, they have been highly subject to influence from without that have meant they reflect populist, nationalist notions of identity.

The museums of this study have been influenced in the democratic period predominantly by financial crisis and the revision of national identity so comprehensively encapsulated in the dual anniversary celebrations and official rhetoric. The combination of these two factors precipitated the influence of popular sentiment, as well as that of foreign through cultural diplomacy and inbound tourism. This led to a stronger financial position, but a weakened ideological one as societal and global influences have permeated the way in which museums have both revised history and not. Lowenthal's exploration of the recent rise in popularity of 'heritage' experiences that has occurred with global tourism provides a cautionary prism for considering Mongolia.³ Lowenthal describes heritage as stories 'packaged' entrepreneurially with an audience in mind and argues that heritage by its populism can be trivial and driven by commercialism and thirdly, that heritage may – or does – 'falsify the true past' in the process to package a user friendly experience, whereas history seeks fact and objectivity.⁴ Lowenthal cautions that the age of commercialisation of history into heritage can at its extreme lead to 'heritage debasement'.⁵ Tempering a wholly negative approach to heritage Lowenthal acknowledges that objectivity is now widely understood to be impossible in history either, but notes that while the historian strives for accuracy and objectivity, heritage 'thrives on ignorance and error'.⁶ Lowenthal's list of devices of heritage is a basis for cautionary assessment of all four museums examined and particularly so for the National Museum as it is the leader in international collaboration and in presenting the national story to tourists and relying on sustaining high

³ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p.104.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 109–121.

visitation numbers. Evoking ‘precedence, primordial beginnings, divine antiquity, indigenous rootedness, bona fides of progress and devotion to recency’ are all devices Lowenthal identifies as important in constructing heritage.⁷ When considered in relation to the way in which the ancient states to Great Mongol Empire and democratic periods are presented both in the National Museum, the Statehood Museum and the Winter Palace these elements are clearly present.

The influence of globalisation on museums has been noted as an agent for both international engagement and for fostering homogeneity in museums.⁸ In 1991, the Director of the National Museum wrote that:

There has also been no cooperative relations with museums abroad. The only relations that have existed have been with museums in socialist countries and these have been merely officialistic.⁹

Clearly based upon the key activities analysed in the past three chapters, the National Museum has entirely reversed this situation. The post-1990 deregulation described in chapter three meant significant change. One of these changes has been the introduction and spread of access to digital technologies, the ‘technologies of globalisation’ both, generally and in museums.¹⁰ By undertaking substantial collaborations with foreign agencies as a method to ensure survival and development some museums took steps toward ‘globalising’ themselves. By doing so have become engaged in negotiating the unequal power dynamics that accompany the coupling of a financially challenged institution with those that are more financially secure. In describing the ‘frictions’ of globalisation in a museum sense, Karp and

⁷ Ibid., p. 173.

⁸ Ivan Karp, Corinne Kratz, Lynn Szwaja & Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Duke University Press, 2006; Christina Kreps, ‘Non-western models of museums and curation in cross-cultural perspective’ in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Wiley–Blackwell, Chichester, United Kingdom, 2011.

⁹ Ichinkhorloo Lhavgasuren, ‘The Mongolian Museum: Its establishment and Development’, paper delivered at the Second Seminar on the Conservation of Asian Heritage, ‘Conservation in Museums’, November 18–21, 1991, Kyoto, <<https://cloudstor.aarnet.edu.au/sender/?vid=6c0a3da3-eb2a-4e68-fb31-0000003ccf48>>, retrieved 16 July 2013, p. 120.

¹⁰ Karp et al., op.cit.

colleagues identify the power relationships that globalisation may reinforce between rich and poor and the potential also the potential for ‘clashes of value systems’.¹¹ They also remind us that tourism is a significant product of globalisation that impacts upon museums.¹²

While rapid change has occurred in the Mongolian museums, they retain continuities from the past. In particular the National Museum retains the employment of archaeology and ethnographic objects as a scientific basis for history as it did during the socialist period, though for new reasons.¹³ Mongolian archaeology began in the first decades of socialism under direct tutelage from the Soviet Union where archaeology was employed as an important tool for construction of Marxist versions of history and ideology.¹⁴ The archaeological record in Mongolia like the Soviet Union was fostered as a scientific guardian of historical fact and a safeguard against inaccuracy or falsification that was a thing of the feudal past.¹⁵ Klejn identified archaeology as a key tool for legitimising socialist state constructed ideologies.¹⁶ The Museum retains a strong contingent of archaeologists on staff and has engaged in an accelerated program of archaeological enquiry since it was able to from the early 1990’s. This program of activity, by its very existence is evidence of the retained centrality of archaeological information for the National Museum and is prominent in the Statehood Museum. What is distinctive about these phenomena is that because the ancient past has moved so swiftly to the centre of constructs of national identity, the archaeological record retains preeminence as the tool with which to continue construction. The National Museum demonstrates a strong tradition of both the preserving the centrality of archaeology and ethnography in historical research activities and also it continues to use the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lynn Meskell (ed.), *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritages in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, Routledge, London, 1998.

¹⁴ Leo S. Klejn, *Soviet Archaeology: Trends, Schools and History*, Rosh Ireland & Kevin Windle (trans.), originally published in Russian, 1993, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012; E. N. Chernykh, ‘Postscript: Russian archaeology after the collapse of the USSR—infrastructural crisis and the resurgence of old and new nationalisms’, Kohl et al. (eds), *Nationalism, politics and the practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 139–148.

¹⁵ Klejn, op. cit., identifies nine groups of scholars each with differing opinions.

¹⁶ Ibid.

archaeological record in construction of a revised national story. On the other hand, the Victims Museum employs traditional archaeology as forensic evidence of the brutality of the purges. Though these approaches contrast, each deployment is highly politicised.

Where museums have collections pertaining to ancient history and traditional culture, they have attracted funding, which has facilitated the ability to make explicit the linkage of the present to the Empire of Chinggis Khan and, in turn, the genesis of this in the ancient states. In making these strong linkages forwards and backwards historically from the Great Mongol Empire, the museums define modern Mongolia as the product of a heritage of the evolution and development of unity, governance and statesmanship as embodied by the uniting actions of Chinggis Khan. While these ideas were pulled into sharp focus in the preparations during the dual anniversary celebrations in the late 2000s, they had been fomenting long before. For example, in 1996 Mongolian President Ochirbat began making linkages between the Ancient States, The Great Mongol Empire and the present democracy:

It is impossible to separate the present reform process from the previous 70 years of historic development. There can be no reform isolated from history. Likewise, it is impossible to separate our last 75 years from the 800 years history since the establishment of the first Mongolian State. The unlimited wisdom of the Mongolian statehood has led this nation from generation to generation together with its culture and civilization, and creative vitality.¹⁷

Historians and scholars have proven that Mongolians have more than 2000 years of historical tradition of statehood. 790 years ago, on the memorable 16th day of the first summer month of the year of Tiger of the fourteenth sixty-years-lunar cycle or on May 25 1206 by Georgian

¹⁷ Ochirbat P., 'Historical Path of Mongolia's Statehood and Independence', address of the President of Mongolia on the occasion of the 790th anniversary of the foundation of the Mongolian State and the 75th anniversary of Peoples Revolution, Ulaanbaatar, 1 July, 1996. <<http://www.mongoluls.net/historicalpathofmongolianstatehood.shtml>>, retrieved 14 July 2011.

calendar, Chinggis Khan convened on the upper bank of Onon River the Great Assembly of Mongolian princes based on the ancient tradition of the Mongolian state institutions and by raising the state nine white banners he proclaimed the establishment of the Great Mongol State uniting the Central Asian 'felt dwellers'.¹⁸

In 2005, Mongolian President Enkhbayar linked Chinggis Khan and distinctly nomadic traditions of statehood: 'Thus he managed to continue the ancient nomadic traditions of statehood from the period of the Xiongnu Empire.'¹⁹ He continued to say democratic Mongolia is 'a direct result of the enormous experience of the Mongols in the culture of statehood'.²⁰

Temporally, this centralisation of the ancient states, Chinggis Khan and traditional ancient culture in the democratic Mongolian psyche was reflected in museums. From early in the democratic period, as the government allowed objects illustrating the history and culture of the Mongols to travel internationally, and as international aid and funding was directed at large scale archaeological projects, these periods were revised interpretively and physically.

While there is consensus between the museums that hold collections of and present the periods of the glorious past and the democratic period (which is, in turn, reflected in contemporary Mongolia), the place of the Manchu period and the role of the last Bogd Khaan, the socialist period and the purges are not so simple. This complexity is reflected in both differing presentations of these periods among museums and in the level of attention they have received in the democratic period. The Manchu period is one which cannot be assimilated comfortably in the philosophical notion of ancient lineage of statehood development and the rule of law that is encapsulated in Elbegdorj's thesis. Both the Statehood Museum and National Museum reflect this in minimalist displays and interpretation relating to this period. The National Museum, however, has approached integration by emphasising notions of the spread of Buddhism and the unique and sophisticated culture it fostered. By

¹⁸ Ochirbat P., 'op. cit..

¹⁹ 'Address of President Enkhbayar', *Nomadic*, Newsletter of the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisations, no. 68, 2006, p.1.

²⁰ Ibid.

interpreting the Undur Gegeen, Zanabazar and the complexity of the religious network, the National Museum has thus shifted away from the historically traditional interpretation of the Manchu as torturers, to the period as being one of cultural development.

The survival of the Winter Palace Museum has also participated in the elevation of Zanabazar, and thus the rich and unique religious tradition of the Mongols, by placing emphasis on the religiosity of the site and by displaying his work as fine art. The interpretation of Zanabazar at the Winter Palace raises the issue of the representation of the last Bogd Khaan in museums and in notions of the meaning of the socialist period in the national story. The Winter Palace was the seat of power at the time Mongolia willingly adopted socialism, and the role of the Bogd Khaan in soliciting the assistance of Russia has become increasingly clear. However, the restoration and reinterpretation works that have been undertaken since democracy have not served to explore the meaning of the actions of the last Bogd Khaan during the two revolutions. Further, the Museum created a disjuncture in its displays by emphasising the artistic legacy of the Zanabazar and the possessions and curios of the last Bogd Khaan, rather than his political role. The result of this is that while the Museum exists and the collections are partially better interpreted, the Palace as seat of power, particularly as seat of power during independence is an important theme subjugated to the connoisseurist approach to buildings and artworks. In this way, both museums reflect popular and political resurgence of interest in the art and trappings of Mongolian Buddhism and in celebrating the *unique* characteristics of Mongolian Buddhism as reflections ‘Mongolness’.

Mongolian museums reflects aspects of the experience of other museums in the post-socialist aftermath, such as an influx of foreign interest, the influence of cultural diplomacy, a rise in tourist focused content and pressure to self-fund in times of economic chaos.²¹ However, this analysis has presented a clear dichotomy between the responses of the National Museum

²¹ Oksana Sarkisova & Peter Apor (eds), *Past for the Eyes, East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2008.

and that of the Victims Museum in presenting socialism in the master narrative. Put succinctly, the National Museum did not rush demonise socialism, but until recently has rather presented it as a period of progress and stability while acknowledging the purges. It has only been with the introduction of the new Democratic Period display that the dichotomy has been drawn between ‘then and now’ and the socialist period interpreted as one of oppression. From the time of the renovation until 2013, this meant that visitors exited a very large, old-fashioned-looking hall that depicted progress in all aspects of Mongolian society and the economy, to be confronted with a sign acknowledging the influence of Russia and the ‘perpetrator’ status of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party. Though the new democracy display demonises socialism and celebrates democracy, the previous hall presented a different message that tempered the democratic one. The Victims Museum, by contrast and by its very existence, demonises the purges, yet it does not present a picture of progress to counterbalance them. This has proved to be a powerful impediment as the Museum has been demoted from official status.

Regardless of the curatorial messages that both museums have attempted to convey, it is not content that is the most telling about the place of socialism in national identity. The National Museum socialist period display remained unrenovated until twenty-two years into the democratic period, as funding was not available domestically or internationally. Rather, due to a lack of interest in the socialist period compared to that of Chinggis Khan and other fund attracting periods – ones that bolster reinventing national identity – reinterpretation of the twentieth century has simply fallen by the wayside, until now. In the case of the Victims Museum, what it displays has less relevance to a consideration of the place of the purges in Mongolian identity today when one takes in to account the message that its devolution from state control conveys. The Victims Museum has been effectively demoted from the official narrative and thus actively sidelined. This is made even clearer when taken into consideration alongside the rhetoric of politicians and the inception of the Statehood Museum.

Since the onset of democracy, the museums of Mongolia have sought to expand and improve by taking opportunistic steps. This has resulted in projects driven both domestically and by international agencies and institutions. While this has resulted in more contemporary museum practices with improved interpretation, outreach and exhibitions and scholarship, at the same time it has been piecemeal and has on occasion shaped by the necessity of acquiring funding, which is in turn shaped by both foreign perceptions of Mongolia and by Mongols own revisionist identity. The activities and interpretive materials of each museum reflect, by both changes and non-changes the broad revision of Mongol history and thus identity that continues to occur popularly, politically and academically in Mongolia. Like the world outside their walls and because that world now heavily permeates their walls, museums have focused on the grand period and achievements in history and present them as moments of pride for today's Mongols. While international cultural diplomacy played a significant role in determining which periods have garnered funding and therefore been revised or celebrated, the dual anniversaries of the 2000s had the significant impact of consolidating the centrality of Chinggis Khan, the ancient states and traditional culture in Mongolian history and in its museum, with the result that the periods of history that do not assimilate have been more slowly revised and with less attention. The 'unblanding' of Chinggis Khan popularly, politically and internationally has challenged museums to fall into step or be left behind.

This chapter concludes the case study in three parts of the museums since the beginning of the democratic period. When considered as parts of a whole, these chapters present a picture of the depth and complexity of the evolution of the museums of Mongolia. The study has demonstrated that there is no one conclusion to be drawn from analysing the museums during the democratic period. Should one overriding conclusion be drawn, it would be that museums have evolved and have done so in different ways. Further, museums have been heavily influenced by the Soviet museological impulse to present a master narrative that gives reason for and legitimises the present. While museums have continually sought to maintain high professional standards from within, they have, in fact been significantly shaped in recent

decades by external forces. While it is understood that museums contribute to national identity making, the case of Mongolia because of financial devastation and in the fervour surrounding the anniversary of the establishment of the Great Mongol Empire, museums have been forced to be opportunistic. As certain periods of history are popular locally, politically and internationally, these have been the ones that have received attention from those spheres. This has led to both a major and rapid reinterpretation of history in museums yet one which has not yet assimilated all areas of history into the master narrative. As Mongolia moves toward the end of its third decade of democracy, by considering how Mongolian museums have fared so far this study has raised further issues. How, if at all, in the future can they better address difficult or less understood history to participate in negotiation of a more sophisticated and fuller national identity?

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