



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSEUM EXHIBITION IN MONGOLIA (1924-1990)

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the development of museum exhibition design in Mongolia between 1924 and 1990, focusing on the evolution of permanent and temporary exhibitions within the broader context of cultural and institutional transformation. Drawing on archival materials, museum publications, and institutional records, the study traces the emergence of modern museum practices from the establishment of the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures to the modernization of the State Central Museum and the expansion of specialized museums during the socialist period. Particular attention is given to exhibition organization, thematic planning, curatorial methods, visitor engagement, and the introduction of new exhibition technologies, including dioramas and audiovisual systems. The article argues that Mongolian museums evolved from relatively modest collection-based institutions into professionally organized museum systems that played a significant role in public education, cultural preservation, ideological representation, and the international promotion of Mongolia's history, art, ethnography, and natural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines the development of museum exhibition design in Mongolia between 1924 and 1990, categorizing it into two principal forms: permanent and temporary exhibitions. Particular attention is devoted to the thematic frameworks, conceptual approaches, duration, content, significance, visitor engagement, and technological innovations associated with permanent exhibitions. The study focuses primarily on the permanent and temporary exhibitions of the State Central Museum of Mongolia during this period, while also examining exhibition practices in specialized and provincial museums. In doing so, it provides a broader institutional perspective on the historical evolution of exhibition-making and museum presentation practices in Mongolia. The development of museums in Mongolia during the twentieth century was closely connected with broader political, cultural, and scientific transformations taking place within the country. Following the People's Revolution of 1921, museums gradually emerged not only as institutions for the collection and preservation of historical and cultural objects but also as important centers for public education, scientific dissemination, and ideological representation. Over time, museum exhibitions evolved from relatively simple displays of collected artifacts into systematically organized and conceptually structured exhibitions incorporating historical interpretation, artistic design, and modern exhibition

technologies. In this respect, the development of museum exhibitions reflected broader processes of state formation, cultural modernization, and the institutionalization of scientific knowledge in socialist Mongolia. Between 1924 and 1990, Mongolian museums underwent significant changes in exhibition organization, curatorial practice, and public outreach. Permanent exhibitions increasingly adopted thematic and chronological structures, while temporary and traveling exhibitions became important instruments for cultural education and international cultural exchange. At the same time, museums expanded their activities through the incorporation of new technologies, the establishment of specialized museums, and the organization of exhibitions abroad. By examining these developments, this study seeks to clarify the role of museum exhibitions in shaping public historical consciousness, preserving cultural heritage, and presenting Mongolia's history, art, ethnography, and natural environment to both domestic and international audiences.

**Formation of Museum Exhibition Practices in Mongolia (1924-1950s):** Following the success of the People's Revolution in 1921, the Sudar Bichgiin Khureelen (Institute of Scriptures and Literatures) was established, laying the institutional foundation for Mongolia's first museum (Batdorj 2025, 11). By 1924, the Institute's activities had expanded considerably, particularly in the systematic collection of books,

manuscripts, and museum objects. As these collections increased, the need for appropriate facilities for their storage, preservation, and display became increasingly urgent. Plans were therefore made to acquire a large traditional ger consisting of 10–12 lattice wall sections, complete with felt coverings and carpets, at a cost of 1,000 lan (1 lan = 37 grams). At the same time, efforts were undertaken to renovate existing buildings and construct dedicated storage facilities, including a clay-built structure designed specifically for housing collections. Alongside these infrastructural developments, public exhibitions were organized in collaboration with P.K. Kozlov, head of the Mongolian–Tibetan Expedition of the Russian Geographical Society (Batdorj 2025, 31).

The Institute gradually consolidated its activities around the residence of Darkhan Chin Van Puntsagtseren through the acquisition and integration of the surrounding properties of five households. Through a process of renovation, reconstruction, and selective demolition, a more permanent institutional complex was established, and the collected museum materials were relocated accordingly during this transition (Batdorj 2025, 32). A contemporary archival document emphasized the broader educational and cultural significance of these developments:

“Entrusting the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures with the responsibility for organizing state exhibitions is of considerable importance, as museums play a vital role in public education. They also serve as sites of interest for both domestic and international visitors. However, the lack of suitable facilities and sufficient space for the proper storage and public display of collected items has created significant constraints. Therefore, this temple complex is to be transferred to the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures, and the relevant authorities are to be duly informed” (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fond 23, Inventory 1, File 110).

Subsequently, the museum collections previously housed within the compound of Darkhan Chin Van Puntsagtseren were relocated to the former Winter Palace of the Bogd Khan. While the institution initially focused primarily on the collection and preservation of museum objects, from 1927 onward archival materials gathered from various sources were also transferred to the palace for storage. The museum of the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures, now situated within the Bogd Khan’s Palace complex, officially opened to the public in August 1926 with a substantial display of exhibits (Institute of Culture and Arts 1999, 296). The museum was organized under the direction of V.I. Lisovsky.

The two-story building which was formerly Bogd Khan’s winter palace and comprised twenty-four rooms, was systematically arranged according to subject matter: the ground floor was devoted to natural history, while the upper floor housed the departments of history, archaeology, traditional life, and fine arts (Batdorj 2025, 33). At the same time, P.K. Kozlov conducted excavations of Xiongnu aristocratic burial sites at Noyon Uul (Noyon mountain) and subsequently organized what may be regarded as the first museum exhibition in Mongolia based on scientifically excavated archaeological materials. According to Kozlov’s diary, on October 6, 1924, he discussed with J. Tseven the possibility of curating an exhibition using the discovered artifacts (Kozlov Petr Kuzimin 2003, 326). The exhibition

officially opened on November 6, 1924, in the newly established building of the Ministry of Education. The exhibition included the following displays:

**Display Case 1:** Valuable bronze and gold artifacts recovered from Noyon Mountain

**Display Case 2:** A large carpet embroidered with mythical creatures, exhibited in its complete form

**Display Case 3:** A composite display consisting of: red silk embroidery and woven textiles on the left side. entomological specimens on the right side, including six rows of insects and flies, with twelve rows of butterflies arranged above them.

**Display Case 4:** Primarily ornithological specimens, alongside preserved animals, including a snake, frog, and brown rodent, displayed in glass containers filled with preservative alcohol.

Kozlov noted that the exhibition was attended primarily by ministry officials, who actively engaged with the displays through discussion and interpretation, a circumstance he regarded as especially encouraging. In addition to Mongolian visitors, Chinese attendees also demonstrated considerable interest in the exhibition (Kozlov Petr Kuzimin 2003, 350–351). Kozlov’s reference to the “new building of the Ministry of Education” most likely refers to the original premises of the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures. Academician B. Rinchen later described this building in the following terms:

“A so-called ‘Luu building,’ it was a single-story structure... at times reminiscent of ancient Egyptian palatial architecture, and at other times of temple-like forms. Its walls tapered upward from a broad base, narrowing toward the top on all sides... unmistakably reflecting an Oriental architectural style” (Rinchen 2003).

Following this, the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures organized another temporary public exhibition in September 1925 at the premises of the Ministry of Education. The central section of the exhibition featured objects from the Bogd Khan’s collection, taxidermied animals, and historical weapons of Qing and Chinese origin transferred from the Uliastai prison. In addition, the exhibition included Mongolian military banners; collections of Mongolian and Chinese musical instruments; two paintings by a Mongolian artist depicting scenes of everyday life; Chinese paintings and embroidery; household objects used by Mongolians; shamanic ritual objects collected from Govi Tusheet Van khoshuu; traditional Buryat clothing; models of paleontological discoveries donated by R.C. Andrews of the American Museum of Natural History; photographs; and extensive collections of minerals and geological specimens, including materials gathered from Gorkhi, the Nalaikh mines, and the volcanic region of Dariganga (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fond 23, Inventory 1, File 110, 19).

Compared with the 1924 exhibition organized in collaboration with P.K. Kozlov, this exhibition was considerably broader in both scope and diversity. In addition to presenting materials associated with Mongolian daily life, such as clothing, tools, and musical instruments, it also introduced objects previously unfamiliar to local audiences. Among the most notable exhibits were the Bogd Khan’s zoological collection, which had rarely been displayed publicly, and visual materials depicting the

flora and fauna of the American continent donated by R.C. Andrews. These collections appear to have attracted substantial interest among Mongolian visitors (Batdorj 2025, 63). In 1926, the Bogd Khan's Palace was officially transferred to the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures, and renovation work was completed during the summer months. V.I.Lisovsky, a cartographic specialist at the Institute and the individual responsible for museum affairs, supervised the transformation of the Bogd Khan's Winter Palace into a systematically organized and publicly accessible museum. The extensive collections assembled by the Institute were catalogued, classified, and arranged according to disciplinary categories. The Bogd Khan's Palace, also known as the "Green Palace," was a two-story building constructed in a Russian architectural style and consisting of twenty-four rooms, which were reorganized into a functional museum space. The ground floor was devoted primarily to natural history, while the upper floor housed the departments of history, archaeology, traditional life, and fine arts.

Rooms 1–3 on the ground floor contained zoological collections, while Room 4 displayed paleontological finds and Room 5 was devoted to mineralogical and geological specimens. Rooms 10 and 11 functioned as storage facilities for the natural history collections. On the upper floor, Rooms 12 and 14 exhibited Mongolian paintings and handicrafts, including embroidery and wood and metal carvings. Room 16 displayed Chinese cultural objects such as wall paintings, embroidery, and jade artifacts. Room 17 contained ancient tools and weapons, while Room 18 presented instruments of punishment used in Mongolia during the Qing period. Room 19 was devoted to historical and archaeological materials, and Room 20 displayed artifacts excavated by P.K. Kozlov from Noyon Mountain representing Xiongnu cultural heritage. Room 21 focused on early Mongolian history from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, Room 23 was allocated for the staff of the History and Archaeology Department, and Room 24 exhibited collections of Mongolian and Chinese musical instruments (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fond 23, Inventory 1, File 110, 19).

With the opening of the museum of the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures to the public, it quickly began attracting both domestic and international visitors. Foreign guests visiting Ulaanbaatar were frequently guided through the museum personally by V.I.Lisovsky. However, during its early years, the Institute prioritized the collection and preservation of museum objects and consequently carried out relatively limited public educational and outreach activities (Batdorj 2025, 64). In an effort to expand its cultural and educational functions, the Institute worked in close association with the State Museum and the State Library, while also establishing a new organizational unit known as the "Local Studies Bureau."

On July 1, 1931, the Presidium of the Institute of Sciences adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of "local studies cabinets" (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fond 23, Inventory 1, File 239, 6). Responsibility for organizing and ensuring the effective operation of these units was assigned to B.Sodnom; however, the initiative appears to have achieved only limited success. From 1934 onward, the Institute of Sciences became increasingly active in organizing public-oriented cultural activities. In particular, special exhibitions were organized free of charge during national celebrations and commemorative events. During the Naadam

Festival of 1934, for example, the Institute's director, L.Dendev, issued a directive calling for the establishment of cultural and educational exhibitions and "red corners," while also appointing an exhibition committee chaired by B.Rinchen, with members including N.Dendev, M.Gombojav, and B. Sodnom (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fund 23, Inventory 1, File 444, 24). In 1939, as the Mongolian People's Republic entered a wartime period, the Institute began organizing exhibitions intended to foster patriotic and military-oriented public consciousness. One notable example was the exhibition titled "Heroes of Khalkhin Gol," organized under the direction of L. Dendev to commemorate and promote awareness of the Mongolian-Soviet victory in the Battle of Khalkhin Gol. The exhibition committee was chaired by Sh. Natsagdorj and included B. Dambaravjaa, Ya. Tsevel, and the specialist Betukhov as members (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fund 23, Inventory 1, File 670, 80). The exhibition also incorporated military equipment and objects captured from Japanese forces. Through these expanding initiatives promoting scientific knowledge, cultural education, and public awareness of museums, the social influence of museum activities increased significantly. Visitor numbers rose from approximately 34,000 in 1937 to more than 100,000 by 1941 (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fund 23, Inventory 1, File 707, 41) representing nearly a threefold increase within only four years.

As part of its broader outreach efforts, the Institute also broadcast a special radio program titled "Visit the Museum" on Mongolian Radio in 1939 (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fund 23, Inventory 1, File 578, 21-28). The program emphasized the educational value of museums while introducing museum activities and collections to a wider public audience. From the 1940s onward, the Institute organized an increasing number of thematic exhibitions. Notable examples included *Our Homeland* (1941); *Assistance from the Mongolian People's Republic to the Front* and *The History of the People's Revolution and Its Leaders Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan* (1944); *Mongolia at the Front and Moscow* (1945); *History of the Qing Period* and *The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the People's Revolution* (1946); and *The Exhibition of Karakorum Finds* (1948). These exhibitions were organized through the collective efforts of the Institute and its affiliated museums and departments.

During this period, museum activities under the Institute of Sciences were largely oriented toward the promotion of state ideology. Exhibitions frequently emphasized the glorification of party and state leaders, celebrated their historical achievements, and highlighted the influence of the Soviet October Revolution on Mongolia. Visual propaganda, including posters, slogans, and political imagery, was widely employed, particularly during public commemorative events. Consequently, museums such as the Revolution Museum and the Sukhbaatar Museum, both of which focused primarily on revolutionary history and ideology, operated under the jurisdiction of the Institute. Although formally affiliated with a scientific institution, these museums were, in practice, strongly guided by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in terms of both content and exhibition programming. A representative example may be seen in the seventeen-page speech delivered at the opening of the Sukhbaatar Museum in 1946, in which the Chairman of the State Baga Khural, G. Bumtsend, devoted extensive attention to praising revolutionary leaders D. Sukhbaatar and Kh.Choibalsan. In

particular, he emphasized their role, supported by Soviet leadership, in securing independence and freedom for a nation previously subjected to foreign domination and oppression (Batdorj 2025, 73). By the 1950s, museum activities in Mongolia had become increasingly diversified, accompanied by a substantial expansion of collections and institutional holdings. The rapid growth of both exhibitions and storage collections created an urgent need for new purpose-built museum facilities. During this period, it also became common practice to transfer exhibits between museums, merge institutions, or divide existing museums into separate specialized entities (Batdorj 2025, 74). In 1964, a consultative meeting was organized to gather visitor feedback with the aim of improving museum operations and exhibition practices. In the same year, sixty traveling exhibitions were organized across sixteen museums and museum cabinets, attracting a total of 17,650 visitors (NCA, Archives of Historical documents, Fund 388, Inventory 1, File 41, 18).

**Modernization of Exhibition Design: The State Central Museum:** Within this broader historical context, Mongolian museums underwent significant modernization in exhibition design and museological practice. The National Museum of Mongolia, the country's oldest museum (Chuluun 2024, 300) had reorganized its permanent exhibitions several times since 1924, most notably in 1926, 1940, and again in 1956. Following its reorganization according to modern museological principles, it was officially renamed the "State Central Museum." The museum's collections were systematically divided into two principal sections: natural history and history-ethnography (Sodnom 1984, 3).

The natural history section presented Mongolia's geography, mineral resources, soils, flora, and fauna, thereby emphasizing the country's environmental diversity and natural wealth. The prehistoric life section displayed fossils of large dinosaurs dating approximately 60–70 million years ago, together with a nearly complete mammoth skeleton (State central museum 1979, 3). The exhibition further included meteorites discovered within Mongolian territory, precious stones, construction materials, mineral resources, soil stratigraphy from various regions, and a wide range of botanical specimens. The zoological section exhibited taxidermied specimens representing hundreds of animal species native to Mongolia. Among the most remarkable and rare exhibits were specimens of the wild ass (*Equus hemionus*) and the Mongolian wild camel, alongside unique geological and mineralogical materials of international significance. The history section displayed stone tools from both the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods, including flakes, cores, scrapers, blades, knives, axes, grinding stones, and grain-processing implements. It also featured archaeological materials associated with ancient states that had existed within the territory of Mongolia, as well as artifacts related to the Mongol Empire, Chinggis Khan, and his successors. These included inscribed steles, banners, weapons, coins, seals, and other historical objects. In addition, the exhibition presented historical documents, photographs, artifacts, books, newspapers, weapons, and instruments of punishment dating from the Qing dynasty and the Bogd Khan period. A separate paleontological exhibition section displayed rare fossil discoveries representing Mongolia's prehistoric fauna. The installation and arrangement of these exhibits were carried out under the supervision of the Soviet scientist A.K. Rozhdestvensky, together with specialists Ya.M. Eglon and A.G. Fonin, in collaboration with Mongolian museum staff.

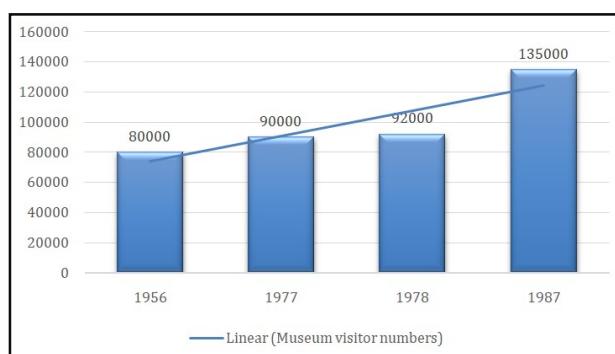
**State Central Museum:** The 1956 reorganization of the State Central Museum represented a fundamental transformation in exhibition methodology, introducing a scientifically grounded and systematically structured museological approach that differed substantially from earlier exhibition arrangements implemented in 1924, 1926, and 1940. The Academy of Sciences provided extensive institutional support for this reform, while researchers such as Kh. Perlee, O. Namnandorj, Ts. Davaajamts, and B. Luvsandanzan played an active role in enriching the museum's collections and improving exhibition content. This reorganization marked a new stage in the development of Mongolia's leading national museum (Ochir, Oyunbileg 2004, 24).

The reform introduced a range of new curatorial and exhibition practices, including the redesign of display stands, showcases, frames, and shelving systems; the presentation of natural specimens within reconstructed environmental settings; and the integration of paintings, maps, and photographs in order to deepen interpretive content. These innovations significantly enhanced both the educational function of the museum and the broader culture of exhibition design in Mongolia (Burnee 1994, 15-16). The Ethnography Department of the State Central Museum was established in 1964. Through thematic exhibitions, the department introduced visitors to the daily life, material culture, and customs of the Mongolian people from the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century (Sodnom 1984, 9). From the 1950s onward, the State Central Museum significantly expanded its activities in the fields of natural history, history, culture, ethnography, and local studies. The museum enriched its collections, organized thematic temporary exhibitions, and actively developed public outreach initiatives.

In 1964, for example, an exhibition titled *Mongolian Clothing and Ornaments* was organized. Based on the success of this exhibition, a specialized ethnographic section was later established within the museum, displaying traditional clothing, ornaments, toys, and household objects representing more than twenty ethnic groups living in Mongolia. Similarly, in 1967 the museum organized an exhibition on *Mongolian Saddles*, followed in 1970 by the exhibition *Mongolian Agriculture*, which displayed agricultural implements such as ploughs, sickles, threshing tools, mills, sieves, and grain-processing equipment. Between 1980 and 1990, the museum further organized a series of thematic exhibitions devoted to livestock culture, traditional games, the "Three Manly Games," Mongolian musical instruments, tobacco pipes, snuff bottles, and traditional dwellings (Burnee 1994, 16). According to 100 Years of Museum Development in Mongolia (1924–2024), the State Central Museum received approximately 138,000 visitors in 1970, while regional and local museums together recorded approximately 60,000 visitors. By 1975, the total number of museum visitors nationwide had reached nearly 550,000, representing an increase of approximately 2.5 times within only five years. At that time, 62.5 percent of museum visitors were school-aged children. Consequently, local museums increasingly aligned their exhibitions with school curricula by incorporating multidisciplinary scientific knowledge, improving curatorial design, and strengthening collection

through newly discovered archaeological materials and archival sources. Exhibition design and display technologies were likewise modernized. Significant changes were also introduced within the natural history section. Rather than presenting Mongolia's geography solely through flat maps, the museum introduced three-dimensional relief models, greatly improving visitor comprehension. Beginning in the mid-1960s, experimental exhibitions sought to display animals within reconstructed natural habitats. This approach proved highly popular among visitors, and nearly ten thematic exhibitions were subsequently developed using this method. The integration of dioramas with specimen-based displays represented a major innovation in the museum's natural history exhibitions (Ochir, Oyunbileg 2004, 25).

In 1981, the State Central Museum further expanded its paleontology department. The new exhibition enabled visitors to experience a scientifically reconstructed representation of Mongolia's prehistoric environment based on empirical fossil evidence. From the mid-1960s onward, the State Central Museum also emerged as a major institution for public education and international cultural promotion, serving both domestic audiences and foreign delegations and tourists. Following the 1956 reorganization, the museum was visited by more than 80,000 people annually. Visitor numbers continued to rise steadily, reaching 90,000 in 1977, 92,000 in 1978, and 135,000 in 1987 (Burnee 1994, 24). This growth clearly demonstrates that improvements in exhibition design and museum presentation contributed directly to increased public engagement and visitor interest.



**Figure 1. Visitor numbers of the State Central Museum in 1956, 1977, 1978, and 1987**

Through the successive modernization of its exhibition system, the State Central Museum achieved the status of a contemporary museum institution. Improvements in collection development, exhibition organization, and research-based public outreach significantly strengthened its methodological capacity, enabling it to function as an important advisory and methodological center for museums throughout Mongolia.

**A 1976 guidebook to the State Central Museum described the institution in the following terms:**

“Mongolia is a land of rich natural resources, rare historical monuments, and an ancient and distinctive culture. To become acquainted with all of this, one would need to travel across vast distances, crossing rivers and mountains. To save time and gain a broad understanding of Mongolia, our museum will assist you.”

The impressions recorded by numerous visitors strongly reflect the accuracy of this statement. Soviet museum specialist

P.I.Galkina, who visited Mongolia's central and regional museums in 1964, wrote in her book *Across Foreign Museums* (Moscow, 1965) that the State Central Museum, situated in the center of the capital, appeared as a major cultural institution housed within an impressive three-story building. She particularly praised the richness and diversity of the Natural History section, emphasizing the extraordinary variety of Mongolia's geological and biological resources. She further commended the museum's integrated presentation of natural history, archaeology, and art, noting that it provided visitors with a clear and comprehensive understanding of Mongolia as a whole. In 1971, Willy Fuglsang, representing the Communist Party of Denmark at the Sixteenth Congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, published his travel impressions in the newspaper *Land og Folk*. He wrote that any foreign visitor seeking to understand Mongolia would inevitably visit the National Museum in Ulaanbaatar, which he described as an exceptionally rich institution. He devoted particular attention to the dinosaur skeletons discovered in the Gobi Desert, fossilized eggs, and other prehistoric fauna. In the Natural History section, he observed rare species such as the wild ass and the Bactrian camel, while in the History section he noted exhibits relating to Mongolian nomadic life, ancient stone tools, stone carvings, and contemporary cultural artifacts. He also remarked upon the traditional felt dwelling (*ger*), describing it as a timeless form of habitation (Burnee 1994, 19).

Similarly, Cuban journalist Arnaldo Musa, in his article “Reflections after the Museum” (*Unen* newspaper 1978, №329), wrote that while viewing the thousands of exhibits displayed in the State Central Museum and the Revolution Museum, he was reminded of the Mongolian proverb: “It is better to see once than to hear a thousand times.” Such accounts clearly demonstrate the extent to which the museum's permanent exhibitions succeeded in engaging and impressing visitors. It is therefore unsurprising that the State Central Museum's permanent displays came to be widely regarded as comprehensive, accessible, and informative representations of Mongolia. This perception is further reflected in the assessment of Soviet statesman A.Kosygin, who reportedly described the museum as “an encyclopedia of Mongolia.” Documentary evidence further indicates that foreign scholars participating in international conferences on Mongolian studies frequently expressed deep admiration for the museum's exhibitions when interviewed by journalists in Ulaanbaatar, particularly emphasizing the high quality of the national museum displays.

In addition, numerous written testimonies preserved in the museum's “Visitors' Book”—ranging from schoolchildren and Pioneer members to Party and Youth League members, herders, industrial workers, and university students—record expressions of admiration, gratitude, and intellectual inspiration derived from their visits. These testimonies underscore the museum's role, particularly from the mid-1960s onward, as a major center for public education, cultural enrichment, and scientific dissemination for both domestic and international audiences. A wide range of educational and outreach activities likewise became institutionalized within the museum's operations. These included thematic and general guided tours for school and university students, educational programs, group activities, and extracurricular clubs. Beginning in 1972, documentary films and newsreels relating to Mongolia's natural environment, history, and cultural

heritage were regularly screened in conjunction with museum exhibitions, significantly enhancing public educational engagement. In this way, the State Central Museum evolved into an important institution that fostered public interest in Mongolia's natural and cultural heritage, encouraged historical and scientific inquiry, and contributed to the preservation and appreciation of traditional culture and customs (Ochir, Oyunbileg 2004, 28-29). Following Mongolia's transition to a new socio-economic system in the 1990s, the Cultural and Arts Committee decided to reorganize the State Central Museum into two separate institutions: the Mongolian National Museum of History and the Museum of Natural History. This restructuring reflected broader international trends toward the disciplinary specialization of museums, based on the belief that such specialization would accelerate institutional development and expand operational capacity. In conclusion, the exhibition system of the State Central Museum not only presented a comprehensive representation of Mongolia's history, natural environment, ethnography, and paleontological heritage, but also functioned as the country's largest and most influential museum institution, attracting extensive interest from both domestic and international audiences.

**Specialized Museums and Exhibition Development in Mongolia:** The State Central Museum played a pivotal role in the establishment and development of branch museums dedicated to specific thematic and professional fields, either by incorporating them as affiliated institutions or by facilitating their development as independent museums. A directive issued by the Minister of Culture of the Mongolian People's Republic formally placed several museums under the administrative supervision of the State Central Museum (NCA, Archives of Historical documents Fund 13, Inventory 1, File 466, 95).

Between 1924 and 1990, a number of historically and architecturally significant museums were established as branches of the State Central Museum. These included the Choijin Lama Temple Museum (1942), the Sukhbaatar Museum (1946), the Bogd Khan Palace Museum (1954), the Amarbayasgalant Monastery Museum (1960), and the Erdene Zuu Monastery Museum (1961). Through the incorporation of these institutions into a centralized museum system, the State Central Museum played an important role in the preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of Mongolia's historical, religious, and cultural heritage.

**The Mongolian Revolutionary Museum:** In 1971, the Revolutionary Museum was reorganized as the Museum of the Mongolian People's Revolution. The thematic exhibition plan was developed by Ch. Sodnom, J. Ichinkhorloo, and N. Baarai, while the academic advisory team included historians Kh. Perlee, D. Dashjamts, L. Bat-Ochir, Liguu, and Tsedev. Artistic direction was provided by the People's Artist L. Gavaa, and the chief exhibition designer was Sh. Galsandorj. The re-equipping and modernization of the museum between 1970 and 1971 was further supported by specialists from the Central Museum of the Revolution of the USSR, including D.V. Aizikov. The museum building had a total area of 2,200 m<sup>2</sup>, of which approximately 1,500 m<sup>2</sup> was allocated for exhibition purposes. Nearly 6,000 exhibits were displayed through approximately 200 exhibition panels, more than 100 display cases, and over ten exhibition screens. The exhibition was organized according to a strict chronological structure based on major historical events. Designed by architect G. Luvsandorj, the museum building enabled a highly systematic

and visually engaging presentation of historical narratives through the integration of multiple forms of visual art intended to enhance interpretive clarity and visitor experience. The building also provided appropriate conditions for the preservation, classification, and long-term storage of valuable historical and cultural artifacts. The exhibition incorporated artifacts, documentary materials, photographs, historical paintings, and sculptures. In order to strengthen interpretive accessibility and educational impact, diverse artistic media were strategically integrated into the exhibition design.

One of the most notable installations was a monumental repoussé copper relief titled *The Victory of the Revolution*, covering approximately 50 m<sup>2</sup>, created collaboratively by the Soviet artist A. Korentsov and the Mongolian artist Sh. Galsandorj. The exhibition also made extensive use of dioramas to present major historical events in a manner that was visually accessible and easily comprehensible to visitors. Furthermore, reflecting contemporary advances in science and technology, the museum incorporated modern audiovisual equipment—including film projections, slide projectors, magnetic audio recordings, and video transmission systems connected to television monitors within the exhibition halls—to support exhibition interpretation and public education (Ochir, Oyunbileg 2004, 93-95).

Between 1924 and 1990, more than ten thematic and specialized museums were established in Mongolia. Many of these institutions were housed in purpose-built museum buildings and introduced modern exhibition technologies such as dioramas, slide-film systems, slide projectors, and audiovisual recording equipment, marking a significant technological and methodological advancement in the development of Mongolian museology.

**The Revolutionary Museum of Altanbulag:** The Revolutionary Museum in Altanbulag was established in 1941 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the People's Revolution and was named in honor of D. Sukhbaatar. The museum building had a total area of 1,700 m<sup>2</sup>, of which approximately 900 m<sup>2</sup> was dedicated to the exhibition of more than 700 artifacts. The thematic exhibition plan was developed by N. Baarai, while exhibition sketches were prepared by artists G. Bayar and M. Butemj. Academic advisors included the historian Dr. G. Munkh and Colonel Sayannyambu. D.V. Aizikov of the Central Museum of the USSR also served as chief consultant for the exhibition design. The exhibition presented artifacts, archival documents, photographs, paintings, and models related to the revolutionary history of Mongolia. Particularly noteworthy was the prominent use of textile-based artistic works, including embroidery, appliqué, tapestry, and sculptural inlay, which formed a distinctive component of the exhibition design.

**Choijin Lama Temple Museum:** The Choijin Lama Temple complex was converted into a state religious museum in 1942 and was first opened to the public in 1962, when the so-called "Sereeter" exhibition arrangement was implemented. In 1964, during the transfer of certain exhibits to the Bogd Khan Palace Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, the exhibition was reorganized. The defining feature of the Choijin Lama Temple Museum lies in its integrated religious architectural complex, in which each structure embodies specific symbolic and ritual meanings. The entire ensemble represents a cohesive religious

and artistic composition originally designed for ceremonial, spiritual, and didactic purposes (Ochir, Oyunbileg 2004, 101).

**Sukhbaatar–Choibalsan Museum:** Following the death of Kh. Choibalsan in 1953, the Sukhbaatar Museum and the Choibalsan Museum were merged into a single institution known as the Sukhbaatar–Choibalsan Museum. The museum operated with ten exhibition halls dedicated primarily to revolutionary history and political commemoration.

**Museum of Ulaanbaatar City History:** The Museum of Ulaanbaatar City History was established in 1960 in accordance with Government Resolution No. 332 of the Council of Ministers (NCA, Archives of Historical documents Fund 1, Inventory 8, File 6, 27-32). The museum underwent major reorganizations in 1964, 1987, and 1995. Its exhibitions were arranged chronologically in order to present the historical development of the capital city and to foster civic identity and pride among the residents of Ulaanbaatar.

**Bogd Khan Palace Museum:** The Bogd Khan's Winter Palace was converted into a museum in 1961. The complex consists of seven temples—including the Maharaja Temple, Appliqué Temple, Fine Arts Temple, ErdemItgemjit Multi-Buddha Temple, Library Temple, and Lavrin Temple—together with the Winter Palace. Since its establishment as a museum, the complex has undergone several stages of exhibition reorganization. In 1961, when it was formally converted into a museum institution, the exhibition was redesigned for the fourth time. The curatorial approach emphasized the preservation and reconstruction of the palace's original interior arrangement on the basis of historical sources, particularly through the authentic placement of royal furniture and furnishings.

**Erdene Zuu Museum:** The exhibitions of the Erdene Zuu Museum were installed throughout the monastic complex, including the Dalai Lama Temple, Tsamba Temple, Western Zuu Temple, Main Zuu Temple, Eastern Zuu Temple, Ayush Temple, Khukh Temple, and Janraisig Temple. The museum's exhibition system sought to preserve the architectural and religious integrity of the historic monastery complex while presenting its historical and artistic significance to the public.

**G.Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts:** The establishment of the G.Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts was approved on March 31, 1965 (The Government archives Fund 1, Inventory 21, File 3, 171) and the museum officially opened in 1966. At the time of its opening, the museum consisted of ten exhibition halls displaying approximately 250 works of modern art on the first floor and around 100 works of ancient art on the upper floor. The museum attracted more than 30,000 visitors annually. Following a fire caused by an electrical fault in 1977, the museum building underwent major reconstruction and the exhibition system was subsequently reorganized. In 1989, the modern art section was separated to form an independent institution known as the "Art Gallery." After this institutional division, the remaining museum was reorganized to display fine artworks ranging from antiquity to the early twentieth century.

**Mongolian Military Museum:** The origins of the Mongolian Military Museum may be traced to Resolution No. 2 of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, issued on January 21, 1966,

which formally approved the establishment of the Museum of the Mongolian People's Army. Between 1986 and 1989, extensive preparatory work was undertaken to resolve issues related to the construction of a museum panorama complex. This included the development of thematic exhibition plans, the expansion of collections, the preparation of panorama and exhibition design solutions, as well as staffing and organizational planning. These efforts collectively laid the institutional foundation for the museum's establishment. The Museum of Mongolian Railway History was established in 1968 and officially opened on June 26, 1970. The museum building was completed in late 1982, and following a comprehensive redesign of its interior and exhibition installations, it reopened on August 5, 1983, in conjunction with Railway Workers' Day.

**G.K.Zhukov House Museum:** The G.K. Zhukov House Museum was established on August 19, 1979, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the victory at Khalkhin Gol. Dedicated to Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov—four-time Hero of the Soviet Union and Hero of Mongolia, the museum occupies the residence where Zhukov and his family lived between September 1939 and May 1940. The museum consists of three exhibition halls devoted respectively to the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, the Great Patriotic War, and the postwar life and activities of G.K. Zhukov. The exhibitions include historical photographs, archival documents, personal belongings, and letters written by Zhukov to his family.

**Challenges in Establishing Specialized Museums:** The development of exhibition design in specialized museums during this period also encountered a number of institutional and practical challenges. One representative example is the establishment of the Theatre Museum of Mongolia. The decision to establish the Theatre Museum was approved through Government Resolution No. 259 of the Council of Ministers of the Mongolian People's Republic on July 13, 1973. The museum was initially intended to open in the historic residence of Prince Kh. Khanddorj in Ulaanbaatar in 1974. Following the adoption of the resolution, the Ministry of Culture appointed a commission responsible for preparing the museum's establishment, including the development of thematic exhibition plans and preliminary design sketches.

However, a number of artists and specialists raised concerns regarding the suitability of the proposed building, citing insufficient space, fire hazards, inadequate heating, and the potential risk of damage to exhibits. As a result, the project was postponed. Due to delays in resolving issues related to funding and infrastructure, the initiative remained suspended for nearly fifteen years. Only in 1989 was preparatory work resumed, with the active participation of prominent cultural figures including State Prize laureate E. Oyun, People's Artist L. Gavaa, L. Namkhaitseren, and the scholar S. Luvsandorj. The museum was subsequently planned for Block B on the third floor of the Cultural Palace complex constructed with Soviet assistance. The thematic exhibition plan was developed through multiple collaborative discussions among the participating artists and scholars. Because of limited financial resources, the project depended heavily upon the initiative and creativity of the artists involved. Under the leadership of L. Gavaa, exhibition sketches were prepared, while Honored Cultural Figure Ch. Gungaasukh organized the theatrical production team and designed the exhibition spaces in an innovative and visually dynamic manner.

**Ministry of Public Security Museum:** The Museum of the Ministry of Public Security was established in accordance with Resolution No. 145 of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1978. The museum was founded to document the historical development and achievements of Mongolia's security, border protection, and policing institutions, and it officially began operations in 1982. The museum sought to present, through authentic documentary materials, the contributions of security personnel who safeguarded national independence, public order, and social stability during the post-revolutionary period. It also fulfilled an educational function by promoting patriotic consciousness among younger generations. The museum's collection comprised more than 3,000 artifacts related to the sixty-year history of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Border Troops, and Police organizations, approximately 1,000 of which were displayed in the permanent exhibition.

**Khalkhin Gol Victory Museum:** The Khalkhin Gol Victory Museum was established under Resolution No. 159 of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1982 and officially opened on August 18, 1984, in commemoration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the victory at Khalkhin Gol. The museum's exhibitions are dedicated to the military events of the Khalkhin Gol campaign and to the heroic sacrifices of Mongolian and Soviet soldiers. The exhibition was organized into three principal sections. The first section, symbolically titled "August 1939-Khalkhin Gol," opened with a commemorative emblem celebrating the victory over Japanese forces. It included the sculpture *Unforgettable Meeting*, depicting the meeting between V.I. Lenin and D. Sukhbaatar, schematic diagrams illustrating the expansionist plans of Germany, Italy, and Japan, excerpts from Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka's secret memorandum of 1927, and materials relating to the border clashes that preceded the conflict.

The second section presented the decisive victory of Mongolian and Soviet forces over the Japanese military. It included archival photographs, personal belongings of military commanders, a diorama of the Battle of Bayan Tsagaan, operational maps of Khalkhin Gol, and artifacts associated with figures such as Kh. Lkhagvasuren and General B. Tsog, including weapons, documents, and personal effects. The final section, known as the "Hall of Glory," commemorated the individuals who contributed to the victory and preserved the memory of those who sacrificed their lives during the conflict. Between 1960 and 1990, institutions that had initially functioned primarily as local studies centers gradually evolved into fully developed museums with expanded collections and renewed exhibition systems. A key figure in this development was J. Nanzadsuren, Honored Cultural Figure of Mongolia and Chief Exhibition Designer of the National Central Museum between 1967 and 1992. Over many years, he directed major exhibition renewal projects and produced large-scale artistic works devoted to themes such as prehistoric life and the Cretaceous period, including reconstructions of ancient environments and dinosaur exhibitions.

He also played a major role in improving regional museum exhibitions, personally supervising design projects and collaborating with artists in Arkhangai Province, Töv Province (including the Manjushri Monastery Museum), as well as the natural history museums of Khuvsgul and Selenge, and the Altanbulag Revolutionary Branch Museum. His contributions,

together with those of several generations of museum professionals, were instrumental in advancing museum development and modernizing exhibition practices in Mongolia.

**International and Traveling Exhibitions:** From the late 1960s onward, Mongolian museums became increasingly active in organizing exhibitions abroad. For example, under Resolution No. 472 issued on September 21, 1967, by the Chairman of the Union of Mongolian Artists, the first international traveling exhibition titled Mongolian Fine Art was organized between 1967 and 1970 in several socialist countries of Eastern Europe, including Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. In addition, within the framework of the "Mongolian-Soviet Cultural Cooperation Plan," an exhibition of works by Mongolian artists was held in Moscow from June 1968 to January 1969, remaining open for approximately six months (Enkhjargal 2019, 273-274).

In 1973, the Council of Ministers of the Mongolian People's Republic issued a resolution titled On Establishing a Theater Museum and Exhibition Hall for Artists with the aim of developing stage design art and promoting the works of Mongolian artists. This decision represented an important policy initiative in support of museum exhibition activities and cultural development (The government archives Fund 1, Inventory 21, File 3, 171).

In 1976, the Days of Mongolian Culture were organized on a large scale in Moscow for the first time. As part of this event, more than 120 works of ancient and modern Mongolian fine art from the Fine Arts Museum were exhibited for over twenty days across twelve halls of the Tretyakov Gallery. At the same time, the Revolution Museum presented a photographic exhibition titled Contemporary Mongolia. These events marked an important stage in the international promotion of Mongolian culture. Similar cultural programs were subsequently organized in Bulgaria in 1979, again in Moscow in 1981, and in Poland in 1984, featuring exhibitions of Mongolian fine arts and photography (National Museum of Mongolia 2014, 168).

From the 1980s onward, improvements in the material resources and organizational capacities of museums contributed to the expansion of international cooperation and the intensification of exhibition exchanges with foreign countries. Exhibitions featuring Mongolian history, fine arts, paleontology, and rare cultural artifacts were organized in the Soviet Union, Japan, the United States, Germany, South Korea, China, Australia, and France, attracting considerable international attention (National Museum of Mongolia 2014). Following the cultural cooperation agreement signed between Mongolia and the Federal Republic of Germany on June 12, 1986, a major exhibition titled *The Mongols* was organized in 1989 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich and later at the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim. Scholars have noted that this exhibition represented a high point in cultural relations between the two countries and significantly increased international interest in Mongolia.

Similarly, based on the research achievements of the Institute of Paleontology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the exhibition *Ancient Life of Mongolia* toured nineteen cities across Japan between 1985 and 1986. Furthermore, the exhibition *Dinosaurs of Mongolia and Their Environment* has,

since 1991, been presented in more than forty cities across over ten countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. These exhibitions featured scientifically important specimens, including dinosaur skeletons, fossilized eggs, and preserved remains of ancient animals and plants, and played a major role in promoting Mongolia's paleontological and natural heritage internationally. At the same time, museum professionals developed lectures and educational programs based on museum collections and exhibitions, organizing outreach activities for institutions and local communities. Museums also collaborated closely with scholars in order to strengthen exhibition content and research activities. During the 1970s and 1980s, museums actively engaged schoolchildren and students through organized visits and cultural programs, making public education an increasingly important aspect of museum work. In addition, traveling exhibitions based on museum collections were organized in provincial centers such as Tsetserleg and Darkhan, bringing museum services and educational programs closer to local communities. This reflected both the adoption of international museological practices and their adaptation to Mongolian conditions (Baarai N, Tumur-Ochir S 1975, 21). In conclusion, between 1924 and 1990, Mongolian museums not only renewed and modernized their permanent exhibitions but also actively expanded temporary exhibitions both domestically and internationally. Through these activities, museums broadened their institutional functions and made significant contributions to the promotion of Mongolia's history, culture, art, and natural heritage on an international scale. During this period, state museums successfully organized more than twenty major exhibitions in the fields of art, culture, ethnography, and paleontology.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the establishment of museums within the framework of the Institute of Scriptures and Literatures officially began in 1924. Through the sustained efforts of successive generations of scholars, museum professionals, and administrators, the foundations of Mongolia's modern museum sector had largely been established by 1956, enabling museums to develop into an important sphere of cultural and educational activity. During the period under review, the permanent exhibitions of thirteen museums were renewed, while numerous temporary and traveling exhibitions were organized in the fields of history, art, culture, natural history, ethnography, and palaeontology. These exhibitions responded to the growing educational and cultural needs of the public, increased visitor engagement, and played a significant role in cultural enlightenment and public education.

At the same time, museums acquired purpose-built facilities, evolved from local studies cabinets into fully institutionalized museums, incorporated technological innovations into permanent exhibitions, and increasingly organized exhibitions abroad. These developments reflect the major transformations and reforms that occurred in both permanent and temporary exhibition practices during this period. Through the successful organization of international exhibitions and the expansion of opportunities for professional training and exchange, Mongolian museums played an important role in promoting Mongolia's history, culture, and natural heritage to international audiences. Finally, it is important to emphasize that the modernization of museum exhibition design and presentation in Mongolia was achieved through the combined

efforts of Mongolian museum professionals and foreign specialists, whose contributions were instrumental in advancing the development of Mongolian museology.

## List of Abbreviations

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
PBOCC	Political Bureau of the Central Committee
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
PDEA	Presidium of the People's Deputies' Assembly
NCA	National Central Archive

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