

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC SEMINAR
“NOMADS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SILK ROADS”

PAPER ABSTRACT

Means of survival means of development; handicrafts and tourism on the Silk Roads in Mongolia today.

Tourism is a major process in modern society and culture. Museums and craft production are key elements in this process. After a review of tourism and the role of museums in Mongolia, and representations of Mongolia in Europe, it is argued that craft production should play an important part in the development of this sector of the Mongolian economy.

MONGOLIA 1992: UNESCO NOMADS ALTAIC ROUTE PROJECT

CONFERENCE PAPER: “Means of survival, means of development; handicrafts and tourism on the Silk Roads in Mongolia today”.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the main growth industries in the world, and may be its largest industry by the end of the century (Smith 1981). Given that economic development is of primary concern in any country I want to examine strands of Mongolia’s economy which are complementary to the primary output of animal products, raw materials and factory-made goods. That is, I wish to discuss tourism and the role of crafts and museums, which are major components in the tourist process. How does Mongolia already perform in this field, and what are the possibilities for further development?

TYPES OF TOURISM IN MONGOLIA TODAY

Tourism in most countries including Mongolia usually has an element of state control. In earlier times this also applied to visitors such as the friars on missions to the Mongol courts: John of Plano Carpini, Andre of Longjumeau and William of Rubruck; and traders including Marco Polo. In recent times Mongolian tourism has been managed through the government travel agency Zhuulchin/Juulchin, which was established in 1954, and has been largely, but not entirely, directed to tourists from the USSR and Eastern Europe, and Mongolian, internal tourists or 'tourees'. A feature of this process has been Youth Tourism, which aims at educating young people; in the economic and political development of Mongolia. Mongolia offers all of the main types of tourism and tourist attractions:

Environment/Adventure tourism

Environment/Adventure tourism is favoured by the wide range of diverse environments, scenic attractions, and the large number of sunny days (2-300). Although the severe winter inhibits tourism, with the season only opening in early May, skiing is being developed as a winter activity.

Mongolia's flora and fauna are equally diverse and plentiful, with government control preserves and National Parks. Particularly notable features include the fossil remains of dinosaurs, mammoths, pangolins and tortoises etc. As we have seen, spaces are wide open, with the rural population forming less than 50% of the total population of about 2m (1938 est).

Licensed hunting tourism developed from the 1960s, with most hunters coming from non-socialist countries. Angling is also developing as a pastime. Hiking tours were introduced about 1984, and have become popular. Government support has been given to develop the facilities required for these activities, with tourist centres in Selenge and Terelj in northern Mongolia; Khujirt and Uvurkhangai near Karakorum/Kharkhorin and Erdene-Zuu in central Mongolia; and Bayan Tsogt and Yolyn Am in south Mongolia. Air and land transport systems provide the mobility needed for this form of tourism but, as recent circumstances have shown, transport is vulnerable to shortages in fuel supplies.

Historical tourism

Historical tourism, which caters for education-oriented visitors who wish to see objects rather than people: buildings and museums for example, is particularly well developed in Ulan Bator. I discuss this below, but meanwhile note that architectural remains in the country at large are being discovered in increasing number. In 1983, the Director of the Board on Restoration of Cultural Monuments stated that the remains of over 700 ancient palaces, fortresses, temples and monasteries are present in Mongolia (Montsame Aug, no.31, 16). Towns first appeared in Mongolian territory over 2000 years ago (Montsame Nov 1979, 45, p.13), and whilst Kharkhorin/Karakorum was a major centre of Asian trade and communication, it is not the only remnant of towns dating from the period of the 9th to 13th century. From the 16th century onwards there are the remains of palaces and temples.

Although many of these structures were destroyed or damaged in the 1930s and 1940s, recent governments have been involved in reconstruction work, and it is currently planned that after re-construction, many will serve as historical and ethnographic museums as well as other cultural establishments. Sacred mountain sites and tent temples, such as that at Manidshir/Manzshir, have also been re-opened, adding to this number.

Ethnic tourism

Meeting the people of Mongolia and seeing something of their daily life is part of the experience of living in the holiday and ger camps for tourists which were previously noted,

and, to some extent, of what one might term Economic/Political tourism: the tours of factories and manufacturing plants which are also a feature in Mongolia. This category overlaps with cultural tourism.

Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism, the experience of local colour, is catered for by a variety of festivals and events: music, theatre, opera, ballet, circus, cinema and sports festivals which combine Mongolian features and those from other countries. The exchange of exhibitions with other countries is well recognized as a primary means of cultural exchange and education. Scientific gatherings such as this, in various disciplines, are another dimension in the range of activity. Films and exhibitions from Mongolia really cannot be faulted in the range of these activities which it hosts and offers, and in development of its museum service, to which I now turn.

ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN MONGOLIAN TOURISM

Museums generally form a 'shop window' for culture. The role of museums in Mongolian tourism may be considered briefly in terms of Mongolian and European museums note an initial difference of definition of ethnographic museums. In Mongolia, as in many countries, an ethnographic museum is seen to deal with the culture and social history of Britain, which lacks its own national museum that particular society. In this sense, we term an ethnographic museum one which deals with societies and cultures on a worldwide, comparative basis. The Mongolian government recognizes the role of ethnographic museums in the moral and nationalistic education of its people (Montsame 9, Feb-Mar 1984, p 10) and in tourism.

The Fine Arts Museum opened in 1966, and the State Central Museum, display artifacts from the Neolithic period onwards, including bronze wares, Hunnic felts, Turkic remains and the products of named and anonymous Mongolian craftsmen, painters, and sculptors etc. from the late 17th century onwards. Site museums include the Winter Palace of the Bogdo Khan, the Choijin Lama temple, Gandan Monastery and the Ulan Bator Museum. The Museum of the Revolution brings one to the modern period and the Modern Art Museum stands comparison with the finest art galleries anywhere in the world.

The collections representing Mongolia in European museums are very mixed in nature. In the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen a major exhibition has just opened. This is based on magnificent material collected in the 1930s by Henning-Haslund

Christensen and Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark. Other major collections are to be found in Sweden, France, Germany and Russia.

In Britain, Mongolia is less well represented in museum collections than other central Asian countries such as Tibet. On the whole, these Central Asian collections, which were assembled as a result of imperial and commercial interests. Since I was keenly aware of this deficiency in the Asian collections at the Horniman Museum, I have made efforts to collect and study Central Asia over the number of years to make good this gap.

In 1979, under the terms of the Cultural Agreement between Mongolia and the United Kingdom, and by the efforts of the Mongolian Artists Union, a collection of mostly contemporary material was made by the Horniman Museum in London. This material: a ger and its furnishings, and case material illustrating most aspects of contemporary life, has been shown since then at a variety of venues including large scale festivals at Bath, Billingham and Bromsgrove, that is throughout England. At the Horniman we have held major exhibitions of this collection: 'Mongolia: Land of the Five Animals', and 'Tents, a Home, Shelter & Way of Life'. The latter was visited by Sukhbaatar's troupe who presented 'Music & Dance of Mongolia' at the museum in 1988. The popularity of things Mongolian in Britain is enormous, and I estimate that about one million people have seen this collection since 1979.

London has also hosted an exhibition of contemporary Mongolian painting, and looks forward to further exhibition, whilst the recent travelling exhibition from the State Central Museum to Munich left everyone amazed as the wealth of Mongolian material culture.

I should not close the review without noting that Mongolian studies in Britain are undertaken at Cambridge and at Leeds University. The department at Leeds, my home town which is twinned with Ulan Bator, was founded in 1968 by Owen Lattimore, with sterling help from Urgunge Onon, and has provided a major means of exchange between Mongolia and Britain ever since. A Mongolian Foundation has also been established in London this year.

ROLE OF CRAFTS IN TOURISM

The role of crafts is significant element in the tourist process. In the pre-industrial context, handicrafts are one of the primary means of adaptation by people to their various environments: physical, social and cultural, but in contemporary conditions craft development is often seen as having low priority, if not irrelevance, in economic and industrial development. However, a lack of craft products means that tourists have little to take away in their hand essential for many museum visitors, and that what is available is of very mixed

quality. An obvious contrast here is the great difference in quality between what is on show in museums and what one can only term 'tourist tat ' or turistica.

Most countries are guilty of the production of such material, but I would note that the tea bowls, jewelry and wood carvings which are on sale in ordinary shops in Mongolia are of generally high quality and could perhaps find their way on to the tourist circuit more readily. The production of many items of Mongolian material culture such as knives and eating sets, items which were formally typical characteristic of Mongolian social status and tribal group, could also be revived for the tourist market.

It is still often stated in contemporary literature (cf Pacey 1990, 20), that craft production was minimal among the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. This view is belied by a stroll through Mongolia's museums and cursory glance at Mongolian literature (for example Heissig & Muller 1989; Tsultem 1982, 1987, 1989). Whilst accepting that a proportion of such artifacts were made by a variety of foreign craftsmen. The production of material culture and the boundaries of its distribution are not always sharply defined, especially in the central Asian context.

Historically, Mongolian crafts were wide ranging, including the techniques involved in the domestication of livestock; felt manufacture for clothing, furnishing and housing; and a variety of metals and associated materials for weapons, implements and jewellery. In the Imperial period the mode of production was by command, craftsmen were brought in from various parts of Eurasia, Mongolia was a 'receiving' rather than a 'producing' society, although not completely so, since local metalworkers were highly regarded in the Chingisid period. The closure of Mongolia during the Manchu period led to a dependence on Chinese and other craftsmen, particularly in Inner Mongolia craftsmen were monks. There is evidence of some continued reliance on outside craftsmen today since Newari metalworkers are currently images and religious apparatus to Mongolian and Tibetan order - a continuation of the imperial tradition perhaps.

CONCLUSION – PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR MONGOLIAN TOURISM

Mongolian tourism in recent years has been badly damaged by events outside its control. The total number of tourists in Mongolia increased from 1976 to 1984 (Montsame Sept 84, 39), and the number of foreign tourists doubled in the years 1981-85 (Montsame Jan 1985, 4, p. 10). In 1983 Zhullchin arranged trips for 170000 tourists from 30 countries, an average of 3600 per week (Montsame 51, Dec 1984, p. 7). In 1958 over 250000 tourists from 62 countries visited Mongolia (Ravdan, B., 1986, Tourist Routes in Mongolia, News from

Mongolia, no. 12, June 11). In 1990 and 1991, some 10000 foreign tourists per year visited Mongolia.

Since Mongolia drew many of its tourists from the USSR and Eastern Europe, one can only assume that their economic decline has led to a reduction in CMEA tourists to Mongolia. Also, with the new freedom to travel, many people from these regions are now visiting Western Europe. I have noted the popularity of Mongolia in Western Europe, and now propose to 'stick my neck out' or, alternatively, 'Teach my grandmother to suck eggs', by offering very humble and probably redundant advice.

Mongolia has tended to be a 'secretive' society in many respects, the lack of maps and signposting for museums is only one example. In Britain there is no listing for Mongolia in visa guides, vaccinations and hotel recommendations. Even my postmistress doesn't know where Mongolia is whilst there are sound cultural and historical reasons for this reticence, may one plead that more publicity is now necessary.

In western tourist literature Mongolia is offered as a brief part trip, part of a 'regional package', rather than a 'whole trip package', usually as a stopover, for other major trips to China or Russia. Mongolia, like everywhere else, would prefer high-spending tourists rather than budget travelers. Please don't the backpacker, most have some money, and are as discerning buyers as high budget tourists. By leaving the well-trodden tourist circuit they may also take money into wider sectors of the economy, and become a steady, bread and butter type of tourists, as in Nepal and Thailand, if facilities are made available gers can happily make up for any lack of hotel beds for this sector of the market.

The necessity to increase export of high quality, finished goods is recognized by Mongolian government. The problem is to find a cost-effective way of getting products out for sale, given the land-locked position of the country. Some kind of ballast-loading like Chinese ceramics with tea is needed. Portable, high-cost objects have always been one solution to this, problem, and paintings and textiles an obvious types of material to export. If reactions to exhibitions at the Horniman are any indication, the demand is there. A further problem of competitive pricing then arises. High quality craft production for the tourist market within Mongolia would help to overcome this problem by bringing customers to the goods rather than the opposite.

The virtue of craft products is that they may be manufactured by pre-industrial technology and methods which do not require investment in imported foreign machinery and equipment, in this sense, 'small is beautiful.' Craft production for the tourist industry may thus

help economic development in conditions where the opportunities for small scale industry are scarce or lacking.

'Modernization' has led and may lead to a further decline in craft skills. The spread of modern tools and factory-made products inhibits 'traditional' craftwork. Also fashions have changed, for example for weapons and some types of jewellery, and patrons such as the nobility are also gone. Tourism can replace these in part, and this may lead to improving standards in craftwork but the recording of crafts and the entry of craft products on the market are vitally necessary activities not only for the purposes of tourism but for Mongolia's cultural identity.

The remarkable development of a variety of styles of paintings is well recognized and valued in Mongolia, the performing arts, for example folk song and dance, are also recognized. These arts can stay unaided. Similar recognition now needs to be given to craftsmen in decorative and applied art, the exemplification of Animal Style, which is at the roots of Mongolian culture. As well as Zanabazar one may also recall Khasgombo for applique; Puntsag-Osor for metal masks with coral inlay; Sharavfor chasing, Choijav for weapons; Sambu for carving; Suren for wood-carving; Jambaljav for wooden inlay etc. etc. The list of former craftsmen in applied arts goes on and, I am sure, could be matched today, and their products find a market in tourism.

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