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## The Role of Museum Diplomacy in the Construction of Soft Power: The Case of China and the United States

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**Abstract:** *As cultural institutions, museums serve as vital vehicles for international cultural exchange, allowing the general public to understand a nation's culture and history. In recent years, museums have begun to exert increasingly significant cultural influence on the global stage and play an indispensable role in building national soft power. The concept of museum diplomacy has gradually emerged as a focal point within academic circles; this relatively new subfield of international relations reflects the growing recognition of culture as a strategic resource. This paper aims to analyze the role of museum diplomacy in shaping national soft power, exploring how museums promote mutual understanding and exchange between nations through international cooperation and practice. Using China and the United States as case studies, it elucidates the practical pathways and insights of museum diplomacy in enhancing national image and expanding cultural influence, supplemented by a brief analysis of Mongolia's potential for development*

**Keywords:** *Soft power, Museum diplomacy, China, the United States*

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, as globalization deepens and the landscape of international relations evolves, culture has assumed an increasingly prominent role in international exchange and cooperation. Competition among nations no longer confines itself to economic and military spheres: cultural appeal and the capacity to disseminate values have become crucial dimensions for measuring a nation's comprehensive strength. The theory of "soft power," proposed by American scholar Joseph Nye, enables nations to shape positive images and enhance influence on the international stage through attraction rather than coercion, thereby advancing their diplomatic objectives through subtle means.

Against this backdrop, museums, as vital institutions for preserving cultural memory and disseminating knowledge, have gradually emerged as key platforms for international exchange and cultural diplomacy. Through exhibitions, research, museum summitry, and digital dissemination, museums not only showcase national cultural achievements and historical narratives but also serve as bridges fostering mutual understanding and trust within the international community. This practice, which uses culture as a medium and exchange as its purpose, has come to be summarized as "museum diplomacy". It embodies a concrete form of cultural diplomacy while also serving as a key mechanism for soft power operations.

Currently, an increasing number of countries recognize the potential of museums

in shaping national image, enhancing international reputation, and promoting cross-cultural dialogue. As two global cultural powers, the United States and China each leverage museums in distinct ways to advance international exchange and cultural dissemination. The U.S. museum system is renowned for its professionalism, openness, and global networks. China, meanwhile, actively builds a cultural diplomacy model with distinct Chinese characteristics through cultural loan exhibitions, thematic exhibitions, and overseas museum collaborations. Comparing the museum diplomacy practices of these two nations helps reveal the diverse pathways and strategic differences in leveraging museums for soft power construction.

This article argues that museum diplomacy functions as a strategic instrument of soft power by enabling states to shape international perceptions through cultural representation and institutional cooperation. To examine this argument, the paper adopts a qualitative research approach, combining descriptive and comparative analysis with a literature review to explore soft power, cultural diplomacy, and international museum practices. China and the United States are selected as comparative cases due to their distinct political systems, institutional structures, and influential roles in global cultural diplomacy.

## Soft Power and Museum Diplomacy

Countries enhance their influence and national image on the international stage by implementing soft power policies. In the early 1990s, Harvard University professor Joseph Nye first introduced the concept of “soft power”, after which theoretical research and practical applications in the field rapidly expanded. Nye defined soft power as a nation’s ability to achieve its objectives or advance its interests through attraction and persuasion. It constitutes a vital component of a nation’s comprehensive strength, distinct from traditional hard power that relies on military or economic might. Soft power encompasses a broad spectrum of elements, including culture, education, legal frameworks, institutional development, governance capabilities, and national identity. Collectively, these factors shape a nation’s overall influence and international image.<sup>1</sup> Soft power primarily derives from culture, political values, and foreign policy. Museum diplomacy, as a vital channel for disseminating a nation’s culture and values, embodies the practical application of such soft power concepts.

From the perspective of international relations theory, museum diplomacy can be regarded as a form of non-traditional diplomacy, representing an emerging practice in modern diplomatic engagement. The core

characteristic of this new diplomacy lies in the fact that diplomatic activities and the role of representatives are no longer confined to state institutions but are conducted within the broader international community.<sup>2</sup> Museum diplomacy fundamentally underscores the vital role museums play in public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> This is because museums collect and exhibit artworks or artifacts, showcasing a nation’s cultural values and historical memory to the international community. Public diplomacy refers to a process of communication and information exchange through which states, as well as governmental and non-governmental actors, promote and disseminate their culture, values, attitudes, and interests to foreign publics to influence perceptions and, ultimately, policy outcomes.<sup>4</sup> As an integral component of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy utilizes a nation’s soft power through artistic and cultural activities to foster mutual understanding among societies. It encompasses a broad range of fields, including film, literature, music festivals, and museum exhibitions. Cultural diplomacy has been defined as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding”.<sup>5</sup> By curating

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Shaun Riordan, *The New Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Sophia Leigh Cambare, “The Future of Museum Diplomacy: Engaging in the Future by Correcting the Past,” *FactsAsia*, 2023, <https://factsasia.org/blog/the-future-of-museum-diplomacy-engaging-in-the-future-by-correcting-the-past>

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Gregory, “American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 6, nos. 3–4 (2011): 351–372, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119111X583941>

<sup>5</sup> Milton C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey* (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003).

meticulously designed exhibitions or organizing international touring shows, museums can shape national image, foster cross-cultural understanding, and establish friendly relations with other countries at the non-governmental level, thereby becoming a significant vehicle for national soft power. Lord and Blankenberg argue that museum diplomacy serves both as a practical form of international exchange and as a means to demonstrate a nation's cultural soft power.<sup>6</sup> The authors emphasize that incorporating the influence of museums into the research of soft power helps broaden its definition, highlighting the strategic value of cultural institutions in international relations.

From a museum studies perspective, museum diplomacy can be understood as closely linked to the communication theory of museology. It conceptualizes museums as cultural and informational intermediaries engaged in international relations. In this context, museums function as sites where soft power is exercised through information exchange, the promotion of mutual understanding, the attraction of international audiences, and the dissemination of cultural values. Moreover, contemporary museology has evolved into an increasingly expansive and interdisciplinary field, encompassing diverse theoretical approaches and critical reflections on museums' roles. Within this

framework, New Museology highlights the social and political functions of museums, emphasizing their active engagement with communities and societies.<sup>7</sup> This perspective does not exclude any type of museum, whether traditional or emerging forms such as virtual museums, as it is closely associated with experimentation and innovation within the museum sector. It further argues that museums are not merely institutions for the preservation and display of artifacts but dynamic spaces for expressing, negotiating, and fostering cultural diversity through public participation. Accordingly, when considering both their institutional classification and their broader social missions, such as the promotion of culture and education, museums can be effectively situated within the conceptual framework of New Museology.

Therefore, museum diplomacy can be regarded as a novel form of diplomacy that integrates international relations theory with museum practice. Although no unified official definition exists, it is generally understood as the practice of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. As a form of soft power, museum diplomacy serves national interests by promoting cultural exchange and international cooperation; it influences foreign public perceptions by showcasing a nation's history, art, and cultural values.

### **Museum Diplomacy in China**

China is committed to promoting museum activities on an international scale, actively participating in the establishment of

global museum exchange mechanisms, and placing high importance on its role in cultural diplomacy. Simultaneously, through cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Gail Dexter Lord and Ngaire Blankenberg, *Cities, Museums and Soft Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Georges Henri Rivière, "Muséologie" (1981), reprinted in *La muséologie selon Georges Henri Rivière* (Paris: Dunod, 1989).

dialogues with Western nations, China leverages its ethnic heritage and national reform achievements as vital resources for cultural diplomacy, enhancing its international image and cultural influence.<sup>8</sup> In 2016, the National Museum of China ranked first among the world's most visited museums, receiving 7.55 million visitors,<sup>9</sup> demonstrating the global appeal of its museum sector. The "Main Guidelines for Promoting Museum Reform and Development" set the goal of building a "World Museum Power" by 2035,<sup>10</sup> highlighting the role of museums as a key platform for cultural communication and national image building. As a nation with a long history and abundant cultural resources, China can display its unique culture and heritage through diverse formats. By organizing international exhibitions, hosting museum summitry, and showcasing distinctive architectural styles, China is able to communicate its cultural values to the world.

**International exhibitions.** China's renowned museums, such as the Palace Museum in Beijing, play a significant role in international cultural diplomacy.<sup>11</sup> By hosting

exhibitions, many museums introduce overseas cultural relics to domestic audiences while showcasing China's history and culture to the international community. In 2023, the Palace Museum hosted an exhibition titled "Thriving in a Collaborative World: 'Belt and Road' Cooperation in Cultural Heritage and Archaeology" displaying 84 archaeological artifacts from 17 domestic and international institutions.<sup>12</sup> This exhibition demonstrated China's achievements in cultural heritage preservation and archaeological research to the international community. By presenting the historical context of artifacts along the Silk Road, the exhibition highlighted cross-border cultural exchange and cooperation, enhancing cultural interaction among nations. **Museum summitry.** These high-level meetings among museum directors serve as crucial initiatives to strengthen international cooperation, facilitate information exchange, and enhance museum management capabilities.<sup>13</sup> Such gatherings further reinforce connections among museums worldwide, deepen dialogue and exchange, and advance the international development of museums. "The Conference of Museum Directors of China, Korea, and Japan" is one

<sup>8</sup> V. I. Fokin and E. E. Elts, "The Role of Museum Affairs in Russia-China Cultural Exchanges," *Journal of Northeast Asia Studies*, no. 4 (2020): 12-20, <https://doi.org/10.19498/j.cnki.dbyxk.2020.04.003>

<sup>9</sup> Judith Rubin, ed., *TEA/AECOM 2016 Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report* (Themed Entertainment Association, 2017), <https://aecom.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2016-ThemeMuseum-Index.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "关于推进博物馆改革发展的指导意见" (Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Reform and Development of Museums), 2021, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfb/gwyxwbgxwfbh/wqfbh>

[\\_2284/2021n\\_2711/2021n11y03rsw/wjxgzc\\_4238/202208/t20220808\\_315114.html](https://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfb/gwyxwbgxwfbh/wqfbh_2284/2021n_2711/2021n11y03rsw/wjxgzc_4238/202208/t20220808_315114.html)

<sup>11</sup> Kirk A. Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, "BRI-Themed Archaeology Outcomes on Display," 2023, [https://english.beijing.gov.cn/latest/news/202309/t20230929\\_3269935.html](https://english.beijing.gov.cn/latest/news/202309/t20230929_3269935.html)

<sup>13</sup> Sascha Prieue, *Museum Diplomacy: Parsing the Global Engagement of Museums*, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, 2021), <https://culturaldiplomacyinitiative.com/publications/museum-diplomacy-parsing-the-global-engagement-of-museums>

such example of a museum summitry. The conference was established in 2006 by the national museums of the three countries and, as is customary, is held every two years; to date, 13 sessions have been held. During the conference, the directors of the three museums report on their work in archival management, collection management, scientific research, exhibition organization, public education, and heritage restoration and discuss cooperation matters.<sup>14</sup> Through planning the exhibition, these three countries can foster cross-cultural dialogue, seeking shared historical and cultural understanding. As a major international gathering for museum directors and senior administrators, museum summitry provides a platform for fostering transnational cooperation and exchange, enabling museums to share experiences and best practices.

**Architectural styles.** In museum experiences, the architecture itself and spatial design sometimes prove more compelling than individual exhibitions.<sup>15</sup> At times, the grand architectural style and historical spatial layout constitute an “exhibition” in their own right, serving as key attractions for visitors. A museum’s unique charm comes from its unique visitor experiences and architectural design, which set it apart from other cultural institutions. In China, newly built museums prioritize cultural heritage while also innovating in architectural design and incorporating modern elements. Chinese

museums have gradually recognized that they can leverage striking architectural designs to showcase the nation’s “soft power”.<sup>16</sup> For example, the Shanghai Astronomy Museum, considered the world’s largest astronomy museum, resembles a giant iron clam. The Guangzhou Museum of Art is built to be a blooming flower, and the Chengdu Science and Fantasy Museum resembles a futuristic space station. China uses these distinctive architectural styles in its museum diplomacy to design buildings that attract the world’s attention. Therefore, because architectural styles help entice international tourists and promote a nation’s cultural image, they can be regarded as tools for advancing cultural diplomacy.

Overall, China’s museum diplomacy provides a platform for transnational cooperation through diverse fields and approaches. As illustrated by the above examples, one characteristic of China’s museum diplomacy is its adeptness at identifying shared historical and cultural ground to foster international museum collaboration. Moreover, beyond emphasizing the international dissemination of exhibition content, China’s museum diplomacy also prioritizes institutionalized cooperation and cultural expression. Unique architectural styles further demonstrate the use of innovation to shape appeal. China actively leverages museums to disseminate

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<sup>14</sup> Newspim, “The 13th Korea-China-Japan National Museum Directors’ Meeting Held in Seoul,” 2024, <https://china.newspim.com/news/view?idx=20240709000746>

<sup>15</sup> Lord and Blankenberg, *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Chung, Andrew Manley, Yi-Wen Wang, Michael Silk, and Rebecca Bailey, “Cross-Cultural Collaboration and Cultural Production within China’s Public Museums: Examining the Challenges and Practices Guiding Administration,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 29, no. 3 (2023): 328–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2022.2045978>

culture and engage in international museum dialogue, thus subtly building its soft power.

### Museum Diplomacy in the United States

The United States stands as one of the world's most influential soft power nations, with cultural diplomacy long occupying a pivotal role in its national foreign policy strategy. As a vital component of this approach, museum diplomacy provides crucial support for shaping American soft power by presenting the nation's culture, values, and history. Throughout the 20th century, American museums, art galleries, and cultural centers actively engaged in cultural diplomacy. Particularly during the Cold War era, the government organized and funded overseas contemporary art exhibitions through the United States Information Agency (USIA), combining artistic dissemination with political objectives to strengthen national image and ideological influence.<sup>17</sup> These practices laid the foundation for modern American museum diplomacy. Through exhibitions, interagency collaboration, and cultural narratives, American museum diplomacy continues to shape international perceptions of U.S. culture and values. The following sections will explore key pathways of this diplomacy, examining collaborative research and cultural property repatriation.

**Collaborative research.** Museums conduct various research activities in collaboration

with other museums, universities, and research organizations, as well as with individual researchers. These include joint field research, such as archaeological excavations and scientific research teams' fieldwork, and studies focused on the provenance, storage, and conservation of museum collections.<sup>18</sup> Enhancing soft power through collaborative research with museums in other countries offers a unique perspective. Such initiatives can be seen as fostering academic exchange and knowledge sharing, thereby establishing a nation's professional image and scholarly authority within the international community. According to the Smithsonian Institution's Annual Report 2024, the organization published a total of 1953 research outputs, with 89.4% resulting from cross-institutional collaborations, reflecting its robust international scientific network.<sup>19</sup> When research outcomes carry global significance, this cooperation demonstrates a nation's capabilities in cultural heritage preservation and academic research, serving as a manifestation of soft power.

The United States values partnerships with countries like Mongolia, supporting their cultural, educational, and scientific endeavors to enhance local research capabilities. For

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<sup>17</sup> Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Priewe, *Museum Diplomacy: Parsing the Global Engagement of Museums*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Smithsonian Institution, *Smithsonian Research Online: Annual Report 2024* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2024), <https://research.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2025/05/Annual-Report-SRO-2024-1.pdf>

example, the Smithsonian Institution maintains long-term collaborations with multiple institutions, including the Embassy of Mongolia in the United States and the Mongolian Cultural Center. Together, they organize conferences on Mongolian studies to advance academic exchanges in fields such as linguistics, art, history, and anthropology. Its “Deer Stone Project,” launched in 2001 in partnership with the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, it documented over 500 deer stones and contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage in northern Mongolia.<sup>20</sup> These collaborations have deepened scientific research and cultural ties between the two nations, strengthening bilateral relations. Moreover, the United States possesses advanced archaeological technologies and scientific research capabilities, while Mongolia boasts a unique cultural heritage and archaeological resources. Through collaboration, both sides leverage complementary strengths to advance academic research. In this process, the United States demonstrates an open, knowledge-sharing approach, reinforcing its image as a global leader in culture and science.

**Repatriation of cultural property.** In recent years, the return of cultural artifacts has become widespread, and the number of cultural groups around the world calling on museums to give back their cultural treasures continues to grow. In particular, many controversial cultural artifacts have been found in museums of former colonial powers such as the United Kingdom, the United

States, Germany, and Japan. Many American museums hold historical objects with origins in other countries. The United States has begun to address the provenance of historical artifacts, taking steps to return them. In 2022, the Smithsonian Institution formally returned 29 Benin bronzes from its collection to the Nigerian National Museum and additionally loaned nine exhibits for a long-term loan.<sup>21</sup> The move was intended both as a response to international criticism of the colonial-era appropriation of cultural heritage and as a move to foster more equitable, mutual understanding of international relations through cultural institutions. This practice of returning museum artifacts holds significant importance in public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, as it helps foster mutual trust between nations, ease historical disputes, and advance bilateral relations. Therefore, the repatriation of cultural property also serves as a means to shape soft power.

In general, U.S museum diplomacy advances academic exchange and knowledge sharing through collaborative research with other museums. Simultaneously, U.S. museums play an active role in cultural property restitution, conveying signals of friendship and cooperation to recipient nations through the return of artifacts. These dual practices demonstrate that U.S museum diplomacy fosters cultural exchange through archaeology and research while also enhancing international influence through cultural stewardship and collaboration. By leveraging collaborative research and artifact

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<sup>20</sup> Smithsonian Global. “The Mongolian-Smithsonian Deer Stone Project (DSP).” *Smithsonian Institution*, 2016. <https://global.si.edu/projects/mongolian-smithsonian-deer-stone-project-dsp>

<sup>21</sup> National Museum of African Art, “Benin Bronzes: Ambassadors of the Oba (Exhibition),” *Smithsonian Institution*, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://africa.si.edu/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/benin-bronzes-ambassadors-of-the-oba/>

restitution, U.S museum diplomacy employs museums as instruments of soft power.

The choice of China and the United States is based on both historical patterns and current trends in the growth of museum diplomacy. According to the 2025 Soft Power Index, the United States and China rank first and second, respectively.<sup>22</sup> While their soft power cannot be attributed solely to museum diplomacy, it is closely connected to broader cultural policies and the role of cultural institutions, including museums. In China and the United States' different political systems and institutional cultures create two distinct models of museum diplomacy. In China, museum diplomacy is embedded within a state-led framework, where cultural outreach is strategically coordinated by government

institutions to project national identity and enhance international influence. In contrast, the United States has used museums as instruments of foreign policy since the Cold War, but it has done so within a more decentralized system. Its museum sector is largely driven by non-governmental organizations and civil society, characterized by institutional autonomy, cultural diversity, and an emphasis on public engagement and inclusivity. As a country with a rich historical and cultural heritage, it has immense potential for the development of museums. In terms of diplomacy, Mongolia can draw on the successful experiences and policies of these two nations, adapting them to its own national conditions, which is of significant importance for its future development policies.

### Implications for Mongolia

Beyond the methods mentioned, museums' international work typically encompasses conventional practices such as traveling exhibitions, loan exhibitions, digital museums, public engagement, and collaborations with international organizations. Additionally, there are instances in which establishing branch museums in other countries or focusing on environmental and climate change issues can also enhance a nation's own soft power. The methodology employed in this study extends beyond these common international practices, revealing some distinctive strategies adopted by American and Chinese museums in

leveraging museum diplomacy and enhancing national soft power. It also offers valuable insights for other museums seeking to draw upon these experiences.

As a nation with a long history and rich cultural heritage, Mongolia possesses extensive museum resources. Its soft power is typically manifested in art, music, traditional festivals, traditional culture, and nomadic civilization. Mongolian museums play an important role in promoting the country's culture overseas. Moving forward, Mongolia can further leverage museums to enhance its national soft power. For instance, through the development of digital museums, both

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<sup>22</sup> Brand Finance, *Global Soft Power Index 2025* (London: Brand Finance, 2025), <https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

domestic and international visitors, as well as online users, can gain deeper insights into Mongolian history and culture.

Mongolian museums can expand cross-border exchange channels by hosting international and traveling exhibitions, thereby elevating Mongolia's influence in the global cultural sphere. The international exhibition projects undertaken by the Chinggis Khaan National Museum in recent years serve as a prime example. The exhibition "Chinggis Khaan: How the Mongols Changed the World" has been exhibited in multiple countries, garnering widespread attention. To enhance the international influence of Mongolian museums in exhibitions, future efforts could focus on organizing more thematic exhibitions and collaborating with other countries to co-curate joint exhibitions. Simultaneously, Mongolian museums can leverage digital technology to engage international audiences through virtual exhibitions, expanding the reach of cultural dissemination. Exhibition content can highlight Mongolia's unique cultural elements, such as nomadic civilization and traditional festivals, to establish a distinctive cultural brand and enhance international recognition. Furthermore, museums can seek cultural commonalities with neighboring countries or other nations sharing similar nomadic traditions to develop multifaceted international exhibitions.

Mongolia can draw inspiration from the practices of museum summitry. By establishing similar regional and international

museum exchange mechanisms, the country can showcase its unique cultural heritage and academic achievements while playing a more active role in international cultural cooperation. Moreover, it can seek cultural commonalities with neighboring countries and regional partners to organize joint exhibitions and academic dialogues. Furthermore, high-level museum conferences can provide opportunities for institutions to exchange insights on collection preservation, artifact restoration, and management practices. Institutionalized conference formats help consolidate long-term cooperative relationships among museums.

In 2024, the Chinggis Khaan National Museum was named one of the "Top 20 Museums of Cultural Hot Spots in 2024" with the tenth-largest total area in Asia, the museum is regarded as Mongolia's most ambitious cultural construction project in nearly a century.<sup>23</sup> The architectural style of Mongolia's newly constructed Chinggis Khaan National Museum exemplifies the fusion of cultural heritage and modern design. This museum stands as a symbol of Mongolia's cultural legacy and national identity. Its main facade mimics the shape of a gerege, an ancient Mongolian messenger's pass, while a golden falcon soars above the entrance. The museum's roof adopts the traditional form of a Mongolian yurt, among other design elements.<sup>24</sup> The architecture of the museum is not only grand and magnificent but also richly imbued with distinctive Mongolian cultural characteristics. Its unique exterior has become a major draw for visitors.

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<sup>23</sup> National Geographic, "Visit These Cultural Hot Spots in 2024," *National Geographic*, 2024, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/best-of-the-world-2024-cultural-spots>

<sup>24</sup> Chinggis Khaan National Museum, accessed August 24, 2025. <https://chinggismuseum.com/>

This architectural charm sets it apart from museums in other countries, transforming the museum itself into a symbol showcasing national culture and identity, a feature that can be considered part of its appeal. Mongolia's rich museum resources and profound historical and cultural heritage provide a solid foundation for conducting museum-related academic research. For many years, Mongolian museums have actively participated in international academic exchanges and cooperation, particularly in research fields such as history, archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics.

The Chinggis Khaan National Museum has pioneered the systematic publication and joint research of overseas Mongolian artifacts, demonstrating Mongolia's expertise in collaborative research while highlighting its sustained commitment to collections and scholarly inquiry. This initiative not only enhances global awareness of overseas cultural artifacts but also strengthens Mongolia's national identity and ethnic cohesion. Moving forward, Mongolia can elevate curatorial research capabilities and collaborative skills by establishing long-term international cooperation projects, field studies, and training systems. Furthermore, joint academic papers, publications, and conferences will effectively disseminate research findings to the international scholarly community.

In the realm of cultural property restitution, Mongolia and the United States play opposite roles. As a country from which cultural heritage has been looted, Mongolia primarily focuses on requesting the return of

its illegally looted artifacts from other nations. In recent years, the Mongolian government has actively advanced cultural heritage protection and restitution efforts, enacting relevant laws to strengthen the recovery and preservation of looted artifacts. However, at the practical level, Mongolia still faces numerous challenges. While some artifacts (such as dinosaur fossils) have been successfully repatriated through cooperation with the United States, meaningful repatriation remains limited overall, often taking the form of exhibition loans or temporary displays. This reflects Mongolia's relatively insufficient resources and negotiating power in cultural heritage diplomacy. To improve this situation, the Mongolian government is compiling an inventory of overseas artifacts, systematically cataloging Mongolian cultural relics scattered across museums and research institutions worldwide, and pursuing their return or joint exhibitions through diplomatic channels.<sup>25</sup> Simultaneously, the establishment of the Chinggis Khaan National Museum has strengthened domestic capabilities for cultural heritage preservation and exhibition. This initiative demonstrates Mongolia's efforts to rebuild its national historical memory and cultural sovereignty through cultural institutions.

Although Mongolia differs from the United States and China in terms of national soft power, museum development stages, and institutional frameworks, this does not imply that their museum diplomacy experiences hold no value for Mongolia. On the contrary, the practices of the United States and China in

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<sup>25</sup> Returning Heritage. "Mongolia has cultural restitution in its sights." *Returning Heritage*, 2024,

<https://www.returningheritage.com/mongolia-has-cultural-restitution-in-its-sights>

leveraging museums to promote cultural exchange and shape national image provide valuable references for Mongolia as it explores a distinctive museum diplomacy model. In summary, Mongolia is progressively establishing a soft power development pathway centered on cultural identity and historical memory within the realms of museum diplomacy, international collaborative research, and cultural heritage

preservation. Through initiatives such as the construction of the Chinggis Khaan National Museum, the compilation of overseas cultural relic inventories, and joint research projects with foreign museums, Mongolia demonstrates active potential for engaging in international cultural exchange by leveraging academic cooperation and cultural heritage as bridges.

### **Conclusion**

The museum diplomacy of the United States and China exhibits distinct characteristics in their approaches and impacts. American museums have played a significant role in global cultural dissemination and public diplomacy through exhibition exchanges, research collaborations, and the repatriation of collections. In contrast, China's museum diplomacy places greater emphasis on shaping cultural soft power, leveraging museum platforms to convey national culture and values. The distinct approaches of both nations offer valuable insights for developing cultural systems like Mongolia. Such countries can establish museum diplomacy mechanisms that balance cultural expression with international cooperation while respecting traditions. By leveraging museum platforms to strengthen national identity, expand global influence, and foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, they can enhance their national soft power.

While museum diplomacy is viewed as a positive contributor to soft power, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Soft power operates through indirect and long-term processes, making its effects difficult to

measure; consequently, the specific impact of museum diplomacy remains inherently ambiguous. Moreover, despite being framed as a form of non-traditional diplomacy, museum diplomacy is not free from political influence, as museums often reflect national narratives and state interests. From a postcolonial perspective, issues related to collection histories and repatriation further reveal the enduring legacies of colonialism and unequal power relations. Therefore, museum diplomacy should be understood as a complex and dynamic practice and process embedded within broader political and historical contexts.

This study demonstrates that museum diplomacy functions as a strategic instrument of soft power by enabling states to shape international perceptions through cultural representation and institutional cooperation. It examines museums as institutions wielding significant influence in modern international relations and capable of effectively implementing soft power policies. The research first explores the relationship between museum diplomacy and soft power from a theoretical perspective, then conducts practical research based on the international

exchange experiences of museums in China and the United States, and finally offers a brief analysis through the lens of Mongolian museums' international cooperation. Mongolian museums have maintained stable and active international activities across multiple domains, demonstrating positive

developmental trends. Mongolia possesses rich historical and cultural heritage alongside substantial developmental potential, which can be further leveraged to enhance its national soft power through the advancement of museum diplomacy.

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