

How does film in Mongolia contribute to the healing of Mongolian cultural wounds?

Literature Review

Introduction

Films in Mongolia have a significant role in healing the cultural wounds inflicted upon its Nation for many years. This comprehensive study delves into how Mongolian Cinema is celebrated. It preserves the nomadic tradition, including folklore and history, with pride and a sense of identity and connection to the 'Old Mongolia and New Mongolia.' Highlight how films help bridge the gap between old and young generations, supporting and encouraging thriving communication and a deeper understanding of the lost and forgotten Mongolian culture.

This study analyses if Mongolian Cinema has a significant hand in helping Mongolians cope with the wounds of three hundred years of cultural and ideological oppression. A nuanced examination of Mongolian culture within the context of this historical oppression can shine a light on the marginalized and forgotten part of the world. It will help to push them further into the process of healing their wound. This means looking closer to the Mongolian historical wound through cinematic views and understanding the reason behind the wounds and how their subsequent colonial occupation by the Soviet Union adds another layer of narrative and investigation of their national cinematic identity. Unfortunately, an existing body of research is extremely limited in understanding the contributions of Mongolian Cinema and its identity as a whole. Knowing this knowledge gap, searching and learning Mongolian Cinema emerges as an academic pursuit and a critical roadway for identifying and understanding Mongolian identity. As Mongolian people's collective experience and memories are captured through a cinematic lens, the exploration of Mongolian film will be a compelling story about uncovering, appreciating, and healing the cultural impairment of the Mongolian people.

Historical Changes in Mongolian Cinema and Culture

Mongolian cultural identity is rich in historical, nomadic, and diverse traditions passed down generations throughout centuries. As part of nomadic culture, Mongolian identity is deeply interconnected to the vast steppes, deserts, and mountains – reflecting their connection with their land and unique way of life and, as such, herding livestock animals like horses, sheep, yaks, goats, and camels. The ability to adapt to harsher environments with expansive landscapes has fostered and helped people with resilience and resourcefulness. The Mongolian language and script are also part of cultural identity, written from top to bottom and intricately connected to Chinese scripts. There is an extensive line of history and knowledge that was passed down.

Being a landlocked country in East Asia, Mongolia has a rich cultural heritage and has endured centuries of challenges, including political upheaval, eroding traditional values and foreign influence. Due to years of abuse, Mongolia has faced countless cultural wounds that have left lasting scars on its identity and its people. This literature review will investigate the contributions of film and TV to Mongolian cultural damage as they overcome three hundred years of oppression. To understand the magnitude of healing said wound and examine the history that shaped the Nation's cultural identity and the subsequent harm it was inflicted upon.

In both these studies and many others, however, they failed to touch on another aspect of the cultural oddity: The Film and TV aspect of the Mongolian revelation and culture. Sadly, as mentioned before, there is little to no study on Mongolian Cinema and its impact on the Nation. However, many films were made during the socialist era, either propaganda films or documentaries – looking at and selecting films made during the different eras of Mongolian history and comparing them based on the influence they had throughout – will give a definitive and precise timeline of Mongolian Cinema and how it helped the Mongolian youth and society to connect with their history, heritage, and culture. Furthermore, they try not to lose the connection they have formed internationally, using the new coming age of technology and new knowledge being shared besides the teaching of the Soviet film industry. Luckily, there is a lot of research and study conducted on the healing aspect of movies' effect on youth and how it helps bridge the generational understanding gap. Most notably, aspects of Shamanic filmmaking, religion and how it paved the way for people of Mongol to connect.

Healing Properties of Shamanic Cinema

Cathleen Rountree explained in *Auteur Film Directors as Contemporary Shamans* (2008) that the primary function of those who practice Shamanic rituals is to foretell a future outcome before its surface, and such is the same with Filmmakers and directors, who are described as thinkers that "Illuminates Intellect." She further explained that the shaman's visions are primarily for seeing or healing the inner one and curing both external and internal injuries and wounds, as filmmakers use their visions to reach the inner conflict with precise prescience in their films. Additional findings by Thompson P. D (2021) researched that films naturally promote violence and disparity to their younger audience, and they found that most children who were exposed to violent TV were more likely to have violent tendencies. They also argued that films are only made for profit with no other alternative intentions, thus naturally opposing the idea of healing. Furthermore, Quinlivan's (2014) research said that Films and movies are considered a form of looking into one culture and are believed to be the way to take a breather from real-life struggles and leave for an unconscious state of consciousness. Film as a form of entertainment has a wide range of emotional reach that helps to give people a sense of community and belonging. This helps to understand that Cinema is essential in society today as it is one of the ways for people to leave the constant negative news and move to a different space in which they are given time to relax.

Conclusions

The main goal of this research essay is to find out if there are healing properties in Cinema and how Cinema can help heal cultural wounds inflicted upon a nation for years. Adding on to that, with little research on Mongolian Cinema other than word of mouth, a definitive question is brought forward: Is there a Mongolian national cinema identity, and if there is, what is it and if not, what are the means to figure out an identity of Mongolian Cinema in which it makes sense to their cultural identity.

Introduction

"The shaman's vision is primarily an "inner" one. Her or his "seeing/healing" cures both internal and external injuries (psychological and physical). By analogy, the alchemical filmmaker heals wounds of the mind, heart, soul, and body." (Cathleen Rountree, p. 124, 2008).

Throughout the history of the world, many forms of entertainment have existed and thrived. Only in reasoned time did another form of entertainment appear with a clear goal and vision. In the twentieth century, the film industry rapidly became one of the ways people consumed entertainment. This exploration seeks a nuanced reason to find out if films and Cinema have a profound way of healing deep cultural wounds inflicted upon Mongolia for years.

This means exploring Mongolian culture, its identity, and the foundation of their traditions – historical and societal changes they had to go through to be reintroduced to the rest of the world. Relearn what it is like to be nomadic and proud of Mongolian heritage and how they overcame the lack of education and basic knowledge of health and hygiene. All while using film media and Cinema as a window to show younger generations the history they never get to learn correctly or experience. This paper will also delve into the connection between Mongolian filmmakers' creative identity and religious identity and how they tried to sow it through the fabric of their nomadic traditions with filmmaking– making a name for themselves within the competitive world of the global Film industry and coming forth with the concept of National cinema.

Furthermore, it will briefly explore what cinema is, how it affects the people viewing the medium, its influence on younger minds, and how it negatively and positively shapes the way they think of people, society, and the culture around them. This leads to how and why Cinema is one of the most vital parts of societal structures and the human psyche – which points to how it creates a healthy community among people with similar interests and ideals. This coincides with Shamans, what they are as a religion and how similar filmmakers and directors are to their religious practice and rituals – correlations with their practices in their respective cultures.

Historic Changes in Mongolian Cinema

Central to Mongolian culture is their nomadic way of life and lifestyle, and it is characterized as a country with seasonal migration and a changing climate – they can move through harsh landscapes with their livestock and homes and shape a way for their cultural identity. Many tribes within ancient Mongolia existed as nomadic groups, such as Xiongnu and Xianbei, which moved across the steppes and desserts, interacting with the neighbouring civilization, one of the earliest forms of society in ancient Mongolia. This means it is hard for the Nation to adapt to a stable Western-like society in which they are not always on the move. However, it gives many advantages, which their nomadic life has allowed them to see distinct cultures and life to learn from.

After the end of the Mongol empire, Mongolian people were subjugated under the Qing empire for two hundred years; historians say this was a colonial and religious occupation to wipe out the last remaining ancestors of a nomadic culture and territorial dispute. Orhon Myadar stated that Russia's occupation of Mongolia was a form of Colonialization and military occupation during a challenging time in Mongolian history, stating that:

"Soviet domination of various societies in the twentieth century has not been conceptualized in the same theoretical framework and has been largely excluded from post-colonial critiques of the Western European domination of 'other' lands. **(Orhon Myadar, p.6, 2017).**

The suppression of traditional Mongolian customs and beliefs during the soviet era had resulted in a lasting impact on the Nation's identity; not only that, because the Soviet occupation was not technically considered colonialism from the Western standpoint – no compensation was given to the

people. The restriction that the Soviet Union implemented on customs was seen to help the people be more open to the world, and with the coming new ages with technology and the economic boost that the rest of the world had, the Soviet Union saw it fit to have Mongolia to follow in line – thus the beginning of the occupation and Colonialization for seventy years. For many years, the Soviet Union was seen as a saviour; they helped Mongolia to get rid of Manchu and are one of many reasons Mongolia is as developed as it is. One of Russia's main advances was education in film and how filmmaking worked.

One of the most well-known films made during the socialist era is *Serelt* (**1957**), which tells the story of a father trying to save his daughter from an illness he does not understand as he looks for a remedy that is not available or on par with the medical professionals want it to be. Due to this, a Russian nurse is sent to one of the provenances that has yet to be introduced to medical knowledge. The nurse is instructed to help the girl, but the father, not believing in medicine, sees the nurse as a demon and refuses the help, leading to almost killing his daughter in the process. This film highlighted a period in which Mongolian people were reluctant to innovation and basic hygiene, unable to move away from the old way of thinking and desperate to hold on to their religious belief of washing away the demanding work and suitable they had accumulated for years. This film was the start of Mongolian-led films, being a way to change the audience's perspective.

Mongolian filmmakers in recent years have focused more on the survival of Mongolian culture and its people throughout its harsher years. Mongolian Cinema has its roots in the early 1930s, with the first feature film being "Son of Mongol" directed by S. Lundag. Just like its history, many of its creative and filmic decisions were influenced by the Soviet Union. With specific ideas to be greenlighted, it had to go through gruelling steps of revisions and rewrite for it to be filmed. Due to this, many films made during that era were either traditional slice-of-life stories of Mongolian people in Communist/Socialist Mongolia or films covering heavily repressed films with pro-Communist and Russian propaganda. As explored before, the religious and political information was incredibly sparse when it came to living in the big city and due to this, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the post-socialist era and transition to democracy, the Mongolian creative industry had an upstream of freedom on what they were allowed to make, and that included how much information was allowed to spread. However, they had extraordinarily little knowledge of their traditional roots, which made them unique in a cultural sense in the first place. With the soviet influence gone, Mongolian filmmakers gained greater freedom to explore diverse themes, concepts, and narratives.

With that in mind, most films moving forward had a cultural identity as their focus, depicting the exploration and preservation of their nomadic roots and religious practices. Throughout the thirty years that the Nation has been independent, Mongolian film has followed its trend of highlighting the lifestyle of those living in the countryside and still practising their nomadic traditions, many notable films being – *The Woman* (**2021**), *The Steed* (**2019**), *Thief of Mind* (**2011**) and many more. *The Woman's* story is about a Korean man visiting Mongolia to learn about their traditions and just sheer curiosity. It shows through the Korean man of hardship living in the countryside and still holding on to the cultural identity. *The Steed* storyline is also similar; however, it takes place in the 20th century during World War 2, following a lost horse and its owner, a young boy who just lost his mom to an illness. The film also focuses on the contribution of the Country during World War 2. Another semi-modern film is *Thief of Mind*, based on a real-life event in the post-socialist era in Mongolia, a nation going through an economic crisis. The main character is a swindler and a scammer trying to win the heart of a girl he likes by lying his way. Its main

underlying message is the state the Communists partly left Mongolia with and how the civilians and people are coping with the fallout. Since the Soviet Union's control over the quality of the films that were being broadcasted and released, the early 2010s Mongolian film industry faced an influx of low-quality films and productions, which caused many people in the creative industry to take a step back and assess the situation that Mongolian Cinema was in locally and internationally.

Around the early 2000s and early 1990s, the film industry barely had any presence in the international film bubble. This adds that there were barely any high-quality movies released around early to mid-2000; Mongolia fell into what is called Western and English-language media domination and imperialism in which the Western world, either intentionally or not, is using the forms of media, Capitalism, and fast-food chains as a way of decreasing linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. Sender clarifies, "The Centre, from their point of view, is the English-speaking countries of the West, and they have used English to suppress the people of the former colonies, a phenomenon referred to as linguistic, cultural and media imperialism." (**Dovchin p. 319, 2011**). However, this argument may not only apply to Mongolians but is seen worldwide. With Mongolian Cinema still in its infancy, there is more room for improvement and tweaking that needs to be done.

The space of Mongolian Cinema from 2010-2020 has been that of many changes and fresh faces as Mongolia began opening its border to the rest of the world and technology, a new filmmaking process other than the one from the Communist era Russia had been instilled in the creative industry. Films like *Single Ladies Tetralogy* (**2013-2020**) were able to push what was socially acceptable to a young woman in Mongolia at that time. Nevertheless, they got many surprising, complimentary reviews from 6.8%-7.8% through the trilogies on IMDb, becoming one of the iconic films in recent years.

Today's modern Mongolian films have focused on the connection between the old Mongolians and the new Mongolians. Historically, the Nation was cut into two halves, Old Mongol and New Mongol, in a cultural and historical sense to turn Mongolia into a modern society – one of many ways they had done this is through coming-of-age stories or movies delving into connecting with older generations through their culture – serving as historical retelling, lessons or form of revealing old events in history that were hidden or not talked enough for the newer generation to learn. Films like *Culturalization Movement* (**2019**) are one of the movies that are popular among the younger demographic. About 60 years ago, in 1959, at a meeting of the Central Committee of the People's democratic party, a resolution was passed on 'Cultural invasion throughout the country. The film is unique in the way it talks about the events conducted by the government under the slogan "Let us make culture the norm" and the living conditions of people at the time. This kind of movie publishing helps to give an understanding of older generations to the younger ones. However, it also helps them to remember, obtain, and hold on to their old heritage without losing touch with modern society.

Healing Properties of Shamanic Cinema

The intersection of Mongolian Cinema and shamanism is one of many exciting points in discovering if Cinema can heal wounds. Films and cinema have a unique healing property far beyond just entertainment; it is an ability to engage with the audience, inspire creativity, and provide representation and experiences for individuals or communities that have been and still are shunned and pushed aside. Films have an innate ability to give viewers a catharsis by giving them a space to relate and identify characters and scenarios, showing that many people worldwide have gone through similar experiences.

Hilary Radner explained, "At this level, then, the film-body as material acts initially upon the spectator-body, who, in addition to these sensorial emotions that vitality affects convey and intensify, also identifies with story and character." **(Hilary, p. 61, 2018)**. The same can be said about Shamanic practice. Using their rituals, they guide people on their journey of healing their mental and spiritual wounds – helping them release their stresses and emotions.

To know why films have a healing effect, the understanding of Cinema and its effects on youth and how they influence their developing mind and their future. In the most rudimentary explanation, Cinema tells stories of communities or imaginary scenarios through rapid images. This form of visual storytelling, coupled with sound design and dialogue, can evoke an emotional reaction in the audience that no other storytelling form can. In this way, movies have a broader reach to human psychics and have an easier time changing people's perspective. Due to films having various forms when it comes to telling stories, they have become popular among younger generations and teenagers. This means that the majority of the audience is one with vulnerable mental capacities that are still developing. So, because of the differences in opinions and life experiences of the filmmakers responsible for the creations of the media that younger generations are consuming – it is hard to know which part of Cinema is suitable for children. Thompson P. D. said that "Movie is an Art Form", but the art form is often based on one's imagination. This imagination is at times contradictory to the truth." **(Thompson, p. 48, 2021)**. This could cause many children, especially teenagers, to fall into untrue or extreme ideologies. Children are easily influenced by the images they see in front of them, such as the degradation of a woman or the brutal killing of a man as a standard way society functions or something to be looked up to. Thompson explained that movies like teenage flicks about criminals promoted lawlessness and adultery to teenagers **(Thompson, p. 49, 2021)**. However, he also argued that movies put our minds at ease, helping people socialize and mingle with unknown people with similar interests, even if they have different opinions and views on the media they have consumed. He added, "Most of the movies show customs and arts of foreign countries. They give us insight into human activities and a better understanding of people of the world." **(Thompson, p. 46, 2021)**. This further supports the idea that films can highlight the suffering and hardship other countries are experiencing and promote to the broader audience as a form of asking for help and spreading awareness for a worldwide problem.

Quinlivan, on the concept of cinema healing properties, has said, "Throughout its history, the film medium has invariably operated as a virtual 'looking-glass' and recuperative space in which cultural crises can be safely negotiated, reconciled or reworked." **(Quinlivan, p.2, 2014)**. Films are meant to exist as a form of escapism, either to unwind from hours of work or a way to release stress; it is undeniable that films are one place where the human mind feels safe and finds pleasure. The idea of Cinema and film having the ability to give the wounded a time to recuperate or take a breather from their hardship is also supported by Cathleen Rountree, who stated, "Others may unconsciously attempt to heal themselves from traumatic childhood or other inter or intrapersonal difficulties." **(Cathleen Rountree, p. 124, 2008)**. Putting both filmmakers and viewers within the same criteria regarding being patients works as both need some catharsis for their emotional wounds. Whether it was intended or not, the filmmaking process had become that of a Shamanic ritual. Shamans are those with an innate connection to the spirit world. Existing between unconsciousness and a dream-like state in which they can connect to the spirits of the world around them. This allows them to be sensitive in terms of emotional turmoil.

How does this extend to being a shaman? Shamans and filmmakers share a similar property of enhanced abilities of seeing, hearing, and feeling the emotions of others through thin layers of boundaries. However, the shamans have no experience with boundaries when they experience their astral' projection.' "When using the medium of film to shift attention from a consensus reality, directors as shamans expand their consciousness and the consciousness of their community by offering a blueprint for spiritual development." (**Cathleen Rountree, p. 123, 2008**). Making film and authoring stories is a process of healing for many creatives in the film industry or any other people creative world by writing their experiences of their life, whether the experiences of being lonely, falling into depression or just sharing stories about their mundane life – it creates a sense of relatability to those who are watching, who are going through the same experience and wanted comfort that would be fulfilled. This creates a communality built by relatability and a sense of belonging, with a healthy culture to boost. As said before, Shamans use rituals to contact the spirit of the deceased, whose loved ones seek help connecting to their traditions that they were separated after years of suffering either through external or internal familial dispute. The same goes for Cinema; albeit it may not be straightforward and literal as a Shamanic ritual, films helped those who felt underrepresented to feel seen or to help families share stories of their loved ones who had extortionary lives or had suffered events that were impossible to survive, but they did, nevertheless.

With the current time and the increase of on-demand media, the community that had once existed has crumbled, with no one watching the same films. They lost a sense of belonging and relatability with no experiences on film, causing an increased gap between people emotionally and physically. In a recent episode of Film Theory, they explained that in the absence of new movies such as Star Wars, Marvel, or New Concert, bad news stays at the top of the media feed. Natural disasters, shootings, war, or political upheaval – while it is not harmful to know the events happening around the world, there is constant negativity that has a lasting impact on the viewer and, most importantly, the younger generations watching it (**Film Theory, How YouTube broke your brain, 9:39, 2023**). This cemented the thought process that Cinema is one of the most critical aspects that exist in creative space and not just inhomogeneous terms in which it is applied to a nation but in a more comprehensive human culture – Cinema is what fills in the gap where the person is given time to take a step back away from all the noises and negativity to reflect on their life and make conversation.

It is essential to know that the correlation between filmmakers and shamans is purely symbolic rather than physical or cultural, and it is essential to treat the idea in a sensitive way that does not impeach other various cultures or spirit practices that have existed for hundreds of years. Mongolian culture, with how long and complicated it is, has one thing they hold dear: their nomadic roots. Throughout the years, they have travelled around the world as wandering nomads. They have accumulated countless stories passed down through generations, so within only thirty years, older generations have begun using the stories they have heard as children to connect with their grandchildren by using films to resurge a community built on trust and respect.

Conclusion

It has only been thirty years since Mongolia had become an independent country in its own right. Ever since then, they have been steadily developing as a nation through technology and culture within the global environment that currently exists at this moment in time. Their resilience and presence in the world,

albeit very much irrelevant, is very much not to be looked over – with their new film *City of Wind* (2023) made by new upcoming director Lkhagvadulan Purev-Ochir, gunning to be nominated for Oscars, this certainly is one step closer to being noticed global wise. Furthermore, cinema and movies can be used as a gateway to attract younger generations with better education and understanding of history to chase film and TV as a career. Having finally found their footing on their identity as nomadic people struggling to find their place in a world plagued by Capitalism and industrialism, Mongolian people found solace in their connection to nature and the Shamanic religion that was once banned through colonialism to the modern era. Their unwillingness to let their culture die but unwillingness to be left behind by the rest of the world has helped them use filmic media to connect – sure; there are other ways the Mongolian government has utilized to keep their traditions afloat. However, Cinema is one of many reasons Mongolia is now healing the extensive line of wounds they have been inflicted upon. This research solidifies that Mongolia indeed has National Cinema – that of coming of age, preservation of cultural heritage, and willingness to societal change.

Even if Mongolia had not had a national cinema, their ways of finding it could have been embracing their culture and mythology. Delve into this subject with an open mind and understand that this aspect of Mongolia is still evolving and will continue to change with time.

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