



International Experience of Forming Ethnographic Collections and Its Application in Uzbekistan Importance for Museum Studies

Kuchkarov Sabir

Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute

sobirqochqorov268@gmail.com

Abstract

The article analyzes the stages in the formation of ethnographic collections in world museums, as well as their scientific, institutional, and exhibition characteristics. The study generalizes the museum experience of Europe, the United States, Russia, and Asian countries and reveals the role of such factors as geographical discoveries, colonial policy, scientific expeditions, nation-state building, and modern museum ethics in the formation of ethnographic collections. It also examines the influence of the centralized museum policy of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union on the formation of ethnographic collections in the museums of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. The article further substantiates the necessity of digitalizing collections, working with local communities, preserving intangible cultural heritage, and interpreting collections within their cultural context at the present stage.

Keywords: ethnographic collection, ethnographic museum, museum studies, material culture, Skansen, Kunstkamera, museums of Uzbekistan, cultural heritage, expedition, museum ethics.

Introduction

Ethnographic collections occupy a special place in the history of world museum studies. They serve as an important scientific source of information on the material culture, traditional way of life, handicrafts, religious beliefs, rituals, and social relations of different peoples. Through such collections, it is also possible to study the historical development, cultural memory, and distinctive worldview of entire societies.

The formation of ethnographic collections in world museums was not a uniform process. In European countries, this process developed mainly in connection with geographical discoveries, maritime trade, colonial policy, and private collecting. In the United States, ethnographic collections were formed on the basis of anthropological research and the need to document the cultures of Indigenous peoples. In the Russian experience, examples of material culture collected from the territories of the empire, including Turkestan, the Caucasus, Siberia, and the Far East, were concentrated in central museums. In Asian countries, ethnographic collections were more closely connected with the idea of preserving national identity, historical memory, and cultural heritage within the country.

*Corresponding author : sobirqochqorov268@gmail.com

Article history : submitted; 2026/01/15 revised; 2026/02/23 accepted; 2026/03/10, published; 2026/04/20



The relevance of this article lies in the growing need to reinterpret ethnographic collections as sources that represent the cultural memory, intangible heritage, and social experience of a people. In particular, studying international experience is of great importance for the museums of Uzbekistan in collecting ethnographic collections, preparing scientific documentation, digitalizing collections, interpreting them in museum exhibitions, and presenting them in cooperation with local communities.

The formation of ethnographic collections in the museums of Uzbekistan reflects complex historical processes associated with the periods of the Russian Empire, the Soviet era, and independence. During the colonial period, local culture was studied mainly as an object of external scientific observation, while during the Soviet period ethnographic objects were often presented within the framework of centralized scientific and ideological interpretation. After independence, these collections began to be reinterpreted in connection with national heritage, historical memory, local cultural diversity, and intangible cultural heritage.

The purpose of this article is to identify the theoretical and practical significance of the formation of ethnographic collections in world museums for the museum studies of Uzbekistan through an analysis of their main historical stages and models. The article summarizes the experience of Europe, the United States, Russia, and Asian countries and substantiates the need for the scientific documentation, cultural interpretation, digitalization, and reconsideration of museum collections in Uzbekistan on the basis of modern museum ethics.

Research Method

The study applies historical analytical, comparative typological, institutional, contextual, and museum studies approaches to examine the formation of ethnographic collections. Using the historical analytical method, the development of ethnographic collections was systematically analyzed from the period of the geographical discoveries of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, through the stage of scientific systematization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reconstructive museum practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scientific expedition activities during the twentieth century, and finally the stages of digitalization and museum ethics in the twenty first century.

The comparative typological method made it possible to compare the experiences of Europe, the United States, Russia, Asian countries, and Uzbekistan. Based on this method, the common and distinctive features of the British Museum, Louvre Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Skansen, Kunstkamera, the Russian ethnographic model, and the Asian national museum model were identified. Particular attention was given to the sources of collection formation, their scientific classification, exhibition interpretation, state policy, and the specific approaches to cultural heritage.

The institutional approach was used to determine that ethnographic collections were formed in connection with the activities of museum institutions, scientific societies, expeditions, state policy, and cultural and educational institutions. Through this approach, the influence of the European empires, the Russian Geographical Society, scientific expeditions during the Soviet period, republican and regional museums, and modern national museums on the formation of ethnographic collections was analyzed.

The contextual method made it possible to study ethnographic objects in relation to the way of life, rituals, handicrafts, religious beliefs, and social relations of the communities

that created and used them. On this basis, the article substantiates the need to interpret ethnographic collections as elements of cultural processes.

Using the museum studies analysis method, the issues of collecting, preserving, scientifically documenting, digitalizing, exhibiting, working with local communities, and reassessing ethnographic collections according to the principles of museum ethics were examined. This method strengthened the practical orientation of the article and provided a basis for developing modern recommendations for the museums of Uzbekistan.

Results and Discussion

Analysis and Results. Historical stages in the formation of ethnographic collections. The first conditions for the formation of ethnographic collections emerged during the period of geographical discoveries in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. European travelers, missionaries, sailors, and merchants brought household objects, weapons, clothing, religious ritual items, and examples of decorative and applied art from distant countries. At first, such objects were mainly collected in royal courts, cabinets, and private collections as rare and unusual items.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the development of anthropology, ethnography, ethnology, and comparative cultural studies led to the systematic collection of ethnographic materials. At this stage, greater attention was given to classifying objects according to geographical region, ethnic group, functional purpose, and typological characteristics. Institutions such as the British Museum, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, and the Kunstkamera developed into major centers of scientific research.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a new stage in ethnographic museum practice began. There was a growing effort to present the traditional residential, economic, and ritual environment as a complete whole. Open air museums, ethnographic parks, and reconstruction complexes emerged in response to this need. The Skansen museum, established in 1891, became one of the most important examples of this approach, where architectural structures, household objects, handicrafts, and intangible heritage were presented together [1].

During the twentieth century, ethnographic museums became multifunctional institutions that combined research, education, and exhibition activities. Documenting disappearing cultures, preserving ethnic identity, and promoting intercultural dialogue became some of their main tasks. In the twenty first century, issues such as digitalization, interactive exhibitions, virtual exhibitions, the restitution of cultural property, and the ethical reassessment of collections have become increasingly important.

European museum experience. Collections, scientific classification, and exhibition. The formation of ethnographic collections in European museums was closely connected with the expansion of empires, maritime trade, scientific expeditions, and private collecting. From the eighteenth century onward, the British Museum expanded its collections with objects brought from Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. Its ethnographic collections include traditional handicrafts, national costumes, masks, musical instruments, ritual objects, and items of everyday life [2]. These collections demonstrate the diversity of world cultures while also reflecting the collecting policies of the British Empire.

Although the Louvre Museum is mainly known as a museum of fine arts and ancient civilizations, its collections also include important examples of the material culture of different peoples. In the Louvre's approach, ethnographic objects are interpreted in close connection

with archaeological and artistic monuments [3]. This approach makes it possible to present objects within the broader context of the history of civilizations, religious traditions, and artistic styles.

The Victoria and Albert Museum is distinguished by its interpretation of ethnographic objects within the context of decorative arts, design, and material culture. Its collections of textiles, clothing, jewelry, ceramics, metalwork, and wooden objects demonstrate the historical connections between traditional handicrafts and industrial design [4]. The experience of this museum shows the importance of studying ethnographic objects as expressions of technology, artistic thought, and social life.

The experience of open air museums is of particular importance for the interpretation of ethnographic collections. In museums such as Skansen, Hessenpark, and the Lithuanian Folk Museum, objects are displayed within historical houses, workshops, farmyards, or ritual settings [5]. This method helps visitors understand the original function of an object, its social meaning, and its connection with the natural and cultural environment.

The experience of the United States and Russia. Anthropology, centralization, and museum ethics. In the United States, ethnographic collections developed alongside the growth of anthropology and cross cultural research. [6] During the nineteenth century, the Smithsonian Institution, the Bureau of American Ethnology, and natural history museums collected, documented, and studied objects related to the Indigenous peoples of North America. Later, cultural anthropology, especially the approach of cultural relativism, established the idea of interpreting each culture as an independent and unique system. This also influenced the methods of collecting and exhibiting ethnographic collections. [7:33-43]

From the second half of the twentieth century onward, ethical issues related to ethnographic collections became increasingly important in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. The return of cultural property, consultation with Indigenous peoples, identifying the provenance of objects, and cooperation with communities became important principles of museum practice. [8] This approach demonstrates that modern museum studies must take into account the historical memory and the rights of the communities connected with museum collections.

In Russia, the formation of ethnographic collections is associated with the activities of the Kunstkamera, established during the reign of Peter the Great in the eighteenth century. Later, household objects, clothing, religious and ritual items, and handicraft products of the peoples of Siberia, the Volga region, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East were collected through scientific expeditions and administrative institutions. [9] During the nineteenth century, the Russian Geographical Society and other scientific institutions systematized this process.

A distinctive feature of the Russian imperial experience is that ethnographic collections were often formed under conditions of "internal colonialism." In other words, collection materials were gathered from regions that were directly connected to the empire, including Turkestan, the Caucasus, and Siberia. Most of the collected objects were transferred to museums in the capital. As a result, the central museums became richer, while the independent development of regional museum institutions remained limited in many respects.

During the Soviet period, the formation of ethnographic collections was carried out within a centralized and state controlled ideological system. Expeditions, scientific processing, and exhibition policies were all organized according to a unified methodology. On

the one hand, this strengthened scientific documentation, but on the other hand, it often led to the interpretation of traditional culture as a "survival of the past." As a result, ethnographic objects in Soviet museums were often presented as evidence of the period before socialist modernization. [10]

Asian countries and the national museum model. In Asian countries, the formation of ethnographic collections was more closely connected with strengthening national identity, restoring historical memory, and preserving cultural heritage within the country. In countries such as Türkiye, Japan, China, Iran, and others, national museums began to collect traditional handicrafts, ritual culture, clothing, music, food, and household traditions as an integral part of state cultural policy.

In this model, limiting the removal of collections from the country, working with local craftsmen and communities, and linking national heritage with education and tourism became important priorities. The Asian experience shows that ethnographic collections can be interpreted as a continuing part of modern national culture and the creative economy. [11]

The formation of ethnographic collections in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, was closely connected with the political, social, and cultural changes that took place in the region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the period of the Russian Empire, Turkestan was regarded as a military administrative and scientific research area. [12] Objects related to the handicrafts, clothing, religious beliefs, customs, and economic life of the local population were collected by Orientalists, military officials, travelers, and scientific expeditions. Part of these materials was sent to central museums in Russia, while another part became the basis for the first museum collections in cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana.

During the Soviet period, the collection of ethnographic materials in the museums of Uzbekistan became more systematic. Republican and regional museums, research institutes, and scientific expeditions collected a large amount of material on traditional housing, clothing, handicrafts, family rituals, agricultural tools, and household objects. However, in museum exhibitions these objects were often presented within an ideological interpretation, showing the contrast between the "old way of life" and the "new socialist way of life." [13]

After independence, the museums of Uzbekistan faced the task of reinterpreting ethnographic collections. These collections began to gain importance from the perspective of national identity, historical memory, local cultural diversity, traditional handicrafts, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Museum exhibitions gained greater opportunities to present national clothing, embroidery, jewelry, pottery, wood carving, household objects, and ritual culture.

Despite this, some problems still remain in the practice of museums in Uzbekistan, including regional and district museums. Many ethnographic objects are displayed according to their material type or collection category, but their connection with everyday life, rituals, social status, and the local environment is not explained sufficiently. International museum practice, however, requires objects to be presented as elements of cultural processes. [14]

One of the most effective approaches for the museums of Uzbekistan is the interpretation of ethnographic collections through reconstructed interiors, handicraft workshops, ritual scenes, mannequin displays, and multimedia technologies. This approach presents together the function of an object, its production technology, its symbolic meaning, and its social context. In particular, the ethnographic collections of the historical and cultural

regions of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Fergana, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya provide broad opportunities for comparing local schools and traditions.

A review of international experience shows that four main models can be identified in the formation of ethnographic collections. The first is the imperial or colonial model, in which collections were concentrated in museums of the metropolitan states. The experiences of the British, French, German, and Russian Empires are examples of this model. [15:54] The second is the scientific expedition model, in which objects are collected together with field records, photographs, and oral information. The third is the open air and reconstruction model, in which ethnographic objects are displayed in settings that closely resemble their original environment. The fourth is the national heritage model, in which collections are connected with national identity, cultural memory, and tourism.

Several of these models can be observed in the history of museums in Uzbekistan. During the colonial period, external scientific interpretation was dominant. During the Soviet period, the centralized expedition and ideological model prevailed. After independence, the national heritage model began to gain strength. The main task today is to combine these experiences with the principles of modern museum studies. In this process, three aspects are important. First, collections should be scientifically documented and digitalized. Second, museum exhibitions should restore the functional and cultural context of objects. Third, museums should cooperate with local communities, craftsmen, and heritage holders. Only then can ethnographic collections become an active source for shaping the cultural memory of society. [16]

The results of the study show that ethnographic collections in world museums were formed under the influence of different historical, political, scientific, and cultural factors. At first, they were collected through geographical discoveries, trade relations, missionary activities, and private collecting. Later, with the development of anthropology, ethnography, and ethnology, they began to be regarded as objects of scientific classification and systematic documentation.

The first finding is that the imperial and colonial factor played an important role in the formation of ethnographic collections. In the experience of the British, French, German, and Russian Empires, examples of the material culture of different peoples were often concentrated in museums of the metropolitan states. While this enriched the central museums, it also limited the development of museums in the regions from which the collections originated.

The second finding is related to the importance of the scientific expedition model. From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onward, ethnographic objects began to be collected together with field records, photographs, oral information, and regional descriptions. This increased the scientific value of ethnographic collections and made them important sources for anthropology, ethnology, and museum studies.

The third finding demonstrates the effectiveness of the open air and reconstruction museum model. In museums such as Skansen, Hessenpark, and the Lithuanian Folk Museum, objects are displayed in connection with houses, farmyards, workshops, ritual settings, and everyday life. This approach makes it possible to present ethnographic collections as expressions of a living cultural environment.

The fourth finding shows that the national heritage model has particular importance in the experience of Asian countries. In Türkiye, Japan, China, Iran, and other countries,

ethnographic collections are interpreted in connection with strengthening national identity, restoring historical memory, preserving handicraft traditions, and developing cultural tourism.

The fifth finding is related to the museum studies of Uzbekistan. The formation of ethnographic collections in the museums of Uzbekistan has been consistently influenced by the colonial period, the centralized expedition policy of the Soviet period, and the national heritage approach that developed after independence.

Today, the museums of Uzbekistan face the task of scientifically documenting ethnographic collections, digitalizing them, interpreting them within their cultural context, and presenting them in cooperation with local communities.

Overall, the results of the study show that four main models can be identified in the formation and interpretation of ethnographic collections: the imperial or colonial model, the scientific expedition model, the open air reconstruction model, and the national heritage model. Some features of these models are present in the museum practice of Uzbekistan, and integrating them with the principles of modern museum studies is an important scientific and practical task.

Discussion. The experience of the formation of ethnographic collections in world museums shows that such collections have never been limited to the simple process of collecting objects. They have always been formed in connection with specific political, scientific, economic, and cultural conditions. Therefore, when studying ethnographic collections, it is also important to consider who collected them, under what conditions, for what purpose, and on the basis of what interpretation.

Although the experience of European museums has established a strong tradition in the scientific classification, preservation, and exhibition of ethnographic collections, the complex issues related to colonial policy cannot be ignored. The concentration of many ethnographic objects in museums of the metropolitan states created opportunities for scientific research, but at the same time it separated these objects from their original cultural environment. Modern museum ethics is now reconsidering this issue.

The experience of the United States, Canada, and Australia, where ethical issues related to ethnographic collections have become increasingly important, provides an important lesson for modern museum studies. Consultation with Indigenous peoples, determining the provenance of collections, reconsidering the legal status of objects, and the return of cultural property have changed attitudes toward ethnographic collections. This approach is also important for the museums of Uzbekistan because every ethnographic object is connected with a particular community, region, craft tradition, and cultural memory.

The experience of the Russian Empire and the Soviet period had a direct influence on the formation of ethnographic collections in the museums of Uzbekistan. During the colonial period, the material culture of Turkestan was regarded mainly as an object of external observation and scientific classification. During the Soviet period, traditional culture was often interpreted through ideological views within the framework of the contrast between the "old way of life" and the "new way of life." The period after independence made it possible to reexamine these collections from the perspective of national heritage, historical memory, and cultural continuity.

The four models presented in the article, the imperial colonial model, the scientific expedition model, the reconstruction model, and the national heritage model, can serve as important theoretical frameworks for the museums of Uzbekistan. This is because all of these models have appeared to different degrees in the history of museums in Uzbekistan. The

main task today is to preserve their positive features while strengthening the principles of modern museum ethics, cooperation with local communities, digitalization, and interpretation within the cultural context.

In particular, the ethnographic collections formed in regions such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Fergana, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya provide broad opportunities for the comparative study of local cultural schools and traditions. However, it is not sufficient simply to preserve these collections in museum storage or display them according to the type of material. They should be presented within their cultural context through reconstructed interiors, handicraft workshops, ritual scenes, mannequin displays, photo and video materials, and multimedia technologies. From this perspective, the most important task for the museums of Uzbekistan is to transform ethnographic collections from "a collection of preserved objects" into "an active source of cultural memory." To achieve this, the origin of each object, its context of use, the local terms associated with it, the craftsmen, communities, rituals, and elements of intangible cultural heritage connected with it should be thoroughly documented.

Conclusion

The experience of the formation of ethnographic collections in world museums is a complex historical process closely connected with geographical discoveries, colonial policy, scientific expeditions, nation building, the preservation of cultural heritage, and modern museum ethics. Ethnographic collections are important sources that reflect the material culture and way of life of different peoples, while at the same time expressing the scientific, political, and cultural views of the societies that collected them.

Based on the results of the study, four main models of the formation of ethnographic collections were identified: the imperial or colonial model, the scientific expedition model, the open air and reconstruction model, and the national heritage model. Although these models have appeared in different forms in the history of world museum studies, their influence can also be observed in the history of museums in Uzbekistan.

The formation of ethnographic collections in the museums of Uzbekistan developed in connection with the external scientific interpretation of the Russian Empire period, the centralized expedition and ideological approach of the Soviet period, and the national heritage model that emerged after independence. At the present stage, it is necessary to reassess these collections according to the principles of modern museum studies.

In conclusion, the museums of Uzbekistan should give priority to the scientific documentation and digitalization of ethnographic collections, identifying their provenance, cooperating with local communities and craftsmen, and presenting the cultural, functional, and symbolic context of objects in museum exhibitions. Only then will ethnographic collections become an active source of national memory, cultural continuity, and modern museum education.

Practical recommendations:

1. International experience should be adapted to the local historical and cultural context when forming and interpreting ethnographic collections in the museums of Uzbekistan.
2. During the scientific documentation and digitalization of ethnographic collections, documentation should not be limited to the name, material, and date of an object.

Information about its context of use, local name, function, and its connection with a craftsman or community should also be recorded.

3. It is advisable to interpret ethnographic objects preserved in regional and district museums within cultural contexts such as way of life, handicrafts, clothing, rituals, house interiors, and economic activities.
4. A comparative study of the ethnographic collections of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Fergana, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya can help identify local handicraft schools and regional cultural characteristics.
5. The use of reconstructed interiors, handicraft workshops, ritual scenes, mannequin displays, audio visual interpretation, and multimedia technologies in museum exhibitions provides a more complete understanding of ethnographic objects.
6. Museums should cooperate with local communities, craftsmen, folklore performers, community elders, and heritage holders. This helps connect ethnographic collections with living cultural memory.
7. When working with ethnographic collections, it is important to follow the principles of modern museum ethics, including identifying the provenance of objects, respecting cultural sensitivity, taking community views into account, and avoiding stereotypes in interpretation.

References

- [1] Skansen Museum, "Skansen Official Website." [Online]. Available: <https://www.skansen.se>. [Accessed: Jul. 8, 2026].
- [2] The British Museum, "The British Museum Official Website." [Online]. Available: <https://www.britishmuseum.org>. [Accessed: Jul. 8, 2026].
- [3] Louvre Museum, "Louvre Museum Official Website." [Online]. Available: <https://www.louvre.fr>. [Accessed: Jul. 8, 2026].
- [4] Victoria and Albert Museum, "Victoria and Albert Museum Official Website." [Online]. Available: <https://www.vam.ac.uk>. [Accessed: Jul. 8, 2026].
- [5] Hessenpark Open-Air Museum, "Hessenpark Official Website." [Online]. Available: <https://www.hessenpark.de>. [Accessed: Jul. 8, 2026].
- [6] T. V. Nikulina and S. G. Kovchinskaya, "The Skansen Museum," in *Museum in the Twenty-First Century: A Textbook*. Petrozavodsk, Russia: Petrozavodsk State University, 2009, pp. 14–24.
- [7] E. V. Podzyuban, "The American Historical School and the Cultural Concept of F. Boas: A Historiographical Review," *Bulletin of Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts*, no. 29, pt. II, pp. 33–43, 2014.
- [8] A. D. Prokofiev, "Spatial Heterogeneity of the Territory of the United States: The Ethnogeographical Factor," *Geographical Bulletin*, no. 2(69), 2024.
- [9] S. I. Sotnikova, *Museology*. Moscow, Russia: Akademicheskii Proekt, 2004, p. 121.
- [10] V. V. Tikhonov, "The Practice of Establishing Foreign and Russian Open-Air Ethnographic Museums," *Bulletin of Transbaikal State University*, no. 9(88), pp. 3–8, 2012.
- [11] O. D. Fais-Leutskaya, "Contemporary Ethno-Anthropological Museums of Sicily," *Anthropology Bulletin*, no. 3, pp. 49–63, 2025.
- [12] M. V. Khartanovich, "On the History of the Acquisition of Ethnographic Collections of the Peoples of the Pacific Islands for the Kunstkamera of the Academy of Sciences in the Second

Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, no. 5, pp. 145–151, 2015.

[13] T. Yu. Yureneva, *Museums of the World: History and Collections, Masterpieces and Rarities*. Moscow, Russia, 2011, p. 322.

[14] S. I. Yakovleva, “Open-Air Museums: The Experience and Lessons of Germany,” *Modern Problems of Service and Tourism*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 72–87, 2018.

[15] Sh. A. Miralieva, “World Experience in the Development of Virtual Museums and Prospects for Their Development in Uzbekistan,” Ph.D. dissertation abstract, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2019.

[16] G. R. Orifjonova, “Historical and Cultural Aspects of the Preservation, Research, and Exhibition of the Ethnocultural Heritage of Uzbekistan from the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century,” Ph.D. dissertation abstract, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2021.