


The History of the Road to the Independent Development of Northeast Asian Peoples

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Journal of Inner and East Asian Studies
volume 3, number 1 (June 2006): 125~139

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The material facts of all periods of Mongolian history show that Mongols and their ancestors successfully created their own states in the process of unceasing fights defending their sovereignty. The Great Mongolian Empire which was created by Chinggis Khan was never dependent upon China. It independently organized its own state machinery, established its own legislation, created its own script and succeeded in uniting vast territory in Asia and Europe into one state. Thus it affected the economic and cultural way of life of this huge territory. One of these subjugated countries was China, which was wholly conquered by the successors of Chinggis Khan, who set up their long rule over this country.

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Central Asian and Northeast Asian countries have been establishing their empires, fighting for and protecting their independence and freedom, as well as having broad relationships with other countries and exchanging cultural advancements with each other.

In Chinese historical research there has been a deliberate tendency to distort true historic facts and to represent the history of Mongolia and other neighboring countries as a part of China's own history.¹ However the actual historical study of these countries demonstrates to us more and more that the people of Central Asia and Northeast Asia independently created their own political societies irrespective of China and developed their own, separate, unique and original cultures.²

The cultural interactions of these nations can be clearly seen in historic documents and archaeological remains. When the Koguryō Empire was established in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, many empires (beginning with the Xiongnu empire) rose up, flourished and fell, each establishing their own politics in Central Asia. Puyo, the ancestors of the Koguryō, were neighbors with the ancient Mongolian tribe Xianbei. Scholars and researchers have found that Korean and Mongolian ancestors

1 Sukhbaatar G. Khyatadin tuukheid yu biciv? ("Gadaad Mongolin tusgaar togtolin nuuts utsir" nomin aguulgin tovc). "Ardin erkh" sonin, 1993, 6-r sarin 13, No. 92 (592).

2 Perlee Kh., Sukhbaatar G. Maogiinkhan Mongolin tuukhiig guivuulsaar baigaagin unen ucuir // Shinjlekh Ukhaani Akademiin medee, 1976, No. 3, 18-30-r tal.

had close ties in their history, culture, and origins.³

Mongolian history is recognized by its nomadic culture and by Chinggis Khan, who conquered and ruled the largest empire in the world. Living and generating their own unique history and culture in Mongolian territory, the nomads have their own specific customs and relationships with the natural environment.

There are not many historic documents about ancient nomads. The facts about nomads are written briefly in the chronological documents of those neighbouring countries that had contact with them. Chinese historical annals, reports of foreign travelers who visited Mongolia at different times, as well as the historically documented facts by neighbouring countries are the main source for the study of Mongolian history.

Extant Nomadic remains are in the form of ancient inscriptions on rocks or inscribed stone monuments that were erected at ceremonial places which were built in memory of emperors and nobleman. However, the study of Chinggis Khan's period is based on *The Secret History of the Mongols*, written by Mongolians; *Jami 'u't-tawarikh* by Rashid-ad Din, written at the request of Mongolian emperors who wished to have a world history of that time, collaborating with scholars from Mongolia and many other countries; the *Yuanshi*, the main document of the Yuan dynasty that ruled China at the time; and reports of travelers from Europe and China who recorded what they saw in Mongolia during their visits.

Scholars and researchers from many countries have played an important role in recovering and clarifying the forgotten and indistinct facts about ancient Mongolian history, and have greatly contributed to the recording of nomadic history. Of particular interest, the five-year joint research project undertaken in eastern Mongolia by Korean archaeologists has greatly increased our understanding of this period. Mongolian scholars, too, have worked hard to study their national history, but during the Communist peri-

3 Sumyabaatar.B. Mongol solongos tuurgatny ugsaa garal, khelnii kholboonii asuudald.UB.1975; Ju Chae Hiog. Solongos, Mongoliin khariltsaany tuuhiin asuudald. // Mongol Solongos ulsiin khamtarsan erdem shinjilgee-2. Seoul.1993; So Jon Bom. Mongol ba Solongos. // Solongos, Mongol uran zokhioliin khariltsaa. 10-dakhi-udaagiin symposiumiin material. UB.2004.

od that dominated in Mongolia for decades, writing and stating the true history to the public was forbidden. In particular writing and speaking about facts relating to Chinggis Khan's historical role was prohibited, and those who did so experienced political repression. However, democratic change in Mongolian society since the 1990s has made it possible for Mongolian historians to work with scholars around the world and recover the historical facts.

Thus, research based on historical documents has since developed considerably, enriching our knowledge of the history of that period. On the other hand, the archeological remains that contain a great amount of information are barely investigated, resulting in a demand to make it an essential subject of thorough research using the potential of modern methods. For example, the need to obtain results from archeological research on the material remains of nomads is becoming increasingly clear, particularly to answer such questions as who are the Mongolians. From where did they originate? How does their history and culture relate to previous periods?

Since the 1990s Mongolian archeologists have been cooperating with fellow archeologists and scholars from other countries where archaeology is highly developed in order to make wider ranging research on our ancient material remains. Archeological remains in Mongolia, relating to the nomadic lifestyle have their own peculiarities and are different from the cultures of sedentary peoples.⁴ Besides their constant movement to better pastures for their herds, there are numerous signs that nomads built cities and settlements. These settlements are not the same as the cities of sedentary cultures, where they are occupied and developed from their beginning to the present day. Instead nomadic cities were left unreconstructed after battles or wars after the residents moved out for good, leaving the city empty and covered in dust and soil.⁵ Information about these occurrences is very scarce; it only is possible to come to a conclusion from the research studies based on archeological findings.

4 Gumilev.L.N. Drevnie Turki. Tovarishiestvo "Kharkhiraa Klyshnikov-Komarov i KO". Moskva. s. 71.

5 Perlee.Kh. Mongol ard ulsiin ert dundad ueiin khot suurinii tovchoon.UB.,1961, 6-ò òàë.

One other branch of research that can provide a great amount of information about nomadic history is burials and graves, which are wide spread in the vast territory of Mongolia. Because of their wide spread locations, we face certain problems in the study, protection, and preservation of these ancient remains. Mongolian archeology has been carried out for more than one century, but it is only in the last ten years that we have been able to intensify our search for new archeological finds and enrich our history with new facts.

Inhabitants in the territory of Mongolia have gone through a long and troubled road of history and along the way many different tribes have risen, establishing their own dynasties but ending up being defeated and conquered by others: a process that has resulted in the mixing of different nations making up new ethnic groups.

In 2000-1000 BC, eastern Eurasia was distinguished by two different cultures and lifestyles. These were Chinese agriculture situated in the middle and lower part of the Huanghe River and those leading a nomadic lifestyle covering areas from Manchuria to East Turkestan. Central Asian tribes practiced a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, were excellent horse riders, and possessed bronze and metal processing skills. Their relationship with neighbouring China was a complex series of armed conflicts and peaceful political and economic relations.

Archeological finds of this period are the numerous stone-slab graves found in the eastern part and the numerous stone mound graves (so called *kereksurs*) found in the western part of the vast territory of Mongolia. After studying those remains researchers consider stone-slab graves as belonging to ancient Turkic-Mongolian tribes and *kereksurs* as belonging to the ancient Iranian speaking Saka and Sarmat tribes.⁶

By the end of the third century BC, the Xiongnu empire — the first nomadic empire in Central Asia — was founded. The empire was divided into two parts, eastern and western, and their armies were organized into a system of units consisting of tens, hundreds, thousands, and ten thousands — a system that was transferred to the next generations of nomadic

⁶ Klyashtorny.S.G.,Savinov.D.G., Stepnye imperii drevnei Eurasii. Sankt-Peterburg, 2005, s. 19.

empires. There are many burials, graves and settlement remains of the Xiongnu in Mongolia. The Xiongnu were shamans who believed in the sky and worshiped the sun, moon, nature and earth, moving seasonally in search of better pastures. When excavating the graves of the Shaniyu, the Xiongnu leaders, their burials are found at deep levels below ground. The body is accompanied with clothing, weapons and belongings, which symbolize richness and wealth in their next life.

The Great Wall of China was built to determine the precise borderline of Xiongnu and China when political diplomacy was established between them.⁷ China embarked upon a program of strategic marriage alliances, exchanges of tribute payments and gifts that paved the way for a flourishing trade along the border in order to avoid armed raids from Xiongnu. But often China stopped this border trade, limiting agricultural and handicraft supplies for the Xiongnu, which led to armed conflicts. The archeological finds of nomadic empires that arose after the Xiongnu, such as Xianbei and Jujan, though, have not been thoroughly investigated.

The next nation to establish its empire in Central Asia was the ancient Turkic tribes. From its early years the Turkic Empire was divided into two parts: Western Turkic covering the areas from the Altai mountains to the Caspian Sea, and Eastern Turkic or Blue Turkic, occupying the eastern territory from the Altai mountains.⁸ There are countless remains in Mongolia from this period, including monuments with inscriptions, stone statues, sacrificial temples or sacred places for offerings, and graves where people have been buried with their.

The unique aspect of this period is that the burial tradition changed from the previous generations. The burials of emperors and aristocrats were now secret, and extensive places for sacrificing to and worshiping them were built in different locations.⁹ These were precautions taken to protect the grave goods from theft, a tradition, which was later passed on to the next

⁷ Barfield Thomas J. *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China*. Cambridge, 1989, p. 32.

⁸ Rene Grousset. *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*. Translated from the French by Naomi Walford. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970, p. 82.

⁹ Bayar D. Recent Archaeological Research at the Bilge-Kagan's Site // *Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia* 4 (20) 2004, pp. 73-84.

generations, such as the Great Mongolian Empire. The archaeological remains of the Uigur and Kitan periods, which followed the Turkic Empire, have been studied in Mongolia.

The Great Mongolian Empire arose in the thirteenth century and embodied the great results of the dreams and wishes of many generations of nomadic tribes in the steppes. By establishing an empire that stretched across Europe and Asia, the Great Mongolian Empire played an important role not only in developing the Mongolian nation but also in uniting and connecting the world at that time and exchanging cultural advancements.

For the Mongols, Chinggis Khan was not only a god-given ruler — and remains so to this day — he was also a lawgiver, a founder of their culture and a teacher of wisdom. Temujin, later known as Chinggis Khan, emerged with a will to succeed from a youth full of hardship and struggle. Charismatic, determined, and organised, he gathered the steppe tribes in a confederation that was the beginning of the Great Mongolian Empire. In 1206, or 800 years ago, the leader of this newly united nation was proclaimed Chinggis Khan, the Great King, a term so sweeping that it is often translated as “Kharkhiraa Ocean-like Ruler.”¹⁰

The new nation needed a new social order, and Chinggis Khan provided it. He replaced the old hierarchy, which was based on an inherited position within a tribal clan, with a universal new political and military order based on service. The Mongolian nation was subdivided into organisational units known as “Kharkhiraa Thousands” and “Kharkhiraa Ten Thousands” and leadership positions were awarded according to merit. He gave the Mongolian nation its body of law, the *Great Yassa*.

The empire of Chinggis Khan and his successors represents the zenith of a long succession of states that were founded in the Eurasian steppe by nomadic tribes of horsemen. At the height of its power in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mongolian Empire, the biggest empire in history, reached from the Pacific Ocean to Central Europe, and owed its multifaceted character to a multitude of peoples and cultures.

¹⁰ Mongol ulsin tuukh. Ded boti. Ulaanbaatar, 2003, 96-r tal.

The so-called Pax Mongolica was based on an efficient administration, the promotion of trade, a modern system of passports and couriers, and, finally, religious and cultural tolerance.¹¹ Until well into the sixteenth century, the exchange between Europe and Asia thrived with heretofore unknown intensity. Trade routes were conduits for more than just goods, as an unprecedented exchange of knowledge and ideas took place along the same routes.

The history of this period is written differently in the historical documents of many countries, but the archeological findings remain constant. These are the physical remains, which prove in a most definite way, that contacts and communications between countries were better than ever and that cultural advances were being exchanged in Eurasian territory after the great battles and wars.

Archeological remains belonging to the Great Mongolian Empire can be divided into three groups: nomadic settlements and cities, burials and graves, and sacrificial sites with stone statues. Now researchers from many different countries are cooperating with Mongolian archeological researchers in these fields and reaching noticeable results, which are enriching our history through the study and publication of their findings.

Sites of Nomadic Settlements and Cities

It has been proven by written sources and archaeological materials that although the Mongols and their ancestors came to practice nomadic animal husbandry, some of them settled to some extent and developed an urban culture. About 300 ruins of settlements or residential sites dating back to the early and middle ages have been recorded in Mongolia, many of which are attributed to the Great Mongolian Empire. Archaeological investigations have been conducted at remains of palaces and cities such as the city of Kharkhorum, the capital of the Great Mongolian Empire. Also, Avraga, a political center, has been excavated for many years at a highly scientific level.

¹¹ Barkman Udo B. Pax Mongolica-iiin talaar eregtsuulen bodokhui // Mongolian Great Empire (Formation, Growth, Decline) September 21-23, 2004. Ulaanbaatar 2005, pp. 77-83.

Kharakhorum. At its height Kharakhorum was a very famous city occupying an important position in written historical sources, and mentioned many times in the itineraries of foreign missions that visited Mongolian domains. According to written sources, the city was established in 1220 by Chinggis Khan as the capital of the Great Mongolian Empire.¹² The fact that Chinggis Khan, who came from the basin of three rivers, established his political center on the bank of Orkhon River meant that he respected a historical tradition, which the previous steppe emperors had followed.

Serious archaeological excavations at Kharakhorum began with the work of the joint Mongolian-Soviet expedition conducted in 1948-1949.¹³ Activities to protect this valuable site from the negative impact of modern life and industry, and to preserve it *in situ*, have been undertaken by UNESCO. As a result, not only have complete topographical and archaeological maps been made, but also the site has been enclosed within a special fence. The zoning of the site provided a great contribution to further investigation and played an important role in the registration of Orkhon Valley as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.¹⁴

A joint Mongolian-German expedition, which began its activity at this site in 1999, has opened a new era in archaeological research at the site. Topographical maps and geomagnetic analyses have been conducted there.¹⁵ By comparing these with aerial photographs it has been possible to render the structure and arrangement of the site clearly. Now, excavation at the site is carried out at an up-to-date level of archaeological research. For example, artifacts from Kharakhorum have been dated using the results of radiocarbon analysis, dendrochronology, and photoluminescence. In addition, food and plant remains have been determined by means of paleobotanical pollen analysis.

By continuing the excavation of a large building purported to be Wan'

12 Cleaves F.W. The Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1346: HJAS XY, 1952, 1-123, pl. I-XII.

13 Drevnemongolskie goroda. Pod red. S.V.Kiseleva. Moskva, 1965.

14 The Ancient City of Kharakhorum. Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Mongolia. Government of Japan. Published by New World Press, Beijing.

15 Bajar D. Forschungen zur Stadt Karakorum // Mongolische Notizen. Mitteilungen der Deutsch-Mongolischen Gesellschaft e.V. Nr. 13 / 2004 (Bonn), S.109-111.

an-gong Palace, which was built at Kharkhorum by Ogedei Khan, we have now made some important discoveries. Having unearthed its total area, it has been found that the building measures 38m × 38m. Of the sixty-four column bases there, forty-six are found to be in their original position; the others have been reused in other places. Around the edge of the palace a gray brick floor was constructed. A green-glazed floor covered the whole southern part of the large hall which previous researchers considered to be a square-shaped border line along the above mentioned gray brick floor. Within the internal part of the green-glazed floor was built a brick platform. On its top a concentration of a multitude of small stupas and fragments of Buddha sculptures were found. The dates of these artifacts show that they are attributed not to Erdene Zuu's period, as had been suggested previously, but to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This evidence demonstrates that this building was not the palace after all, but was a large Buddhist temple or pagoda erected at Kharakhorum in 1346, as noted on a stone stele bearing a Mongolian and Chinese inscription.¹⁶ Also traces of the production of building materials at that time have been found around Kharkhorum, as well as well-preserved kilns, which were found in their original position. These are important factors in the study of production of that time.

Many valuable artifacts have been found from excavations carried out at the craftsmen's quarter. At the center of Kharkhorum an ancient stone covered street, and remains of a heating platform for supplying heat to buildings have been found. There are distinctive cultural layers with finds that are key in indicating many different phases of the city's development, including about 300 coins, one of which is a coin bearing Phags-pa writing, and a secretary's seal of the Ministry of Revenue dating to 1371-1372 and the reign of Ayushiridara or Biligt.¹⁷

Excavations at other sites of cities and settlements located outside the

16 Hans-Georg Hüttel. *Der Palast des Ögedei Khan — Die Ausgrabungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts im Palastbezirk von Karakorum // Dschingis khan und seine Erben — Das Weltreich der Mongolen*, München. 2005. pp. 140-146.

17 Eva Nagel. *A secretary's seal of the Ministry of Revenue issued in April 1372. Qara-qorum city (Mongolia). // Bonn Contribution to Asian Archaeology 1//*. 2nd revised edition, Vol-1. Bonn. 2002. pp. 59-85.

territory of Outer Mongolia are also being undertaken. In particular, there are many published works on the results of archaeological investigations of sites such as Shang-t'u, located in the district of Shuluun khokh in the Shiliin Gol Province, which was a capital of Yuan Empire,¹⁸ and at "Kharkhiraa Olon Sumiin Balgas," around the Aibaga River in the Ulaantsav Province in Inner Mongolia, which was a large Nestorian temple belonging to the Ongut tribe.

Russian scholars such as Kondui Ordu and Dyon Terek have excavated the site of "Kharkhiraa Golyn Balgas" located within Khavt Khasar's domain and some sites dating back to the Great Mongolian Empire, and have published their results. In addition, they are continuing to excavate many sites of the "Kharkhiraa Golden Horde" in Russia and the Ukraine.¹⁹ All of them have provided their own significant contributions to our knowledge of architecture or construction of the Mongolian Empire and of their development and changes.

Graves and Burial Mounds

The most common remains left by the medieval Mongols are grave goods. That the Mongols of that time took care of the dead by burying and providing them with belongings such as their weapons and ornaments meant that they believed that the dead will live and use their possessions in an afterlife. A distinctive feature of these graves is the custom of placing the shinbone of a sheep in a standing position near the body, which may be connected to their way of life and worldview. A shallow pit was dug for the body, which was placed in a coffin or wrapped in birch bark. The head was directed towards the north. Stones were laid over the grave.²⁰ Outside Mongolia this type of grave has also been found in areas adjacent to Angara River, on

18 Shang-Tu. *The Summer Capital of the Yuan Dynasty // Archaeologia Orientalis Series B. Vol.II, The Toa-Koko-Gaku-Kwai or the Far-Eastern Archaeological Society 1941.*

19 Egorov V.L. *Istoriceskaya geografiya Zolotoi Ordi v XIII-XIY vv. Moskva, 1985.*

20 Ardanov B.C. *Istoriya izucheniya pamyatnikov rannemongolskoi arkheologiceskoi kulturi Zapadnogo Zabaikaliya // Centralnaya Azia i Pribaikalie v drevnosti. Ulan-Ude-Cita, 2002, s. 178-185.*

Olkhon Island in Lake Baikal, at the beginning of the Lena River, at the middle of Shilka River, and at the beginning of the Argun or Ergune River in Russia.

Recent research has shown that during this period the dead and their grave goods were also buried in high mountain caves. Because a shadowy mountain cave has relatively constant temperatures and dry environs, the preservation of such graves is excellent and they are therefore very valuable for archaeology.²¹

Although tombs of the Mongol emperors have not been found, some burial mounds of nobles have been found. Particularly, an untouched burial of a child, possibly from a noble family, was found near an ancient city called Kharkhiraa in the Onon River basin, Chita Province, Russia. S.V. Kiselev claimed that the child was a descendent of Khavt Khasar, younger brother of Chinggis Khan.

Some chamber graves of the Yuan period were found in the past homelands of tribes who lived in felt walled tents in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and some northern regions of China such as Shansi, Shensi and Kansu provinces. They are valuable in the study of Mongolian burial customs, especially those of the nobility. These graves consist of a tent-shaped chamber under the ground containing a burial pit, and paintings on the walls of scenes of the past lifetime of the buried person.²²

Memorial Complexes with Stone Statues

Memorial complexes with stone statues are a distinctive type of archaeological monument of the middle ages. In archaeological investigations in Eurasia, the view that the erection of memorial complexes with stone statues was only a custom of the Turkic people of the sixth to eighth centuries has dominated. However, as a result of accurate research that has been undertaken very carefully, it has been confirmed that a peculiar type of stone stat-

21 Ulambayar Erdenebat und Ernst Pohl. *Felsspäten- und Höhlenbestattungen in der Mongolei. //Dschingis Khan und sein Erben-das Weltreich der Mongolen*, pp. 81-89.

22 Shatzman Steinhardt N. *Yuan Period Tombs and their Decoration: Cases at Chifeng. //Oriental Art* 36 /4/. 1990/1991, pp. 198-221.

ue located mainly in eastern Mongolia belonged to Mongols of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that they are different in stylistic features and chronology from those of the Turks.²³

Such types of memorial complexes with stone statues have mainly been found in several eastern provinces of Mongolia, such as Sukhbaatar, Dornod, Khentii, Dornogovi and Dundgovi. In recent years, similar monuments were also discovered in the territory of Shiliin Gol and Kholonbuir provinces in Inner Mongolia. Results of the investigations carried out in those provinces completely correspond to our own findings.

The stone statues at the above mentioned places mostly depict a figure seated on a chair, holding a vessel in the right hand and placing the other hand on the arm. They wear a hat with a round top and a wide edge, a long robe or gown with a diagonal fastening from left to right, and boots with slightly tapered but not upturned toes. The fact that these attributes of hairstyle and clothing are exactly the same as those depicted in Persian miniatures and Chinese paintings of Mongolian nobility in the middle ages and in emperors' portraits by Chinese artists is a credible key to determine their date and significance. Furthermore those objects represented on the stone statues have also been found in the process of the excavation of graves and burial mounds belonging to medieval Mongols.

The sculptures of the medieval Mongols are usually installed in the southeastern or central part of a round stone mound, ranging 3 to 12 m in diameter and 0.2 to 1 m in height. Their faces are always directed towards the southeast. This round stone complex is very different from memorial stone enclosures where Turkic figures were located. Early researchers considered them as being statues later erected on earlier burial mounds because it seemed as though they were stone mounds of the nomads in general form. During the course of excavations, it was firmly established that they are not burial sites, but memorial complexes with animal bones and pottery fragments inside.

Scholars who have researched written sources have found mention

²³ Viktorova L.L. *Mongoli. Proiskhojdenie naroda i istoki kulturi*. Moskva, 1980; Bayar.D. *Mongolchuudiin chuluun khurug. /XIII-XIV zuun/*. UB.,2002.

therein that the Mongols created portraits of their departed nobility and erected sacrificial complexes in memory of their glory.

The above-mentioned stone figures are an important source for the reconstruction of the religion and culture of medieval Mongols and to find out about their clothing, ornaments, hairstyle and other objects. They are valuable monuments of art in determining the art and culture of the Mongol Empire.

Conclusion

It can be seen in conclusion that the results of the work undertaken so far go a long way in showing that Mongolia was not an undefined territory of dispersed tribes but instead a unified and distinct country with a unique history and culture entirely its own. There is no doubt that Chinggis Khan was largely responsible for the creation of such a unified country, but the facts we have about earlier tribal empires demonstrate that Mongolian borders were always well defined.

The material facts of all periods of Mongolian history show that Mongols and their ancestors successfully created their own states in the process of unceasing fights defending their sovereignty. The Great Mongolian Empire which was created by Chinggis Khan was never dependent upon China. It independently organized its own state machinery, established its own legislation, created its own script and succeeded in uniting vast territory in Asia and Europe into one state. Thus it affected the economic and cultural way of life of this huge territory. One of these subjugated countries was China, which was wholly conquered by the successors of Chinggis Khan, who set up their long rule over this country. It is only through painstaking and detailed archaeological study of the medieval Mongols, in close cooperation with international researchers, that we can come ever closer to a clear understanding of them and to bring new facts to light.