

# BEYOND THE NOMADIC- SEDENTARY DICHOTOMY: THE INFLUENCE OF NOMADIC STEPPE CULTURE ON THE FORMATION OF EURASIAN CIVILIZATIONS

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**Abstract.** This article examines the distinctive features of nomadic steppe cultures – specifically Kazakh-Turkic traditions – in contrast to sedentary societies, focusing on differences in cultural norms, political authority, mobility, worldviews, and aesthetics, as well as differing perceptions of space, time, nature, the world, and concepts of ownership. The study *aims* not only to explore the characteristics of nomadic steppe cultures but also to identify the shared cultural practices that emerged from the interaction between these two distinct societal traditions, as well as transformations in political, spatial, and artistic systems in Central and South Asia. To this end, the research analyzes four interconnected aspects: worldview, spatial organization, governance systems, and aesthetics. The methodology employs comparative historical analysis, supplemented by cultural-semiotic analysis, visual interpretation, and an interdisciplinary approach integrating anthropology, history, and art history. The study draws on historical sources and contemporary scholarly works concerning Turkic and Mongol cultural traditions. These sources suggest that nomadic and sedentary civilizations did not simply stand in opposition to one another but rather developed through historical interconnection. *Findings.* The study demonstrates that viewing the relationship between the steppe and empires as a dichotomy between nomadic and sedentary civilizations is insufficient. Instead, it reveals a dynamic process of mutual cultural exchange that shaped political institutions, artistic culture, mobility systems, and symbolic representations of power. The analysis further suggests that many phenomena traditionally attributed exclusively to either nomadic or sedentary cultures emerged as a result of long-term cultural interaction. The study proposes a new comparative framework for understanding the historical interconnectedness of Central and South Asia. Furthermore, by re-examining Turkic-Mongol relations through the concepts of cultural hybridity, transcultural exchange, and shared civilizational development, it expands upon contemporary scholarly discourse in the fields of Eurasian history, intercultural communication, and comparative cultural studies.

**Keywords:** nomadic civilization; steppe culture; Kazakh culture; Mughal Empire; Turkic civilization; Great Silk Road; cultural hybridity; mobility; comparative imperial studies; cultural semiotics.

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## Introduction

For many decades, Soviet scholarship interpreted the history of Eurasia in terms of two distinct models of civilizational development: nomadic and sedentary. Nomadic societies were traditionally associated with mobility, tribal organization, oral culture, freedom of movement, and adaptation to the natural environment. Sedentary states, meanwhile, were viewed as manifestations of territorial stability, urban culture, centralized administrative systems, and written traditions. This dichotomy established an enduring research paradigm in which the steppe and the empire were perceived as two distinct models of civilizational development. However, their historical roles, specific characteristics, contradictions, and unity were not adequately examined.

Since Kazakhstan gained independence, the fields of historiography and cultural studies have produced significant research that counters misconceptions and distortions regarding the country's history and culture. Studies conducted in recent decades – spanning comparative empire research, mobility studies, and the cultural history of the Great Steppe – demonstrate that nomadic and sedentary societies were not iso-

lated worlds but interconnected elements of a unified Eurasian space. There was a constant exchange between them involving political institutions, military technologies, artistic traditions, religious beliefs, economic practices, and models of social organization. The Great Silk Road served not only as a trade route but also as an important setting for cultural communication, facilitating the long-term interaction of diverse civilizational models.

In this context, Central Asia held a special place. Rather than occupying a peripheral position in world history, it was a key center in the formation of Eurasian civilization – a region where, over the course of centuries, Turkic nomadic societies, Iranian agrarian cultures, the Islamic intellectual tradition, and, later, the politics of South Asia interacted. It was here that political ideas, artistic systems, spatial concepts, and symbolic models took shape, exerting a significant influence on the development of neighboring regions.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus noted that one of the migratory flows across the Central Asian steppes began between the 10th and 8th centuries BC, coinciding with the emergence of a culture that can be characterized as that of nomadic peoples

(12). Their routes of movement can be traced through archaeological evidence and were subsequently repeated during later waves of nomadic migration. It is stated that “moving along the coast of the Eastern Caucasus, they entered the Transcaucasian steppes — in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan — and then proceeded into Asia Minor and Mannae, where the vast empire of the nomadic Scythians was established during the 7th and 6th centuries BC” (Frye 106–107). The arrival of these nomads marked a shift from initially static, formal compositions to dynamic, complex, and vibrant ones — a transition particularly evident in the depiction of animals and movement. “The art of the sedentary populations of Mannai and Assyria broke free from certain established canons under the influence of Scythian artistic techniques, giving rise to a distinctive stylization of figures that incorporated elements of the ‘Scythian animal style.’ This is evident in depictions such as the dying lion, the lion vomiting blood, the lion hunt, the fleeing herd, and other reliefs from the palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (modern-day Kuyunjik)” (Rudenko 95).

Of particular interest is the observation by Bek Ibrayev that “many artistic archetypes originating in Central Asia are subsequently found in the cultures of Europe, China, Iran, and other regions to which steppe peoples migrated” (22). The researcher emphasizes that these archetypal forms did not vanish with the migration of peoples; instead, they acquired new cultural meanings, becoming part of the artistic systems of diverse civilizations. Such a perspective allows us to view steppe culture not merely as a local historical phenomenon, but as one of the significant influences shaping the cultural landscape of Eurasia.

One of the most illustrative examples of such a historical transformation is the Mughal Empire. Emerging in India as one of the major sedentary empires of the early modern period, it simultaneously maintained deep ties to the political and cultural traditions of Central Asia. The empire’s

founder, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur<sup>1</sup> — a member of the Timurid dynasty and a descendant of Genghis Khan on his mother’s side — was shaped by the cultural milieu of Transoxiana and Fergana, where steppe and urban traditions had interacted closely for centuries. “His *\*Baburnama\**<sup>2</sup> reveals the worldview of a man for whom space, movement, natural landscape, martial valor, and personal freedom remained fundamental categories of perceiving the world, even after the establishment of a powerful centralized empire” (Grousset 5).

The political organization, architecture, court culture, artistic practices, and administrative system of the Mughal Empire emerged from the complex interplay of Turkic, Persian, and Indian traditions. This interaction was not merely a mechanical borrowing of isolated elements but a prolonged process of mutual adaptation, cultural transformation, and the formation of a new civilizational model, in which the heritage of steppe culture became an integral part of the sedentary imperial world.

Despite the substantial body of research dedicated to the history of the Mughal Empire, Central Asia, and the Great Silk Road, a comparative analysis of the Kazakh steppe tradition and Mughal imperial culture remains underdeveloped. Most existing studies focus either on political history and

<sup>1</sup>Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530) was a prominent Central Asian military commander, poet, and statesman, as well as a descendant of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan. He founded the Baburid Empire (known in Europe as the Mughal Empire) in India and authored the famous autobiography *\*Babur-nama\**. After losing his native Fergana domain to invading Uzbek khans, Babur was forced to flee to Afghanistan, where he captured Kabul. From there, he launched successful campaigns into India, securing a decisive victory at Panipat in 1526; this enabled him to establish a great dynasty that ruled the subcontinent for over 300 years.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to his conquests, Babur left a profound mark on literature. He created masterpieces of classical Uzbek poetry (including famous *\*rubai\**) and wrote the *\*Baburnama\** — a seminal historical and geographical work.

military campaigns or on specific aspects of cultural interaction. Issues concerning worldview, spatial organization, artistic culture, and the mechanisms behind the formation of a shared civilizational model are, as a rule, addressed only fragmentarily. Consequently, there is still no comprehensive study examining the steppe and sedentary traditions as interconnected cultural systems that evolved through a prolonged historical dialogue.

*The aim* of this study is to examine the influence of nomadic steppe culture on the formation of Eurasian civilizations and to conduct a comparative analysis of the differences between nomadic and sedentary cultures.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following *objectives*:

- to examine the nature and specific features of the influence exerted by the nomadic culture of the Great Steppe on sedentary cultures during the formation and development of Eurasian civilizations;
- to analyze the worldview foundations of nomadic and sedentary cultures in the context of how humans interact with space, time, nature, property, and social organization;
- to apply Lev Gumilev’s theory of ethnogenesis to analyze the influence of the Great Turkic peoples on sedentary societies and determine how processes of “passionate” (vital energy) surges and ethno-cultural consolidation may have contributed to the transformation of sedentary societies in Eurasia;
- to compare models of state governance and political culture regarding political values and mechanisms of power legitimation;
- to identify commonalities and distinctions between artistic and aesthetic systems, including architecture, visual culture, and court art;
- to determine the significance of cultural interaction in the formation of hybrid civilizational models in Central and South Asia;
- to undertake a decolonial re-examination of the dialogue between nomads

and sedentary peoples by critiquing the Eurocentric model – that treats sedentary societies as the sole bearers of civilization and nomadic societies as peripheral.

This study examines the applicability of Lev Gumilev’s theory of *ethnogenesis* and *passionarity* to the relationship between the two societies in question, aiming to demonstrate the active role nomads played in history. It also identifies hypothetical mechanisms of socio-political and cultural transformation within sedentary societies driven by nomadic migrations, conquests (“peacemaking through war”), and cultural contacts. The research is grounded in the premise that the relationship between the nomadic steppe and sedentary societies should be viewed not as a confrontation between two distinct civilizational worlds, but as a long-term process of mutual cultural shaping. Throughout this process, political institutions, spatial concepts, artistic practices, and symbolic systems continuously evolved through intercultural interaction, giving rise to new, synthetic forms of culture and statehood.

The study’s scholarly novelty lies in its treatment of the interaction between the Kazakh steppe tradition and the neighboring sedentary culture – viewing it not as a case of one-sided influence or a clash of civilizations, but as a long-term process of mutual cultural formation. The proposed comparative conceptual model integrates political, spatial, ideological, and artistic-aesthetic aspects of the interaction involving nomads as a unique civilizational vector in history. This approach enables a fresh interpretation of the cultural hybridization characterizing historical ties between Central and South Asia, as well as the interconnected histories and dynamics of Eurasian civilization in the context of contemporary research.

## Methods and materials

This study is based on an interdisciplinary, integrative approach that combines methods from comparative historical analysis, cultural anthropology, the semiotics of culture, art

history, and comparative civilizational analysis. This approach makes it possible to view nomadic steppe societies and sedentary imperial cultures not as isolated historical phenomena, but as interconnected cultural systems shaped through a long-term process of political, economic, and artistic interaction.

The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study rests on concepts exploring the continuity of the nomadic worldview, aesthetic principles, and the artistic perception of space within traditional Kazakh art. In this context, a key theoretical pillar of the article concerns a scholarly work entitled “Understanding the World Through Traditional Kazakh Art: Nomads. Aesthetics”; originally published in 1975 but immediately suppressed by the totalitarian regime — which sought to prevent the recognition of our indigenous culture — it is being republished this year, in 2026. This work examines traditional Kazakh art as an artistic expression of the nomadic worldview, analyzing its aesthetic structures, specific ways of perceiving the world, and the cultural foundations of its artistic forms. These insights allow us to view nomadic aesthetics not merely as a historical legacy, but as a dynamic cultural system currently being revitalized in contemporary art through new artistic meanings and forms.

In the context of contemporary research aimed at re-evaluating Kazakh culture and art from a decolonial perspective, special mention should be made of Almira Naurzybayeva’s work — “The Aesthetics of Nomadism in Kazakh Visual Culture” (based on her monograph “Nomads: Aesthetics”). Her study, which was long excluded from academic discourse, offers a detailed examination of methodological approaches for understanding the distinctions between nomadic and sedentary cultures and recognizing the influence of nomadic steppe culture on the formation of Eurasian civilizations. The author identifies the conceptual pillars of nomadic aesthetics — such as the “spiritual world,” “nomadism and space,” “the path as a symbol of knowledge,” and the “search for harmony” — and proposes interpreting the spatial development

of nomadic visual culture through the concept of the “heterotopia of images” (Naurzybayeva 61).

Of particular importance to the study is the comparative-semiotic analysis of worldview models, spatial organization, political culture, and the artistic representation of power. This approach makes it possible to identify not only differences but also the shared symbolic mechanisms through which both civilizations constructed their conceptions of the cosmos, the legitimacy of power, and cultural identity.

An integrative approach is especially useful for the study of Mughal culture, as it aligns with the very nature of a civilization formed at the intersection of Turco-Mongol, Persian, and Indian traditions. As scholars have noted, Mughal-era artists — working under imperial patronage — increasingly employed the visual arts as an independent medium for expressing political, religious, and philosophical ideas that were either absent from written sources or expressed there only in general terms. Consequently, this study treats the analysis of architecture, miniature painting, decorative arts, and symbolic imagery as a historical source of equal value, offering deeper insight into the foundational worldview of Mughal culture.

The study employs *methods of comparative analysis, historical and cultural reconstruction, visual analysis, the interpretation of artistic imagery, and the semiotic analysis of cultural codes*. Their integrated application makes it possible to trace the mechanisms of interaction between steppe and imperial cultures, identify the shared civilizational foundations of their development, and demonstrate that the relationship between them was not one of confrontation, but rather a dynamic process of mutual cultural transformation.

## Discussion

### *Worldview: mobility, space and power*

One of the key differences between the nomadic cultures of the Eurasian steppe and the sedentary imperial tradition of the

Mughal Empire is the understanding of space, power, and the relationship between humans and their spatial environment. The worldview of the Turkic-Kazakh steppe was grounded in a cosmology of movement, in which mobility was not only a method of economic adaptation, but also a fundamental principle of the organization of the world. Space was perceived as relational, seasonal and ecologically determined, and not as a fixed territory with strictly defined borders. Collective identity was formed through genealogical, historical memory, sacred landscape and constant movement, rather than solely through attachment to a particular place or political center.

The aesthetic consciousness of nomadic peoples did not separate beauty from lifestyle. Space, movement, ornament, dwellings and material objects formed a single system in which the artistic form was a way of understanding the universe. As noted in the collective monograph *"Nomads. Aesthetics"*, the aesthetics of the steppe culture arose not as an ornament of life, but as a form of human existence in space (Poznaniye mira traditsionnym kazakhskim iskusstvom. Kochevniki. Estetika 4).

As noted by Bek Ibraev, in the traditional cosmology of the Turks, "The world is one... There is nothing immovable or permanent in it, only the dead and the earth are immovable. Everything else is moving, from its beginning to its end and again to its beginning... And everything - nature, people, animals, dwellings, things - everything is similar to the World" (1980 44). This thought reveals the fundamental principle of the steppe worldview, according to which movement is not a physical movement, but a universal law of existence that unites man, nature and space.

For a nomadic civilization, movement was not only a form of existence, but also a way of understanding the universe. The cosmos was perceived as a single space, subject to the universal law of Heaven (Tengri), which unites man, nature and society in a single system. In this picture, the movement of the world meant participation in

the natural rhythm of the universe, and the open steppe was a space of continuous interaction between man and the environment. Consequently, the steppe worldview formed a special sense of belonging not to a separate territory, but to the entire Eurasian space, where natural cycles, seasonal migrations and social organization formed a single order. Nurlan Amrekulov rightly notes that "for a long time the European historical tradition interpreted nomadic societies through the prism of the territorial state, as a result of which mobility was perceived as a sign of incomplete social development" (Amrekulov).

Research on "An Integrated Regional Economy: Steppe Pastoralists, Sir-Darya Towns, and Mawaerannahr" demonstrates that the nomads' relationship with their neighbors within this shared space was uniform in nature: "The exchange of pastoral products for grain is rarely witnessed by our sources. Strong nomadic states, as the Jungar and Kazak polities were around 1700, tended to institutionalise the supply of agricultural staples through coercive means" (Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations 181).

For nomadic civilizations, however, movement was not the absence of order, but a different form of organization of space, society and power, based on the unity of man, nature and space (Figure 1; Table 1).

That is why aesthetic forms of nomadic culture never existed autonomously. Ornaments, yurts, clothing, weapons, and musical instruments acted as unique models of the universe, reproducing a unified cosmic order.

Such mobility should not be regarded as a sign of political instability or institutional immaturity. On the contrary, nomadic societies possessed complex systems of governance, diplomatic practices, military organization, and legal traditions that ensured the stable functioning of large political associations on the territory of the Great Steppe. The legitimacy of political authority was based not so much on control over the territory or monumental architecture, but on dynastic succes-



Figure 1. Two models of civilizational organization

**Table 1. Comparative models of the worldviews of the Great Steppe and Mughal civilizations**

| Category                               | Steppe (Turkic-Kazakh) civilization            | Great Mughal Empire                                                          |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Philosophical foundation</b>        | Cosmology of movement                          | Cosmology of space                                                           |
| <b>Image of the world</b>              | The world as an open ecological system         | The world as an ordered imperial system                                      |
| <b>Cosmos</b>                          | Tengri is a universal cosmic order             | Divine order expressed through Turkic and Persian traditions                 |
| <b>Space</b>                           | Dynamic, seasonal, ecological                  | Architecturally organized, permanent, and symbolically centered              |
| <b>Mobility</b>                        | The basis of existence and social organization | Means of managing empire and military expansion                              |
| <b>Source of power</b>                 | Charisma, lineage, and personal legitimacy     | Sacred kingship, bureaucracy, imperial ritual                                |
| <b>Representation of power</b>         | Personal khan, tribe, steppe                   | Palace, garden, architecture, ceremonial                                     |
| <b>Relation to nature</b>              | Harmony and coexistence                        | Transformation of nature into an ideal imperial landscape (gardens, palaces) |
| <b>Perception of time</b>              | Cyclic                                         | Historical and dynastic                                                      |
| <b>Cultural memory</b>                 | Oral tradition, epos, genealogy                | Chronicles, miniatures, architecture                                         |
| <b>The main artistic symbol</b>        | Steppe, yurt, path                             | Palace, Taj Mahal, Garden of Eden                                            |
| <b>Mode of expressing cosmic order</b> | Movement                                       | Space                                                                        |

sion, personal charisma of the ruler and his ability to maintain harmony between society, nature and cosmic order.

In the nomadic tradition, the aesthetic representation of power differed from that of sedentary empires. Its greatness was determined not by architectural monumentality,

but by the ruler's ability to maintain the harmony of the world, which was reflected both in public relations and in artistic culture. According to Nurlan Amrekulova, "power in the nomadic tradition was understood not as the right of ownership of the territory, but as a moral obligation to maintain cosmic and

social balance. That is why the authority of the khan was determined not by the size of the territory under his authority, but by his ability to ensure harmony between people, nature and heaven” (Amrekulov “The Celestial Empire” 6).

In contrast to this, the political ideology of the Mughal Empire represented authority through the concept of universal kingship, combining the Central Asian, Persian and Indian traditions of statehood. Space was organized as a symbolically ordered system, in which architecture, palace ceremonies and the urban environment became the means of representation of divinely sanctioned power. At the same time, this imperial model preserves important elements of the Turko-Mongol political culture - ideas about sacred lineage, charismatic rule and legitimacy of conquest. Thus, the steppe worldview did not disappear in the conditions of a settled empire, but received a new cultural embodiment.

If the aesthetics of the steppe civilization was embodied in movement, open space and material culture, then imperial aesthetics sought to materialize the cosmic order in architecture, palace ritual and artistic representation of power. Works by Kazakh directors illustrating the influence of nomads include Bakhytzhan Kairbekov’s documentary

‘Deshti Kipchak’ (2015); Bolat Mansurov’s feature film ‘Sultan Beibars’ (1989), which depicts the military rule of nomads in Egypt; Akan Satayev’s ‘Tomiris’ (2021), focusing on the history of relations between Iran and steppe peoples; and films portraying the formation of the Kazakh Khanate, such as ‘Almas Kylysh’ (‘Nomads’). Additionally, the Indian film ‘Jodhaa Akbar’ (2008) by Ashutosh Gowariker also reflects these representations of nomadic influence. (Figure 2,3,4)

Eva Koch notes that “historians and court poets of the era of Shah Jahan invariably praised the palace constructions as “reaching the heavens”, although in reality the architecture of that time was distinguished by relatively low and extended volumes. In her opinion, such a characteristic was a stable rhetorical formula that reflected not so much the real architectural parameters of the building as the ideological representation of the elevated nature of imperial power” (Koch 207). Therefore, architectural imagery was a symbolic expression of the cosmic order, in which the earthly rule was interpreted as a reflection of the highest, divine harmony. Taj Mahal occupies a special place in this system. Its meaning goes far beyond its status as an outstanding monument of world architecture. In the Islamic, and especially

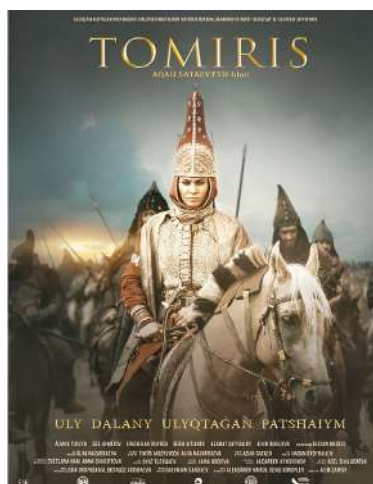


Figure 2. Akan Satayev’s ‘Tomiris’ (2021), focusing on the history of relations between Iran and Saks.



Figure 3. Bolat Mansurov’s feature film ‘Sultan Beibars’ (1989), which depicts the military rule of nomads in Egypt.

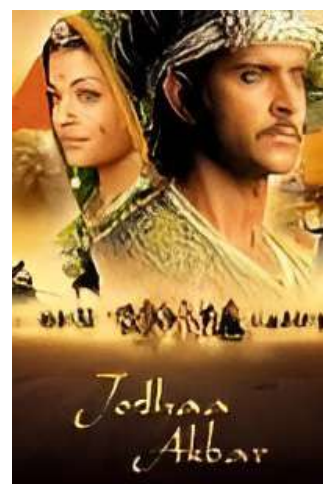


Figure 4. The Indian film ‘Jodhaa Akbar’ (2008) directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

in the Sufi tradition, this mausoleum is often interpreted as an artistic embodiment of the idea of ascending from earthly love to divine love. Architectural perfection, light composition, symmetry and landscaped gardens form a special spiritual environment in which aesthetic experience becomes a form of religious experience. Thus, the Taj Mahal is not only an imperial memorial, but also a unique cosmological model that combines aesthetics, spirituality and political symbolism. (Figure 5,6)



Figure 5. The Taj Mahal (“Crown of Palaces”) is a mausoleum-mosque located in Agra, India. Built by the great Mughal emperor Shah Jahan I in memory of Mumtaz Mahal. 1632 g.p.



Figure 6. Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 1052/1642. Platform in the center of the \*mahtabi\* (moon-viewing terrace).

As research on the history of artistic culture of the Great Mughals shows, imperial architectural ensembles, miniatures and court ceremonies formed a single visual program in which political authority was interpreted as a reflection of the universal world order. Thus, architecture performed not only a utilitarian or memorial function, but also became a means of symbolic organization of the imperial space. (Table 2)

The comparative analysis shows that the fundamental difference between the steppe and imperial civilizations lies not so much in the opposition between mobility and sedentariness as in the different ways of expressing a unified cosmic order. For nomadic civilization, the movement was the primary philosophical category, from which ideas about space, power and social order were formed. On the contrary, in the imperial culture of the Great Mughals, the cosmic order was materialized through architecture, sacredly organized space, palace rituals and artistic images. If in the steppe movement created space, then in the empire space organized movement, setting a symbolic order of interaction between man, society and the state.

In this regard, the principle formulated by Bek Ibraev - “*The world is similar to the world*” - allows us to see the fundamental difference between the two civilizational models. For steppe culture, the cosmos was reproduced in the very way of life, organization of housing, social structure and movement. For imperial culture, the same cosmic order was transferred to architecture, urban landscape and court ritual.

In this context, the dialogue between the steppe and the empire should be considered not as a clash of two opposite civilizational models, but as an interaction of different artistic and political interpretations of a shared cosmic order. For both traditions, political authority derived its legitimacy not only from military force or administrative control, but first of all from the ability to relate earthly rule to the highest principles of the universe. The fundamental difference was in the means of expressing this idea: if for the steppe civili-

**Table 2. Two models of cultural organization of the world**

| Steppe civilization                       | Great Mughal Empire                          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Movement shapes space</b>              | <b>Space organizes movement</b>              |
| Landscape shapes society                  | The state organizes space                    |
| Cosmos manifests itself in nature         | Cosmos manifests itself in architecture      |
| Power follows man                         | People move within an ordered space of power |
| Memory is preserved in tradition          | Memory is preserved in monuments             |
| The symbol is the path                    | The symbol is the palace                     |
| The center is the community and the tribe | The center is the sovereign and the capital  |

zation such means were movement, natural landscape, ancestral memory and constant interaction with the environment, then for the imperial culture - architectural monumentality, ritual, artistic representation and symbolically organized space.

*Space as a model of the world: steppe landscape and imperial architecture*

One of the most fundamental differences between nomadic and classical sedentary civilizations lies not merely in dwelling types or systems of governance, but in the conception of space as a model of the world order. In historiography, the contrast between “camp” and “city” is often reduced to a comparison of mobility and settlement. However, such an approach appears to be oversimplified. It is more productive to consider space as a cultural category that reflects the fundamental ideas of society about space, power and the place of man in the Universe.

In the traditional culture of the Eurasian steppe, space was never an empty territory subject to development or administrative control. It was perceived as an interconnected cosmological system in which the natural landscape, man, species, animal world and heavenly order formed a single interconnected structure. As noted by Bek Ibraev, “in the worldview of the ancient Turks and Kazakhs, “The world is one... there is nothing immovable or permanent in it... everything - nature, people, animals, dwellings, things - is all similar to him, the World”” (Ibraev 1980). This idea of universal similarity is one of the most important principles of steppe philoso-

phy, where every subject of material culture reproduces the structure of the universe.

That is why the spatial organization of nomadic culture cannot be understood solely as a pragmatic adaptation to the conditions of a mobile way of life. A yurt is not only a dwelling, but also a symbolic model of space. Its composition reproduces the vertical structure of the universe: the roof ring (*shanyrak*) symbolizes the firmament, the poles (*uyk*) connect the heavenly and earthly levels, and latticed walls (*kerege*) form the boundaries of human space. An analogous principle of cosmological similarity can be traced in the organization of camps (*orda*), ritual constructions, mausoleums, household items, clothes and ornaments. Each element of material culture has not only a utilitarian function, but also a semiotic meaning, reflecting the place of a person in a unified cosmic order.

It is especially significant that, as demonstrated by Bek Ibraev, “a single cosmological model is preserved in the most diverse forms of artistic culture - from ancient barrows and tent mausoleums to traditional headdresses, carpet ornaments and wooden religious structures. Regardless of the scale of the object, the same compositional principle is reproduced: the vertical connection of the Earth and the Sky, the centered composition and the idea of the world tree as the axis of the universe” (Ibraev 1980). Thus, the spatial thinking of the steppe civilization is manifested not only in the organization of the settlement, but also in the formation of the entire material culture.

In contrast to the steppe model, classical sedentary civilizations of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Europe formed a different spatial logic. Here, space is organized by means of architecture, urban planning, monumental construction and administrative institutions. Whereas in nomadic cultures space is shaped by movement and continuous interaction of a person with the natural environment, then for a settled civilization it is fixed in architectural forms, city boundaries, road networks and state buildings. Architecture becomes a material expression of the political order, and the city is a spatial model of the state.

That is why the comparison of the steppe culture directly with the Mughal Empire requires certain methodological caution. Despite the settled character of its statehood, the Mughal political culture was not a typical example of a classical settled civilization. The Mughal dynasty originated from the Turko-

Mongolian steppe tradition, which contributed to the preservation of many principles of the nomadic worldview in the new imperial form. Monumental architecture, regular gardens, palace ensembles and ceremonial spaces did not negate the steppe heritage, but transformed it into a stable architectural system of power representation.

In this regard, the imperial gardens and palace complexes of the era of Shah Jahan are especially significant. The strict geometry, central axis, symmetry and spatial organization reproduce the idea of cosmic harmony, but express it already through the architectural composition. If for the steppe culture space was revealed through an open landscape, movement and natural environment, then in the culture of the Great Mughals a similar idea took the form of an organized architectural space. Thus, this can be understood as a translation of steppe cosmology into the language of Mughal architecture. (Figure 7)

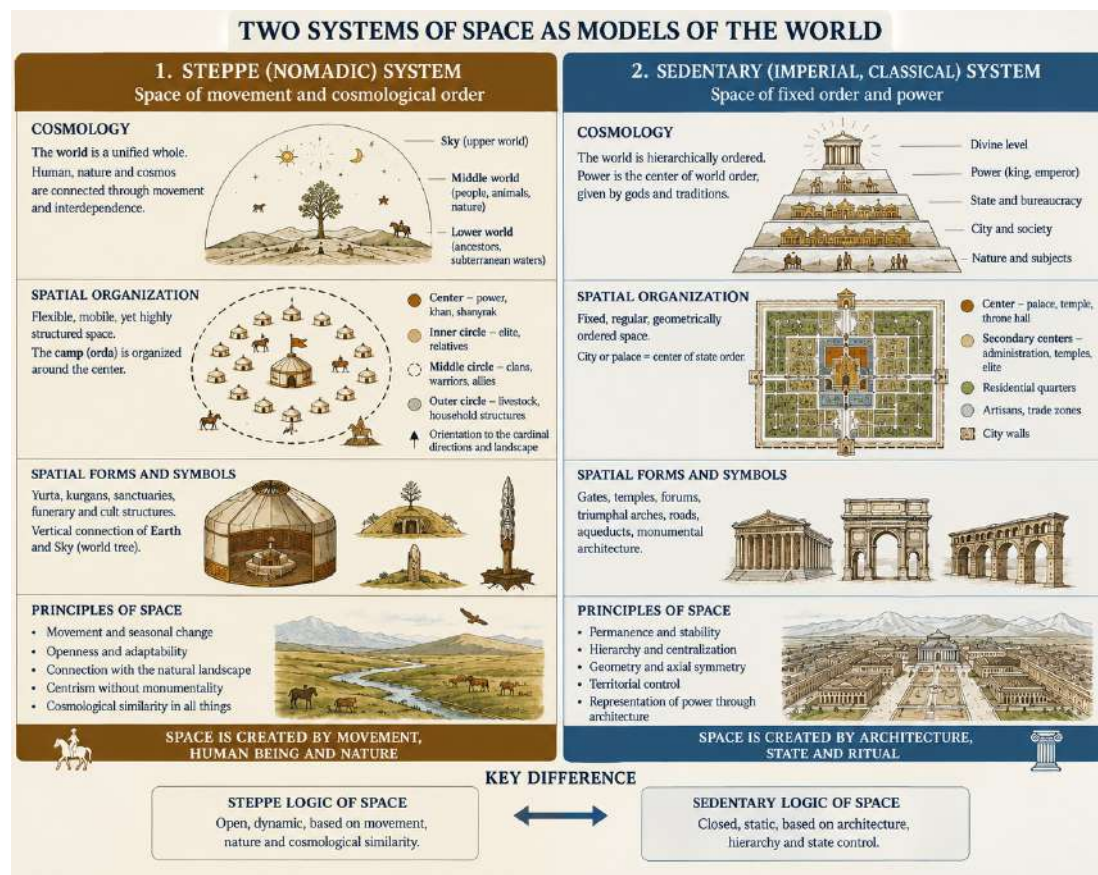


Figure 7. Two spatial systems as models of the world: the steppe (nomadic) system and the sedentary imperial (classical) system.

This transformation points not to a rupture between the two civilizational models, but rather to a process of cultural adaptation. The Mughal Empire represents an evolution of steppe traditions within a sedentary state framework. The result is a hybrid spatial model that combines concepts of the sacred nature of Turco-Mongol authority with Persian and Indian architectural traditions.

Thus, the primary distinction lies not in “nomadic” versus “sedentary” as mutually exclusive categories, but in two different modes of spatial organization. In the first instance, space is shaped as an open cosmological system wherein movement generates order. In the second, order is established through architecture, administrative centers, and the monumental representation of power. The Mughal Empire thus occupies an intermediate position between these models, demonstrating how steppe spatiality can be transformed into architectural spatiality without sacrificing its ideological foundations.

Consequently, the interaction between steppe and imperial traditions should be understood not as the replacement of one civilizational model by another, but as a process of mutual cultural transformation. Space serves not merely as the physical environment of a society’s existence but also as a key mechanism for preserving cultural memory and political legitimacy, and for the artistic expression of worldviews.

#### *Aesthetics: Ornament, Narrative, and Representation*

The aesthetic systems of the nomadic steppe and the Mughal Empire represent distinct modes of artistically organizing cultural space; however, the differences between them cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between “nomadic” and “sedentary” art. Both traditions sought to articulate fundamental concepts regarding the world, power, and humanity’s place in the universe, albeit through different artistic means. While the aesthetics of steppe civilization were shaped by a mobile lifestyle finding expression in ornamentation, textiles, jewelry,

epic storytelling, and material culture — the Mughal artistic system manifested itself primarily through architecture, miniature painting, garden design, and courtly culture.

In the steppe tradition, artistic form never existed merely as decoration. Ornamentation served as a unique language of cultural memory, reflecting concepts of the world’s structure, lineage origins, and the interaction between humanity and nature. As Bek Ibrayev noted, “in traditional nomadic culture, every object in the material world simultaneously fulfilled both utilitarian and symbolic functions; for ‘beyond its practical purpose, every object carries a semantic layer — no less vital to human life — that assigns it a specific place within the unified structure of the Cosmos.’ This semiotic integrity was evident in the layout of the yurt, the construction of the “shanyrak” (roof ring), ornamental systems, traditional clothing, and even the composition of everyday objects, all of which replicated a universal cosmological model of the universe” (Ibraev 1980).

This understanding of artistic form allows us to view steppe aesthetics as a dynamic system grounded not in the depiction of the surrounding world, but in the expression of the universal principles governing its existence. The symbolism of movement, the open horizon, the cyclical nature of time, and sacred space shaped the artistic mindset of nomads far more profoundly than any desire for the naturalistic reproduction of reality. The artistic culture of the Great Mughals developed within a distinct social and political environment, yet it largely retained a Central Asian understanding of the symbolic nature of art. The interplay of Turkic, Persian, and Indian artistic traditions gave rise to a unique aesthetic system in which architecture, miniature painting, calligraphy, and the decorative arts served as vehicles for representing cosmic order and imperial authority.

As Barbara Brend demonstrates, “the architectural ensembles of the Mughal era were not merely remarkable feats of engineering but also artistic expressions of a new worldview that emerged at the intersection

of diverse religious and cultural traditions. The Taj Mahal stands as the most striking embodiment of this concept; Shah Jahan commissioned its construction following the death of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal, in 1631, thereby transforming a personal tragedy into the creation of one of the world's greatest architectural monuments" (Brand 271).

The reign of Akbar is particularly illustrative in this regard; he sought not the dominance of a single religious system but rather their philosophical synthesis. According to Barbara Brand, "the emperor held theological debates with Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Parsis, Sikhs, and even Jesuits invited from Goa, and in 1582 he attempted to create a new syncretic doctrine, *Dīn-i Ilāhī* ('Divine Faith'), proclaiming himself its spiritual guide" (Brand 272). Such religious policy was a crucial factor in shaping Mughal artistic culture, which was grounded in openness to diverse cultural traditions.

The Central Asian school of miniature painting – which achieved particular prominence through the work of Kamal ud-Din Behzad – played a pivotal role in the development of this aesthetic. As Zukhra Rakhimova notes, "Behzad's art marked a turning point in the evolution of Eastern

miniature painting by combining profound spirituality and Sufi philosophy with extraordinary psychological expressiveness in artistic imagery. Unlike earlier traditions of text illustration, Behzad's miniatures created an autonomous philosophical space wherein color, composition, and the plasticity of figures served as vehicles for conveying inner spiritual content" (Rakhimova). It was precisely this artistic tradition that significantly influenced the development of Mughal court painting. (Figure 8,9,10)

Oleg Grabar provides a theoretical perspective on this synthesis. In his view, Islamic ornament cannot be understood merely as a decorative element of artistic design; rather, it constitutes a distinct mode of visual thinking that bridges the material and spiritual worlds. Ornament becomes a language of cosmological order, enabling artistic form to express ideas that defy full articulation through verbal description (Grabar, 1992). From this perspective, the decorative programs of Mughal architecture and miniature painting should be viewed as a complex semiotic system that organizes the space of power and sacred knowledge.

Ernst Gombrich develops a similar idea, regarding ornament as a universal mecha-



Figure 8. Bekhzad Kamaladdin. Historical Painting with People Bagno turco, Kunst, Manoscritto.



Figure 9. Tebriz School of miniature. Mir Musavvir. Nushirvan and the Owls, Khamsa Nizami, 1539-40, fol. 15v. British Library.

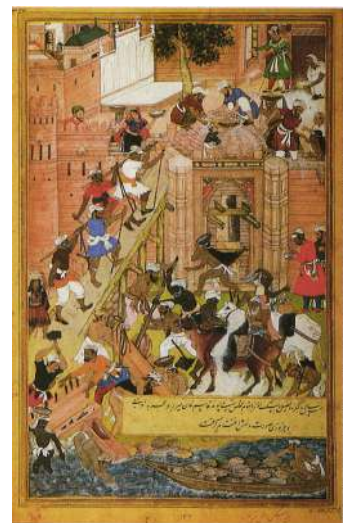


Figure 10. Construction in Agra, 1565. Miniature from the \*Akbar-nama\*. Composition by Miskin; drawing by Tulsi Khurd. Lahore, 1590.

nism for organizing human perception. In his view, “artistic representation never reproduces reality literally but constructs it through culturally conditioned visual models” (Gombrich, 1979). Consequently, ornament and artistic narrative serve not only an aesthetic function but also shape ways of understanding the world, historical memory, and collective identity.

In this regard, the ornamental culture of the steppe and the artistic system of the Great Mughals share substantial conceptual similarities. In both instances, artistic form acts as an intermediary between humanity and the cosmos, serving as a vehicle for transmitting collective memory, religious concepts, and political ideology. The distinction lies primarily in the modes of artistic representation. While the cosmological worldview of the Great Steppe culture was embodied through mobile forms — ornament, epic narrative, the yurt, costume, and ritual — analogous concepts in the imperial culture of the Great Mughals were materialized in monumental architecture, formal gardens, miniature painting, and court ceremonial.

Thus, a comparative analysis reveals that the aesthetics of steppe civilization and the artistic culture of the Great Mughals represent two complementary models of cultural representation rooted in a shared worldview. Their interaction demonstrates not a conflict between the “nomadic” and the “sedentary,” but a long-standing process of mutual artistic enrichment, through which Central and South Asia forged one of Eurasia’s most distinctive and influential cultural traditions. Accordingly, the dialogue between the steppe and the empire should be understood as a process of the constant translation of cultural meanings from one artistic system to another, rather than as a confrontation between two incompatible civilizations.

#### *Towards a Decolonial Re-examination of the Dialogue Between Nomads and Sedentary Peoples*

For a long time, the history of Eurasia was interpreted primarily through a Eurocentric

model, in which sedentary states were viewed as the sole bearers of civilization, statehood, and cultural progress, while nomadic societies were portrayed as peripheral, politically unstable, and dependent on agrarian civilizations. “Such a research tradition established a persistent binary framework: *city versus steppe, state versus tribe, civilization versus barbarism, and written versus oral culture*” (Barfield 161). However, contemporary research on Central Eurasia highlights the limitations of this model and the need for its methodological revision.

Modern historiography is gradually shifting from an emphasis on opposition toward an analysis of interconnections. As research by Thomas Barfield (2012), Christopher Beckwith (2024), Nicola Di Cosmo (2026), and other scholars of Central Eurasia shows, nomadic societies were complex political entities with their own systems of governance, diplomacy, law, and economic organization. Their historical role extended beyond military expansion to include the shaping of trans-continental communication networks, the facilitation of mobility, and the development of trade and cultural exchange across various regions of Eurasia. In this context, the Mughal Empire — despite belonging to the sedentary state tradition of India — emerged from Central Asian political traditions and retained key elements of Turco-Mongol culture: concepts of charismatic authority, sacred lineage, military mobility, and a distinct spatial consciousness. At the same time, by integrating Persian and Indian artistic traditions, the Mughals created a new, synthetic model of imperial culture. Thus, the history of the Mughal Empire demonstrates not an opposition between nomads and settled peoples, but a process of prolonged cultural interaction and mutual transformation.

This interpretation is consistent with the approach proposed by Nurlan Amrekulov, who views nomadic civilization as an autonomous philosophical system grounded in the cosmic unity of humanity, nature, and society. In this system, movement is not a sign of instability but a fundamental princi-

ple of world organization, while the steppe itself is understood as an open space for the formation of culture and power. “Such an interpretation allows us to move beyond the traditional view of nomads as representing a ‘pre-state’ stage of development and to regard steppe civilization as an equal participant in world history” (Amrekulov 2019). This idea is complemented by the research of Bek Ibrayev, which focuses on the cosmological concepts of Turkic peoples. Through an analysis of the yurt, mausoleums, the material world, ornamentation, and traditional attire, the researcher demonstrates that every cultural element reproduces a unified model of the cosmos. His well-known formula — “The World — and everything is like it” — reflects a fundamental principle of steppe aesthetics, wherein the dwelling, the individual, the landscape, the object, and society form a single cosmological system. It is for this reason that the spatial organization of nomadic culture represents not chaotic mobility, but a complex system of symbolic order.

In this context, a decolonial approach entails neither replacing one historical hierarchy with another nor romanticizing nomadic civilization. Its objective is to reject the notion of a universal model of civilizational development and to acknowledge the multiplicity of historical paths leading to the formation of statehood, culture, and artistic thought. Steppe civilization is viewed not as the periphery of global empires, but as an independent center for the generation of political, aesthetic, and philosophical ideas that have significantly influenced the shaping of the Eurasian space. From this perspective, the relationship between the Great Steppe and neighboring states should be understood as *a dialogue between distinct civilizational logics*, each possessing its own model for organizing space, power, art, and cultural memory. It was precisely this dialogue — rather than their opposition — that became one of the crucial factors in shaping the historical and artistic landscape of Central and South Asia.

## Results

In the history of Eurasia, the nomads of the Great Steppe are characterized by the role they played as conduits — transmitting cultural ideas and civilizational innovations to the wider world. Travelers and representatives of sedentary cultures often viewed the Great Steppe — the nomads’ home — as an empty void, devoid of anything significant. Yet, while it might appear so at first glance, the Great Steppe is actually replete with wonders and profound meaning. For sedentary societies, the concept of “home” and “nature” is defined by a fixed dwelling and the mastery of a specific territory; for the nomad, however, “home” is a mobile abode beneath the vault of the sky. Adapting to the harsh elements and shifting conditions of the Steppe taught them to live in harmony with its inherent rhythms. In overcoming these challenges, the nomad mastered the horse — a means of traveling across the expansive steppe — and harnessed the speed that drove progress. Their contribution to Eurasian civilization lay in the constant transmission of innovation, culture, and renewal to other continents, as well as in their role of preventing the isolation of individual peoples and fostering interconnection. Legends and tales disseminated by nomadic peoples are linked to the figure of Korkyt Ata — a mythical figure who brought art, knowledge, innovation, and science to humanity. It can be posited that without such legendary figures — akin to Korkyt Ata or, in other cultures, figures like Zarathustra — Eurasian civilization would have lacked cultural development, and the nomadic peoples themselves would not have exerted such a significant historical influence. Overall, it is evident that the impact of the Great Steppe’s nomadic culture on sedentary societies was not only direct but also mediated through cultural adaptation and mutual transformation, influencing political organization, military affairs, trade, art, technology, and symbolic systems.

First and foremost, the defining characteristic of the nomadic mindset is the open-

ness of its worldview. Within the nomadic worldview, the essence of the world was not limited to the physical, material substrate of the visible realm. They believed that, empowered by Tengri – the Creator of the vast cosmos – living beings ought to dwell joyfully and creatively beneath the blue sky. They understood the cyclical nature of life and death, recognizing that existence is a continuous process of perpetual transition. To the nomad, the concept of “death” did not exist in the absolute sense; rather, it was viewed as a migration to another world. Nomadic Kazakhs expressed this perspective – a blend of melancholy and wistfulness – through their songs and poetry, describing life itself as a “migration.” They also articulated their philosophical outlook on the world with the saying: “A single day in this bright, living world is worth more than a thousand days in paradise.” This reflects the philosophical concept of being “here and now” (ontic existence) – valuing the present moment as the greatest opportunity. The saying that human life is “as short as the handle of a whip” underscored the importance of making the most of the present moment. Regarding the use of nature, one should utilize it only to the extent of actual need; the restraint shown in avoiding the accumulation of excessive material wealth reflects a pious philosophy – encapsulated in the maxim, “If you have a life that lasts until evening, gather only enough provisions for the midday meal.” In contrast, the culture of sedentary societies – whether manifested in archives, written records, or architecture – is deeply rooted in a specific locality, while its relationship with time prioritizes stability and historical continuity. Ultimately, these enduring characteristics reveal the distinct ideological foundations of nomadic and sedentary cultures, particularly in how they shape human interaction with space, time, nature, property, and social organization.

Lev Gumilev’s theory of ethnogenesis – concerning the activities of nomadic Turkic peoples and their impact on world history – merits attention. Notably, the influence

of the Great Steppe nomads on sedentary societies was not limited to military-political expansion; rather, it was a complex phenomenon involving ethno-cultural consolidation, cultural transfer, and the reorganization of social structures. The author defines “passionarity” as a varying distribution of biochemical energy among ethnic groups across different historical periods and regions – an “inner drive leading to heroism in the form of characterological dominance” (Gumilev 55). The culturally significant traces left by the Turkic peoples in history are particularly interesting for the way they catalyzed a new quality of cultural transformation within sedentary societies. For instance, the period of high passionarity was marked by an acceleration of intense social interactions and cultural exchanges across the Eurasian landmass. The scholar highlights how this dynamic evolved into the subsequent “inertial” phase – a period theoretically grounded in established practices that fostered the accumulation of material cultural assets. From this perspective, the influence of nomadic Turkic societies was not merely an external force that altered sedentary Eurasian cultures; rather, it acted as a catalyst for the emergence of new, hybrid models of culture and civilization.

To summarize, as previously noted, the abstract thinking of nomads is closely akin to the art of architectonics. Anthropological approaches enable us to view art in a much broader and more substantive context. We move beyond the Western categories of “fine art” and “craft” to evaluate art as a form of social activity, a vehicle for meaning, and a fundamental aspect of human life. The masters of the Great Steppe – who considered it inappropriate to “build a dome beneath the dome of the Infinite Sky” due to their constant movement and mobility – began creating collapsible household objects, starting with the yurt, their portable dwelling. Guided by the belief that the structure of the world should mirror the model of the cosmos, nomads developed a unique architectural mindset and rejected the criteria of European architecture,

painting, graphic art, and sculpture. This is because the Western concept of art — shaped largely by European history and grounded in various dualisms — categorizes creative output into “art” and “craft.” (Shiner) This distinction typically separates “fine arts” (painting, sculpture) from “crafts” (ceramics, weaving); the former are deemed to serve primarily an aesthetic function, while the latter are viewed as utilitarian. This distinction is rooted primarily in the Renaissance and the differentiation between the artist as a genius and the artisan as a mere laborer. From the nomadic perspective, however, dividing art into aesthetic and utilitarian categories is inappropriate. Within this Western framework, art is valued for its own sake — for its capacity to generate an aesthetic experience. In this framework, a beautiful painting constitutes “art,” whereas a beautifully crafted tool is classified as “craft.” Thus, in the art of the Great Steppe, aesthetics represents merely one aspect of applied art and an integral part of the whole. While the concept of individual genius and artistic individuality aligns more closely with sedentary culture, collective creativity is more characteristic of nomadic life. In many Western art-historical traditions, greater emphasis is placed on the individual artist — figures like Picasso or Leonardo da Vinci — placing a premium on authorship and originality. This mode of artistic creation is not necessarily applicable to many non-Western contexts, where art is a collective or even anonymous endeavor.

Consequently, the practices of the Great Steppe’s artisans persisted into later Kazakh society. In the realm of decorative and applied arts, items such as feltwork, embroidery, weaponry, beds, and kitchenware were adapted to the interior of the yurt, facilitating assembly and disassembly during migration. The yurt’s structure was streamlined so that it could be transported on a single camel, with provisions carried on another. Overall, we sought to identify the distinctions between the artistic and aesthetic systems of nomadic and sedentary cultures regarding *spatial organization, materials, and artistic tech-*

*niques in architecture, visual culture, and court art.* While the nomadic system is defined by mobility, open space, and decorative, applied, and symbolic-figurative approaches, the sedentary system is characterized by permanent architectural structures, urban environments, and monumental artistic forms. Differences in court art were evident in the artistic forms and spatial organization used to project power.

*The comparative study yielded the following findings:*

1. The primary forms and mechanisms of interaction between nomadic and sedentary cultures were identified and classified; their role in the formation and development of Eurasian civilizations was determined.

2. The similarities and differences between the worldview models of nomadic and sedentary cultures were characterized, revealing their different understandings of space, time, nature, society, and the sacred realm; the shared value-based foundations and distinctive features of each cultural model were identified.

3. The applicability of Lev Gumilev’s theory of ethnogenesis and “passionarity” (passionate energy) to explaining the interaction between nomadic and sedentary societies was assessed; possible mechanisms of socio-political and cultural transformation in sedentary societies — driven by nomadic migrations, conquests, and cultural contacts — were identified.

4. A comparison of state governance and political culture in nomadic and sedentary societies established that the mechanisms of power organization and legitimation are closely linked to the characteristics of social structure, economic type, and political communication.

5. The common and distinctive features of the artistic and aesthetic systems of nomadic and sedentary cultures — specifically in architecture, visual culture, and court art — were compared; the forms of their mutual influence and transformation were traced.

6. The role of cultural interaction between nomadic and sedentary societies in

shaping the hybrid civilizational models of Central and South Asia — characterized by the mutual exchange of cultural practices, artistic forms, and social institutions — was clarified.

7. The traditional Eurocentric interpretation of the relationship between nomadic and sedentary societies was re-evaluated; the necessity of viewing nomadic cultures as active participants in civilizational processes and cultural exchange — rather than as a phenomenon peripheral to sedentary worlds — is substantiated.

## Basic Provisions

1. Historical relations between nomadic and sedentary societies should be interpreted as a process of long-term mutual cultural shaping, rather than as a confrontation between two isolated civilizational models.

2. A cosmology of movement forms the fundamental worldview of steppe civilization, whereas imperial cultures establish cosmic order through architecture, ritual, and the spatial organization of power.

3. The Mughal Empire represents an example of the successful synthesis of Turkic-steppe, Persian, and Indian traditions, preserving fundamental elements of not only the political but also the artistic culture of the Great Steppe.

4. Artistic forms — ornamentation, architecture, miniature painting, the epic tradition, and the organization of space — serve in both cultures as universal mechanisms for preserving cultural memory and transmitting civilizational values.

5. A decolonial perspective allows for a re-evaluation of nomadic societies as active agents in world history that made significant contributions to the development of Eurasian cultural and political processes.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the relationships between the nomadic societies of the Eurasian steppe and sedentary states can-

not be interpreted within the framework of the traditional “nomad vs. sedentary” binary model. Historical evidence and a comparative analysis of worldviews, spatial organization, political culture, and artistic representation reveal a far more complex picture, in which steppe and imperial traditions evolved through constant interaction, mutual borrowing, and cultural transformation. In this context, the Great Steppe emerges not as a periphery of world history, but as one of the independent centers shaping Eurasian civilization.

In 2026, on the eve of the 800th anniversary of Jochi’s birth, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, officially affirmed that the Kazakh people are the direct successors of the Golden Horde; this inclusion in the “Constitution of Law” was hailed as a new turning point in history. Historians worldwide are sharing their research on this process. At the House of Scientists in Almaty, and with the support of the French Embassy, a work by the renowned historian Marie Favereau — “The Golden Horde: How the Steppe Empire Changed the World” — was presented following its translation into Kazakh. The book’s cover states: “In the first comprehensive study of the western part of the Mongol Empire — the Golden Horde — Marie Favereau demonstrates that Mongol achievements extended far beyond warfare. For three centuries, the Golden Horde exerted an influence on global development comparable to that of Rome. It left a profound mark on Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East — a legacy still felt today... In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Golden Horde was a central hub of the Eurasian trade boom, serving as a primary conduit for exchange that spanned thousands of kilometers. Its political system produced enterprising rulers and skilled diplomats. The result was a mobile, disciplined, and innovative economic structure. From its capital at Sarai on the Lower Edil River, the Golden Horde offered Russia a model of state governance and influenced the social customs

and state structures of the Islamic world. It disseminated profound knowledge regarding the creation of the world and established new concepts of religious tolerance.” ‘The Golden Horde’ is a profound and comprehensive portrait of an understudied and often superficially assessed empire; it challenges the traditional view of nomads as a marginalized group in history, and Favereau clearly demonstrates that a significant part of the modern world traces its roots to the Mongol era, thereby showing that nomadic culture continues to experience a resurgence and evolution in world history (Favereau).

The study established that the fundamental differences between nomadic and sedentary civilizations are determined primarily by distinct models of conceptualizing space, power, and cosmic order. In the Turkic-Kazakh steppe tradition, movement is a fundamental category that shapes the organization of space, social structure, and collective identity. In contrast, within the sedentary model, cosmic order finds material expression through architecture, urban space, court ceremonial, and a symbolically structured system of state power. Yet, both traditions sought to articulate the universal idea of harmony between humanity, society, and the cosmos, employing diverse artistic and political forms.

One of the study’s key findings is a re-evaluation of the cultural nature of the Mughal Empire. The analysis demonstrates that this state cannot be viewed merely as a typical sedentary empire. Rather, it stands as a remarkable example of civilizational synthesis, in which the Turkic-Mongol heritage, Persian artistic tradition, Islamic philosophy, and the Indian cultural milieu combined to forge a new model of statehood and art. While retaining steppe concepts of charismatic authority, sacred lineage, and the mobility of the political center, Mughal culture simultaneously created one of the most sophisticated architectural and artistic systems in the Islamic world.

The comparative analysis of artistic systems is of particular significance. The study

revealed that ornament, architecture, miniature painting, epic traditions, and spatial organization all performed a similar cultural function: serving as mechanisms for preserving collective memory, transmitting worldviews, and shaping civilizational identity. Despite differences in artistic media, the aesthetics of steppe and imperial cultures reveal a shared symbolic mindset — one forged through centuries of cultural exchange along the Great Silk Road. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the development of a new comparative model for analyzing the interaction between steppe and imperial cultures, based on an integration of methods from comparative history, cultural semiotics, art history, and postcolonial studies. Unlike traditional approaches that view nomadic societies primarily as an external force relative to sedentary civilizations, the proposed concept interprets them as equal participants in the formation of a shared Eurasian cultural space.

The practical significance of the study stems from the potential application of the proposed methodological model to the study of Central Asian history, comparative empire studies, and the history of art, architecture, theater, and cultural heritage. The findings are relevant for the development of university courses in cultural history, Turkic studies, Oriental studies, comparative civilization studies, and Silk Road research, as well as for further investigation into processes of cultural hybridization and transregional interaction.

Thus, the dialogue between the steppe and the empire emerges not as a history of confrontation between two opposing worlds, but as a long-term process of shaping a shared Eurasian cultural environment. It was within the space of this dialogue that new political institutions, artistic forms, and worldviews emerged, significantly influencing the development of Central and South Asia. Examining these processes through a decolonial research lens allows for a re-evaluation of the contribution made by Turkic peoples and nomadic societies to

world history; it fosters a more balanced understanding of Eurasia's cultural heritage as

the product of centuries of interaction rather than civilizational conflict.

#### **Authors' contribution:**

**K. Khalykov** – conceptualization and methodology, drafting the main text, searching for citations, formatting the article and the list of references.

**B. Kalymbetov** – development of the research methods and conceptual framework, analysis and synthesis of research material, editing the article, writing additional text.

#### **Вклад авторов:**

**К.З. Халыков** – формирование идеи и методология, написание основного текста, поиск цитат, оформление статьи и списка литературы.

**Б.Н. Калымбетов** – методы и концепция исследования, анализ и обобщение исследовательского материала, редактирование статьи, написание дополнительного текста.

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## КӨШПЕЛІЛЕР МЕН ОТЫРЫҚШЫЛАР ДИХОТОМИЯСЫНАН ТЫС: КӨШПЕЛІ ДАЛА МӘДЕНИЕТІНІҢ ЕУРАЗИЯ ӨРКЕНИЕТТЕРІНІҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУЫНА ЫҚПАЛЫ

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада көшпелі дала мәдениеттерінің, атап айтқанда, қазақ-түркі дәстүрлерінің ерекшеліктері және мәдени нормалар, саяси билік, мобильділік, дүниетаным және эстетикалық көзқарастар, сондай-ақ кеңістік пен уақытты, табиғат пен әлемді қабылдау, меншік туралы түсініктер бойынша отырықшы қоғамдардан айырмашылықтары қарастырылады. Мақаланың мақсаты – көшпелі дала мәдениеттерінің ерекшелігін зерттеумен қатар, аталған екі бөлек қоғамның өзара ықпалдастығы нәтижесінде қалыптасқан ортақ мәдени тәжірибелердің, сондай-ақ Орталық және Оңтүстік Азиядағы саяси, кеңістіктік және көркемдік жүйелердің трансформациясын анықтау. Осы мақсатқа сәйкес зерттеуде өзара байланысты төрт негізгі аспект талданады: дүниетаным, кеңістікті ұйымдастыру, басқару жүйесі және эстетика. *Зерттеу әдіснамасы* салыстырмалы-тарихи әдіске негізделіп, мәдени-семиотикалық талдау, визуалды интерпретация және антропология, тарих пен өнер тарихын біріктіретін пәнаралық тәсілдермен толықтырылады. Түркі және моңғол мәдени дәстүрлеріне қатысты тарихи дереккөздер мен қазіргі ғылыми еңбектер кешенді түрде талданды. Бұл бағыттар көшпелі және отырықшы өркениеттерді бір-біріне қарама-қарсы қоймайды, керісінше, олардың тарихи тұрғыдан өзара байланыста дамығанын негіздейді. *Нәтижелері.* Зерттеу дала мен империялар арасындағы қатынастарды көшпелі және отырықшы өркениеттердің қарапайым қарама-қарсылығы ретінде қарастыру жеткіліксіз екенін көрсетеді. Керісінше, бұл саяси институттардың, көркем мәдениеттің, мобильділік жүйелерінің және биліктің символдық көріністерінің қалыптасуына ықпал еткен өзара мәдени алмасудың серпінді үдерісі болды. Сондай-ақ дәстүрлі түрде тек көшпелі немесе тек отырықшы мәдениетке тән деп есептелетін көптеген құбылыстардың ұзақ мерзімді мәдени өзара ықпалдастық нәтижесінде қалыптасқаны дәлелденеді. Зерттеу Орталық және Оңтүстік Азияның тарихи өзара байланысын түсіндіруге арналған жаңа салыстырмалы тұжырымдаманы ұсынады. Сонымен қатар, түркі-моңғол қатынастарын мәдени гибридтілік, транс-мәдени алмасу және ортақ өркениеттік даму ұғымдары арқылы қайта пайымдап, Еуразия тарихы, мәдениетаралық коммуникация және салыстырмалы мәдениеттану салаларындағы қазіргі ғылыми пікірталастарды кеңейтеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** көшпелі өркениет; дала мәдениеті; қазақ мәдениеті; Ұлы Моңғол империясы; түркі өркениеті; Ұлы Жібек жолы; мәдени гибридтілік; мобильділік; салыстырмалы империялық зерттеулер; мәдени семиотика.

**Дәйексөз үшін:** Халықов, Қабыл, және Болат Қалымбетов. «Көшпелілер мен отырықшылар дихотомиясынан тыс: көшпелі дала мәдениетінің еуразия өркениеттерінің қалыптасуына ықпалы». *Central Asian Journal of Art Studies*, т. 11, №3, 2025, 16–40 б., DOI: 10.47940/cajas.v11i3.1250

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### ЗА ПРЕДЕЛАМИ ДИХОТОМИИ КОЧЕВЫХ И ОСЕДЛЫХ: ВЛИЯНИЕ КОЧЕВОЙ СТЕПНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЕВРАЗИЙСКИХ ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИЙ

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются особенности кочевых степных культур, в частности казахско-тюркских традиций, и отличия от оседлых обществ в культурных нормах, политической власти, мобильности, мировоззрении и эстетических взглядах, а также в восприятии пространства и времени, природы и мира, в представлениях о собственности. *Цель статьи* – изучение особенностей кочевых степных культур, а также выявление трансформации общих культурных практик, сформировавшихся в результате взаимодействия этих двух различных обществ, а также политических, пространственных и художественных систем в Центральной и Южной Азии. В соответствии с этой целью в исследовании анализируются четыре основных взаимосвязанных аспекта: мировоззрение, пространственная организация, система управления и эстетика. *Методология исследования* основана на сравнительно-историческом методе и дополнена междисциплинарными подходами, сочетающими культурно-семиотический анализ, визуальную интерпретацию и антропологию, историю и историю искусства. Проводится всесторонний анализ исторических источников и современных научных работ, относящихся к тюркским и монгольским культурным традициям. Эти направления не противопоставляют кочевые и оседлые цивилизации друг другу, а скорее обосновывают их историческое развитие во взаимном взаимодействии. *Результаты.* Исследование показывает, что недостаточно рассматривать отношения между степью и империями как простое противопоставление кочевых и оседлых цивилизаций. Напротив, это был динамичный процесс взаимного культурного обмена, способствовавший формированию политических институтов, художественной культуры, систем мобильности и символических представлений о власти. Также утверждается, что многие явления, традиционно считавшиеся характерными только для кочевых или оседлых культур, сформировались в результате длительного культурного взаимодействия. Исследование предлагает новую сравнительную концепцию для объяснения исторического взаимодействия Центральной и Южной Азии. Кроме того, оно расширяет современные научные дискуссии в области евразийской истории, межкультурной коммуникации и сравнительного культурологии, переосмысливая тюрко-монгольские отношения через призму концепций культурной гибридности, транскультурного обмена и общего цивилизационного развития.

**Ключевые слова:** кочевая цивилизация; степная культура; казахская культура; империя Великих Моголов; тюркская цивилизация; Великий Шелковый путь; культурная гибридность; мобильность; сравнительные имперские исследования; культурная семиотика.

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