THE NOMADIC EMPIRES AS STATE FORMATIONS

© Pavel I. Osinsky
Dr. Sci. (Philos.), Prof. of Sociology Department,
Appalachian State University
480 Howard Street, Boone, NC 28608, USA
E-mail: osinskyp@appstate.edu

The article explores historical experience of the premodern empires formed by the Inner Asian nomads (e. g., the Xiongnu, the Huns, and the Mongols). It claims that the steppe tribal confederations turned into the centralized empires when the nomads launched large-scale military expeditions, conquered other societies, and had to maintain their domination by using extratribal authority structures. However, a shift towards centralization and sedentarization undermined the nomads' main advantage vis-a-via settled farmers, their mobility. Transferring a function of taxation to the native princes and local bureaucrats resulted in weakening of the imperial center and strengthening of the centrifugal forces. When the power of the nomadic aristocracy had become undermined by the conflicts and the internecine wars, the subordinate rulers have overthrown the power of their nomadic masters.
Keywords: nomads; tribal confederation; empire, state; Xiongnu; Huns; Mongols; Inner Asia.

Since the groundbreaking studies of the European state-making by Charles Tilly [1], the theory of state formation has significantly expanded its scope [2]. Historical sociologists examined processes of state formation in the regions other than Europe [3]. Observing a little impact of warfare on state-making in the non-European settings, social scientists attempted to dissociate processes of warfare and state formation, or, at least, qualify Tilly's claim that "war made the state and the state made war" [4]. An argument of a zero-sum relationship between the states and the preexisting governing institutions (e. g., extended kinship) [5] was balanced by the notion of their symbiosis in the familial state [6] and an astute observation of tenacity of patrimonial structures [7]. Research on the genesis of the modern nation-states was supplemented by studies of theocracies, city-states, and other entities [8]. Development of sociology of empires — centralized, hierarchical, multiethnic states formed by conquest and maintained by coercion — represented a significant step forward in conceptualizing the premodern political structures [9].

This paper argues that one important category of states was left outside this vibrant field of state formation theory. Sociological studies examine states instituted, one way or the other, by the sedentary societies. So far, except for Ibn Khaldun's celebrated analysis of the Bedouin civilization, sociologists have had little to say about the assorted

states formed by the nomads, migrants, predators, and marauders: the Cimmerians, the Scythians, the Sarmatians, the Xiongnu, the Goths, the Vandals, the Huns, the Hephthalites, the Rouran, the Vikings, the Normans, the Arabs, the Magyars, the Uighurs, and the Mongols. Some of these formations have turned into enormous territorial empires with a life-span ranging over several centuries, including the largest continental empire that ever existed in the history of the world, the Mongol Empire. As Barfield [10] noted some time ago: "When the nomads did make an appearance on the stage of world history by invading their neighbors, such events were often treated as a form of natural history, like plague or locusts." Put it shortly, historical sociology neglected nomadic societies treating them like peoples without history wandering outside the gates of the civilization.

Why should historical sociologists be concerned with studying the nomadic empires? True, most nomadic empires were relatively short-lived and had disappeared one way or the other being assimilated into the settler cultures once-conquered by them, but in the process, they have changed these cultures to the extent that newly-formed states resembled little the preexisting formations. Writing about the Huns, Hyun Jin Kim [11] states: "The group that was the real instigator of momentous changes in the millennium before European dominance has been largely forgotten. The public in both the West and the East are vaguely aware of them, if at all, as simple savages who killed, looted and plundered their ancestors. It is perhaps time to give the steppe empires their due and acknowledge the fact that their world constituted another, important civilization, which made a significant contribution to our 'modern' civilization by first bringing together the disparate cultural centers of Eurasian whole and then contributing to the molding of a new global culture." Our acknowledgement of the contribution of the nomads to the formation of the modern states as diverse as China, Russia, and Iran is long overdue. The fact that these nations are quite different from the globalizing Western civilization may be due to the impact of the past civilizational mutations initiated by the nomadic invasions a long time ago.

Let's begin with clarifying terms. A nomadic empire can be defined as a "nomadic society organized on the military-hierarchical principle, occupying a quite large space and exploring the nearby territories, as a rule, by external forms of exploitation (robbery, war and indemnity, extortion of gifts, non-equivalent trade, laying under tribute etc.)" [12]. The nomads are neither migrants nor colonizers. Many ethnic groups experienced extended periods of a large-scale migration and resettlement. However, if such a group represented a settled society before and after moving to a new location, it places this group outside the scope of our analysis. This study focuses at the steppe societies of the Inner Asia that continued their migrations as a part of their lifestyle even after conquering new lands and creating large empires (e.g., the Xiongnu, the Huns, and the Mongols). I begin with a discussion of the general characteristics of the nomadic empires and move to examining the nomadic trajectory of state formation that includes (1) emergence of nomadic confederations, (2) raids, conquests, and making of empires, (3) stabilization, sedentarization and assimilation in new environments, and (4) decline and disintegration.

Nomadic Empires: General Patterns

Study of nomadic empires is replete with analytical problems. One issue is whether nomadic empires should be considered the states at all. Some historians and anthropologists

categorize steppe empires as chiefdoms. They identify simple chiefdoms — the homogeneous tribal communities ruled by a single chief — and complex chiefdoms that incorporate several simple chiefdoms and several ranks of the hierarchically positioned chiefs. Following this logic, they identify nomadic empires as supercomplex chiefdoms; their distinctive feature is existence of the mechanism of the governors who are sent by the supreme chief to manage regional structures [13]. However, many scholars insist that some nomadic communities (at least the Xiongnu, the Huns, the Gokturks, and the Mongols) were indeed the states [14]. It is true that in their core such formations were the extended tribal confederations. Yet, the political structures of the nomadic empires did not remain static. The nomads periodically created the giant steppe societies with developed protobureaucratic features that later disintegrated into separate khanates or even acephalous lineage societies [15]. In other words, nomads experienced periods of political centralization when they attained features of the states and decentralization when they devolved into the tribal communities integrated by the shared culture, not a unified authority structure.

The origin of the centralized nomadic confederations constitutes another theoretical conundrum. Following a theory of the endogenous state formation, some authors claimed that the nomadic states emerged out of the intrasocietal conflicts associated with increasing social differentiation, emergence of classes and class conflicts [16]. However, applying such theory to the nomadic communities encounters a serious problem. A "pristine state" argument, based on experience of the early sedentary civilizations, implies a context of geographic circumscription, i.e. a situation where the cultivators had nowhere to run in order to escape social caging by power structures [17]. That apparently does not work in the context of the mobile societies where strong pressure from above would result in departure of the discontent population or an outbreak of violent resistance [18]. At present, almost all experts adopt an exogenous conception of nomadic state formation, claiming that nomadic empires emerged out of conflicts of the nomads with other groups [19]. According to this argument, a demand for consolidation of the nomads emerged most frequently before or during the large-scale raids on farming societies or campaigns for a conquest of the new territories for pastures and migration [20]. Usually (but not always) the decentralized tribal confederations turned into the centralized empires when the nomads established political control over the conquered groups and had to maintain this control by the extra-tribal authority structures [21].

The nomadic empires were autocratic polities. Admittedly, a ruler of empire, who emerged from the ranks of tribal aristocracy acquired immense power (e.g., Modu Chanyu of the Xiongnu, Attila the Hun, Shelun of the Rouran, or Genghis Khan and Timur of the Mongols). However, this power originated in the confederate tribal arrangements and rested on a balance of the intertribal relations. A ruler's authority imposed on the older structure was autocratic from the outside but consultative and tribal inside, at least at the early stages of state formation [22]. Like other empires, the nomadic empires included an imperial center (or a core) and a periphery of the conquered area(s). In many cases, an empire was divided into two or three parts – left and right wings or center and wings. The wings, in turn, could be divided into the subwings. With the onset of military campaigns, that tended to become continuous, the authority structure

became increasingly centralized and hierarchical. Among the Mongols and some their predecessors, the wings and subwings have been divided into tumens – the military-administrative units, which could provide approximately ten thousand soldiers (usually less than that), each that corresponded to the tribal associations or complex chiefdoms. The latter, in turn, following a decimal principle, have been divided into thousands, hundreds, and tens that represented, chiefdoms, tribes, and clans of a different measure of complexity [23].

Several nomadic empires, like the Mongol Empire under Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251–1259), had attained a considerable degree of political consolidation and protobureaucratization. Right below the Great Khan, there was a first minister who was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the imperial government. He supervised the princely appanages, controlled the treasury, was responsible for issuing imperial edicts, and conducting official ceremonies. He was also a commander of the imperial guard, which also functioned as secret police. Another minister, second in seniority, oversaw the secretaries and the chamberlains, assumed responsibility for scheduling audiences, receiving tribute, and making records about internal and external affairs. The imperial secretariat that he headed was divided into the specialized sections, each under command of a senior official assisted by aides and clerks: a post service office, an office of the imperial court, an office dealing with sacrifices, shamans, and fortune-tellers, etc. Below the central secretariat, there were three or four regional secretariats in charge of separate regional subdivisions of empire. The Khan controlled various regions of the empire through the governors, appointed by him, each with a large staff to assist him. Some dependent rulers had retained their thrones. Many of regional officials were non-Mongols: the Uighurs, the Muslims, or the Chinese. At the local level, most officials were recruited from the local population. Since the Great Khan spent most of his time traveling across camps and hunting grounds, the whole central government travelled with him [24].

The Mongols used the effective administrative tools for governing the conquered populations. For example, Great Khan Möngke initiated a general census of the empire, which was completed by the end of his reign. The census counted not only households but also the number of adult men and the number of fields, livestock, etc. When the new register was completed, one copy was dispatched to Karakorum (the capital of the empire) and one copy kept for the local administration. The Mongols collected numerous taxes including the tribute, imposed on all adult males of the empire as well as traditional taxes such as the agricultural tax and the tax on trade. All taxes were collected by the agents of the central government [24]. The Mongols' ability to organize large armies rested on a system of conscription of the subjugated populations. Initially, a system of recruitment was restricted to Mongol and Turkic nomads, the "people who lived in felt tents". Beginning with Ögedei's reign (Genghis Khan's son and successor, r. 1229–1241), the Mongols began drafting recruits from the settled population. Among the nomads, almost all adult males served in the army (a warrior's family and herds accompanied him in the military campaigns). Among the sedentary agriculturalists, one in ten or one in twenty males were drafted to the army. The recruitment quotas of the sedentary population were established by the census. The Mongols had introduced an

effective system of communication by using a postal system, or *yam*, i.e. a network of stations, where the horse-riding messengers would get food and shelter and change their horses. The yam carried not only messages but also officials and ambassadors, all by the state expense [25]. By using the *yam* system, the Mongol officials were able to receive information with a great speed [24].

Formation of Nomadic Confederations

A history of human civilization began, as we know, in the geographically circumscribed areas of river valleys that were propitious for the alluvial agriculture: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Shang China, and the Indus/Ganges valleys in India. The groups in the outside world were known to the contemporaries as the "barbarians," the primitive peoples who lacked the urban settlements, the monumental buildings, the cultivation technologies, the advanced crafts, well-articulated theology, and the written language. Their itinerary existence — a life year-round in wagons, tents, and yurts — prevented them from creating works of architecture and art characteristic of great agrarian civilizations.

One may be inclined to view emergence of nomadic states as a Spencerian build-up of the internal structural complexity of the expanding human groups with the patriarchal families converging into a clan, clans making a tribe, and, finally, tribes uniting into a tribal confederation. Such pattern of a bottom-up societal organization is known to anthropologists as a "native model". However, scholars believe that the "native model" is little more than an ahistorical conceptual construction [26]. It is certainly true that nomadic societies are based on the kinship and in most cases represent communities of the patriarchal lineages, each descending from a common ancestor (i.e. the agnates). The agnates differ in their status, with the senior lineages of the eldest sons enjoying greater status honor than the junior and lateral lineages. Group cohesion within lineages and conflicts over status honor among lineages provide much of the social dynamics within these "republics of cousins." Gellner [27] argued: "For the tribesmen, political life was the conflict of local groups, alignments, lineages, families, for local power, and the game was played out within the region." The same pattern was presumably replicated at the higher level of relations between the tribes. Intertribal rivalry was a perennial phenomenon in the steppe societies. In some occasions, however, several tribes formed large tribal confederations that expanded into the hierarchically organized nomadic empires.

Yet, scholars argue that a nomadic lifestyle by itself provided few incentives for forming large societies and developing the hierarchical structures of authority. Kradin [28] claims: "All basic economic processes in a pastoral society were realized within the framework of individual households. For this reason, there was no particular need for a specialized bureaucratic machinery performing managerial-redistributive activity. On the other hand, all social conflicts among the nomads were resolved within the framework of the traditional institutions of maintaining internal political stability." It is true that tribes competed for pastures and other resources and tried to establish their domination over other groups, but, as stated above, in the open frontier areas, where the nomads migrated, there was always an option of outmigration and avoiding social caging by the hierarchical structures.

Why would nomads form the tribal confederations and build steppe empires then? Currently, scholars concur that a need for supratribal unity was almost always exogenous. Only in very rare cases has a nomadic state emerged without conquering and subjugating a sedentary population [29]. Why did it happen? Nomadic pastoralism provided a limited range of products. At the same time, the nomads interacted with the sedentary civilizations that generated much greater assortment of goods, including prestigious luxury items. Grousset [30] wrote: "The poor Turko-Mongol herdsmen who in years of drought ventured across the meager grazing of the steppe from one dried-up waterhole to another, to the very fringe of civilization, at the gates of Pechili (Hopei) or Transoxiana, gazed thunderstruck at the miracle of sedentary civilization: luxuriant crops, villages crammed with grain, and the luxury of the towns." Being unable to offer the equivalent goods for exchange, the nomads routinely resorted to violent appropriation of such goods. Occasional raids represented an irregular source of highly sought goods. A more rational solution would be establishing a continuous domination over the sedentary societies for predatory expropriation of such goods on a regular basis. Such ambitious endeavor would be possible only by creating a large extra-tribal political structure [21].

Ibn Khaldun was the first social thinker who talked about a "pull" of civilization in the context of relations between the "barbarians" and settled cultures. Writing about the Bedouins, he claimed "people of the desert" restrict themselves to bare necessities in food, clothing and dwelling. At the same time, "since desert life no doubt is the source of bravery, savage groups are braver than others. They are, therefore, better able to achieve superiority and to take away the things that are in the hands of other nations" [31]. A would-be leader of the nascent predatory state had to be the person most effective in mediating nomads' relations with their sedentary neighbors. Lindner [32] writes: "Achievement of success as chief meant mediating conflict within the tribe and acting as a fulcrum between the tribe and external powers, representing the tribal interests in negotiations, or should parley fails, leading the mounted archers of the tribe against its enemies. On the death or defeat of the chief, the absence of an equally able successor meant the disintegration of his tribe as his former tribesmen sought elsewhere for greener pastures and more adept shepherds of their interests."

Of course, subordination and exploitation of the agriculturalists was not the only possible way of dealing with a lure of the sedentary civilizations. Another option was simply destroying them. The Mongols massacred thousands of people during their campaign against Khwarazm in 1220s and later, during Chagatai's campaigns in the Middle Asia and Batu's conquests in the West. In fact, the issue of how to deal with the sedentary societies represented a matter of serious contention within the Mongol elite. While the steppe traditionalists insisted on destruction of the settled societies whenever possible, the key rulers (Ögedei and Möngke) chose to pursue a strategy of extracting tribute from the conquered sedentary societies, which eventually had prevailed over the genocidal plans.

Thomas Barfield [33] set forth an interesting theory that nomadic confederations in Inner Asia (e.g., the Xiongnu and the Mongols) emerged in order to extract tribute from the sedentary China. He argued: "Empires established by nomads in Mongolia

were distinctive 'shadow empires' that arose as secondary phenomena in response to imperial expansion by the Chinese. Their stability depended on extorting vast amounts of wealth from China through pillage, tribute payments, border trade, and international reexport of luxury goods — not by taxing steppe nomads. When China was centralized and powerful, so were nomadic empires; when China collapsed into political anarchy and economic depression, so did the unified steppe polities that had prospered by its extortion." However, research on other nomadic states, such as the Turks in the sixth century, indicates that Turk steppe empire was established several decades before China's reunification, i.e. at the time when China was still weak and divided. The Uighurs, another steppe confederation, enjoyed a peak of their power (from 744 to 849 AD) when the Tang dynasty in China was severely weakened by the military rebellion of An Lushan. Thus, a bipolar model (the power of the nomads as contemporaneous with a strong unified China) — even if it is true — cannot be applied to experience of all nomadic states, which points to the need of a more nuanced multipolar model of nomadic state-building [34].

To sum up, we argue that nomadic empires emerged out of intense power struggle and military competition in the Eurasian steppe. From time to time, driven by the pull of the civilization, the nomadic tribes formed the extra-tribal power structures with the goal of subjugating and exploiting the sedentary civilizations. Thus, state formation was driven by relations with other societies, but not necessarily restricted to relations with China but involving relations with various societies: nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary [34].

Raids, Conquests, and Making of Empires

While having strong incentives for predatory exploitation of the sedentary societies was an important factor, the nomads ought to possess effective means for achieving such goals. Domestication of horses was the first step towards the rise of the nomads' power. Although horses were domesticated around 4,000 BC, for a long-time horseback riding was used only sporadically, as a sport or athletic display. Riding was very dangerous and practically useless because riders had little control over a horse. Only with adoption of saddles and stirrups in the first millennium BC the horseback riders had become secure enough to use weapons when riding. Skillful use of a bow has made the mounted combat effective. The main advantage of the mounted archers was their remarkable mobility. By having two horses in reserve, mounted warriors would cover up to seventy miles a day, taking their victims by surprise, annihilating them, and disappearing before any resistance would be organized [35].

Raids and plunder were the most common forms of early nomadic predation. The Cimmerians and the Scythians were notoriously predatorial. The Cimmerians were the Indo-European people (most likely of the Iranian origins) that appeared in the Pontic area (north of the Black sea) around 1,000 BC. They migrated in the vast territories spreading from the contemporary Romania to West Siberia. The Scythians succeeded the Cimmerians in the steppe zone of Eurasia and were present in this region for about a thousand years, from 700 BC to 300 AD. Neither the Cimmerians, not the Scythians showed any intention of establishing permanent control over sedentary civilizations. They thrived on plundering their neighbors. Confronting serious resistance, the nomads

preferred to retreat. However, such retreat was often feigned. One of the favorite tactics of Scythians was shooting arrows at mounted pursuers when retreating (a so-called "Parthian shot") [36]. Many rulers tried to put the end to the Scythians' forays. In 512 BC, Darius, the Achaemenid king (the one who fought Greeks) launched an expedition to the steppe determined to defeat the elusive nomads. Darius had advanced eastwards as far as the right bank of Volga but being unable to catch the Scythians, turned his exhausted troops back home [37]. Since Scythians had not established permanent domination over the settled societies, they dispensed with creating extra-tribal structures of authority. Although reliable evidence is scarce, most likely the Cimmerians and the Scythians exemplified complex chiefdoms rather than the hierarchically organized nomadic empires.

Later adaptations became more regularized. The Xiongnu, the Huns, and the Mongols pursued policies of militaristic expansion, followed by political subjugation and prolonged domination over the sedentary societies. The Xiongnu were the confederation of steppe nomads that resided in the territory of contemporary Mongolia and adjacent regions from 3rd century BC to the late 1st century AD. The empire was created around 209 BC by a warrior named Modun. The polity was divided into the right and left wings ruled by the kings subordinate to the Chanyu (the emperor) (the pattern was found in later steppe empires as well). Lower in the hierarchy came the governors, the generals and the commanders of one thousand, of one hundred, and of ten men. Provoked by the Chinese advance to the territory controlled by the Xiongnu, Mogun assembled a large military force, defeated the Han emperor and established a domination over the Chinese state. The rulers of the latter had taken an obligation to send princesses to marry Xiongnu leaders and gifts to the Chanyu. For about two and a half centuries the Xiongnu dominated the Chinese. However, by the mid first century AD, the fealty relationship had reversed; the Xiongnu became vassals of the Chinese. In the end, the steppe empire plunged into the civil war and disintegrated into several smaller pieces [38].

Many historians view the Huns who dominated a large part of the Middle Asia and Eastern Europe in the 5th and 6th centuries AD the direct descendants of the Xiongnu that migrated to the West. By the mid fifth century, the Huns created a large nomadic empire that subordinated the Goths, the Alans, and under the leadership of Attila attacked both Eastern and Western parts of the Roman empire. After a series of defeats, the Eastern Romans had to pay tribute to the Huns. Nonetheless, the Western Romans had withstood Atilla's expeditions and avoided subordination to the barbarians. After Attila's death in 453, the Huns had to deal with uprisings of the conquered tribes. In the end, the Hun elite was absorbed by the local populations.

In the early thirteenth century, a Mongol warrior, Temujin, succeeded in uniting the Mongol tribes under his rule. After being enthroned as Genghis Khan in 1206, he launched a series of conquests that ended up in creating the largest empire in the history of the world that controlled most of the territory of Eurasia. The first society conquered by the Mongols was the Uighur Kingdom west of Mongolia. Next, Qara-Khitai (further West) fell to Genghis Khan. In 1220, The Mongols armies descended on the Central Asia, which resulted in massacre of thousand people and destruction of the thriving cities of Khwarazm. In 1236, the armies of Batu Khan (a grandson of Genghis Khan) attacked

the Volga Bulgars. Next year, Batu launched a three-year conquest of the Kievan Rus. In 1241, after defeating the Poles and Hungarians, the invaders reached the Adriatic Sea. In 1258 the army of Hulagu (another grandson of Genghis Khan) seized Baghdad and wrecked the Abbasid Caliphate. By 1279, Kublai Khan (an older brother of Hulagu) destroyed the Song empire and established the Yuan dynasty in China. Usually invasion and subjugation of the immediate enemies brought the information about more distant civilizations. Once such information was obtained, the Mongols sent envoys with request of submission. Often merchants performed a similar function. In some cases, establishing relations of fealty and vassalage was achieved by relatively peaceful means. However, if envoys or merchants were mistreated or, even worse, murdered, the Mongols' onslaught was imminent and ruthless. All men would have been killed, women raped and enslaved.

In the mid thirteenth century, after losing much of its initial thrust, the empire fragmented in four parts. The descendants of the Genghis Khan's eldest son, Jochi, established control over the western part of the former empire that included the Russian principalities, the Volga region, and the West Siberia, which became known as the Golden Horde. Second son, Chagatai, became a ruler of the Middle Asia. A Genghis Khans grandson, Hulagu founded the Ilkhanate in the Middle East. Another grandson, Kublai Khan, established a Mongol-dominated Yuan empire in China.

Stabilization, Sedentarization, and Assimilation

"Conquering the world on horseback is easy, it is dismounting and ruling that is hard." A famous phrase attributed to Yelü Chucai (a Chinese advisor to Great Khan Ögedei) underlined the difficulties of transition from war-making to the everyday business of managing vast territories conquered by the Mongols. The nomads were not accustomed to governing large groups of people on a continuous basis. First, administration of empire required a stationary capital. Such administrative activities as tribute-taking, allocating appanages, authorizing patrimony of subordinate rulers, accepting envoys, and keeping records could not be done effectively on a move. In 1235, Ögedei established a permanent capital of the empire in Karakorum in central Mongolia. For a quarter of a century, Karakorum was a site of world politics until the Genghisid empire had fragmented and entered the period of civil wars when the city slowly declined and became depopulated.

In a similar fashion, after the empire broke down into four parts in the 1260s (the Golden Horde, the Chagatai Khanate, the Ilkhanate, and the Yuan China), each of the khanates obtained an administrative center, either established in the old capital or built anew. Soon such cities became centers of political intrigue, crafts, commerce and art. Of course, their functions varied depending on the pattern of imperial organization of each ulus. Khazanov [21] has identified two patterns of state/society organization in the Pax Mongolica. First pattern characterized the polities in which the nomadic conquerors and the agriculturalists lived in separate ecological zones and lacked significant economic and cultural integration. Second pattern involved the states where the nomadic conquerors and the cultivators occupied the same geographic location, which resulted in substantial economic and cultural integration of such societies.

The Golden Horde with its clear demarcation between the Mongols and the sedentary population exemplified the first pattern. After the Mongols conquered the Russian principalities, they conducted the census of the population, established a taxation system

and sent tribute-taking officials to the Russian lands. The Mongols themselves continued their nomadic lifestyle in the grassland areas of the middle and lower Volga, where their new capital Sarai was established, whereas the bulk of the Russian population was concentrated in the forest zone in the northwest. (From the fourteenth century the Russian princes themselves brought tribute to the Horde). The process of sedentarization of the nomads in the Golden Horde did not advance to a great extent. The Mongols had mixed with the Turkic population of the Volga region (many of them converted to Islam) but much less so with the Christian Orthodox Russians. The clear separation of the Horde and the Eastern Slavs helped to create a common cultural identity of the Russians people who overthrew the Mongol yoke by the end the fifteenth century [39].

The Mongol-dominated state in China (the Yan dynasty), founded by Kublai Khan in the 1270s, provided an example of the second pattern. After conquering China, Kublai Khan had transferred the capital of the empire to Khanbaliq, where present day Beijing is located. The Mongol occupant elite was essentially superimposed on the Chinese agricultural society and the Mandarin bureaucracy. The Mongols and the Chinese shared the same environment. The preexisting power structures were preserved with many Chinese bureaucrats left in place. Later, even the old Confucian system of examinations was revived. Many Mongols turned to settled life style and assimilated into the local Chinese culture [40].

Acceptance of customs and institutions of the sedentary people led to transformation of the traditional nomadic culture. The new generations of nomadic rulers have lost much of a crusading zeal and the military skills of the early empire-builders. The Mongol elite adopted a luxurious lifestyle of local rulers spending their days in drinking, being entertained by wives and concubines. Some of them, following the teachings of Confucianism, became patrons of arts and education. In essence, the Mongols followed the trajectory of the previous nomadic conquerors of China such as the Xiongnu and the Turks that underwent substantial sinification. As Vasjutin [41] commented "Most likely the nomads realized the danger of Chinese influence on the steppe, but the habits, fashion and passion of nomadic aristocracy for enrichment at the expense of Chinese gifts prevailed. All this led to the nomadic elite's "decomposition" and disregard of the common nomads' interest. Its organizational base was thereby weakened, and this was accompanied by a decline in its military efficiency."

It is noteworthy that Ibn Khaldun has described such transformation long ago. He argued that great dynasties among the Bedouins usually lasted for four generations (sometimes a little longer) but beginning with a second generation they began losing their "group feeling" (asabiiya) which resulted in erosion and disintegration of the nomadic dynasty: "As a result, the toughness of desert life is lost. Group feeling and courage weaken. Members of the tribe revel in the well-being that God has given them. Their children and offspring grow up too proud to look after themselves or to attend to their own needs. They have disdain also for all the other things that are necessary in connection with group feeling. This finally becomes a character trait and natural characteristic of theirs. The group feeling and courage decrease in the nest generations. Eventually, group feeling is altogether destroyed. They thus invite their own destruction… When group feeling is destroyed, the tribe is no longer able to protect itself, let alone press any claims. It will be swallowed up by other nations" [42].

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Decline and Disintegration

The imperial quest for domination retained its momentum until the rulers of the empires were able to continue their conquests and allocate gifts and appanages among the members of the nomadic aristocracy. However, at a certain point even the Mongols had reached the limits of their geopolitical expansion. Using the present-day designations, by the end of the thirteenth century the possessions of the Genghis Khan's descendants included the whole of China and Korea in the East, reached Vietnam in the South East, and incorporated most of Pakistan in the South. In the West, steppe warrior controlled the Russian principalities. In the Southwest the Ilkhanate occupied territories of the contemporary Iran, the western part of Turkey, and all Transcaucasia but confronted the strong resistance of the Egyptian Mamelukes who prevented establishing the nomads' control over Syria and Jordan.

The Mongols looked formidable for their European contemporaries yet turning from the outside to the inside have exacerbated the intra-elite tensions within the empire. Now the conquerors began to compete for the spoils of war. In 1262, the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate became embroiled into a conflict over control of the Caucasus (the Berke-Hulagu war). In the East, grandsons of Genghis Khan - Kublai and Ariq Böke - fought a bitter war for the title of the Great Khan (the Toluid civil war). As a result, by the mid-1260s, the Genghisid empire broke down into four fragments.

Within each of four subparts, the members of the Mongol elite conflicted almost continuously. After a more than century of its existence, the Golden Horde sunk into a civil war (1259–1281) in which four khans vied to control of the crumpling state. After a short reunification under Tokhtamysh, the khanate declined and disintegrated. The major contender of the Horde, the Ilkhanate, experienced problems of maintaining control over the Caucasus. Resistance to the Mongol rule in Georgia resulted in decline in taxes paid to the rulers and weakening the state. In 1330s, the Ilkhanate fragmented into several successor states. Further east, the Chagatai Khanate split into two parts, Transoxiana and Moghulistan. The Mongol elite in Yuan China lost much of its cultural identity becoming thoroughly sinicized. Natural disasters such as severe floods and plaque struck the domain. The power of the emperor was further undermined by the Red Turban rebellion (1351–1368). In the 1370s, the Yuan dynasty finally expired being replaced by the Ming dynasty of the Han Chinese. All four Genghisid successor states lasted for about a hundred years and all disappeared by the end of the fourteenth century.

In all four cases, the Mongol elites were torn by the conflicts that turned periodically into the civil wars. Such pattern was due to a large extent to the inconsistent mechanism of succession when a new Mongol emperor had to be elected by the members of the nomadic aristocracy. That allowed the opportunistic members of the rulers' lineage to mobilize the discontent members of the elite for fighting the elected (or soon to be elected) leader. As a consequence, the authority structures of the nomadic states were undermined by a series of succession crises. In addition, the Mongol rule suffered a serious problem known in social sciences as an agency dilemma. Being a relatively small elite of conquerors placed atop of large sedentary societies, the rulers often had to delegate functions of taxation to the subordinate local princes (like in Russia) or the

native officials (like in China). That worked towards weakening of the central state and strengthening the centrifugal tendencies.

Once the nomadic authorities became undermined by internal struggles while the local rulers gained enough strength, that opened an opportunity for overthrowing the rule of the invaders. In the end of the fifteenth century the Russians ended the Mongol-Tatar yoke and in the mid of the sixteenth century Czar Ivan IV launched a massive counter-offensive against the Tatar khanates on Volga, extending the Russian power to the east. After the fall of the Yuan dynasty in China, the Mongols retreated to Mongolia, where they established a Northern Yuan dynasty that lasted until 1630s when it fell under the Jurchens, a sedentary people from Manchuria who also founded the last (Qing) dynasty in China. With centralization of power in Russia and China and effective use of firearm weaponry by the modern armies of these sedentary states, the power of mounted archers has come to an end.

Conclusion

For more than two and a half thousand years (since a rise of the Cimmerians in the first millennium BC to the fall of the Timur's empire in the early sixteenth century) most of Eurasia was dominated by the chiefdoms and empires established by the horse-riding nomads. If we add the polities formed by the camel-riding nomads (the Bedouins and the Berbers) and the seafaring predators (e.g., the Vikings) we would get an impressive array of the premodern (proto)state formations that were neglected by mainstream historical sociology. My brief exploration of rise and fall of the Eurasian nomadic empires supports Charles Tilly's thesis of the decisive role of war-making in state formation. I also suggest that the nomadic power structures has left a major imprint on institutional design and other characteristics of several modern states, from Russia to Iran and China. Their lasting effect on these nations, which presumably varied in nature and intensity, is a subject of further investigation, which is outside the scope of this essay. The intent of this paper is modest: to bring the nomadic empires under the purview of state formation theory.

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ИМПЕРИИ КОЧЕВНИКОВ КАК ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

Осинский Павел Иванович
доктор философских наук, профессор Департамента социологии,
Аппалачский государственный университет,
США, 28608, Северная Каролина, г. Бун, Говард стрит 480
E-mail: osinskyp@appstate.edu

Статья рассматривает исторический опыт империй, созданных кочевниками Центральной Азии (хунну, гуннами и монголами). Автор утверждает, что степные племенные конфедерации трансформировались в централизованные империи по мере того, как кочевники вступали на путь широкомасштабных завоеваний, подчиняли другие народы и должны были управлять ими посредством протобюрократических структур, которые выходили за рамки племенных институтов власти. В то же время переход к централизации управления и частичной оседлости подрывал главное преимущество кочевников перед оседлым населением — их мобильность. Передача функции взимания податей местным князьям и чиновникам приводила к ослаблению имперской власти и усилению центробежных тенденций. Когда же власть кочевников оказалась окончательно подорванной их междоусобными войнами, подчиненные им князья смогли освободиться от господства своих степных правителей.
Ключевые слова: кочевники; племенная конфедерация; империя; государство; хунну; гунны; монголы; Центральная Азия.