

REVIEWING THE CAUSES THAT LED TO THE END OF NOMADIC CIVILISATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE MONGOLIAN CASE

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the end of nomadic civilisations can be dated from the first colonisations carried out by European countries and peoples from a sedentary background, mainly engaged in agriculture, but lacking in sufficient extensions of land to guarantee for their survival. The cause is to be sought in the mainly feudal structure of Europe in 1500, that concentrated vast territories in the hands of few noble big landowners.

In addition to the above, one should take into consideration the poverty of huge masses of Europeans, who would urbanise in the towns that were becoming more and more populated with the consequent risk of riots, therefore endangering the constituted order.

The lack of land extensions sufficient to survival of all was one of the reasons that drove European sovereigns to promoting exploring campaigns first, and violent conquests (subjugation) after, all to enable the transfer of landless Europeans in less inhabited territories and anyhow taken forcedly away from their legitimate owners.

2. The beginning of the end

It is possible to date the beginning of the end of nomadic civilisations in the continents as follows:

1. 1488 Bartholomew Diaz, sent by the King of Portugal, doubles the Cape of Good Hope thus opening the way to conquest of the whole African continent by Europeans;
2. 1492 Christopher Columbus, sent by the sovereigns of Spain, landed at the isles facing Central America, therefore starting the colonisation of the whole continent by hand of the European Powers;
3. 1497 Vasco de Gama, sent by the sovereigns of Portugal, arrives in Asia, reaches India in Calicut and opens the way to Asian colonisation for all European states;
4. 1582 the battle of Kazan headed by Russian Zar Ivan marks the beginning of Russian penetration in the nomads' territories of Central Asia and Siberia;
5. 1606 the Dutch discover Australia and open the way to colonisation of the continent and nearby territories for all other European Powers, first of all for the Kingdom of Great Britain.

The natural boundaries established to split up the nomads' territory among the various tribes so that each one would have that "vital space", necessary to its survival, wholly similar to the natural boundaries that almost all animals give themselves, have been routed and drastically reduced by the Europeans to the point of disappearance either by slaughtering or subjugating about one hundred million nomads, to advantage of the new settlers, owners of the land to be destined to sedentary cultures or uses.

3. Nomadic culture in Mongolia

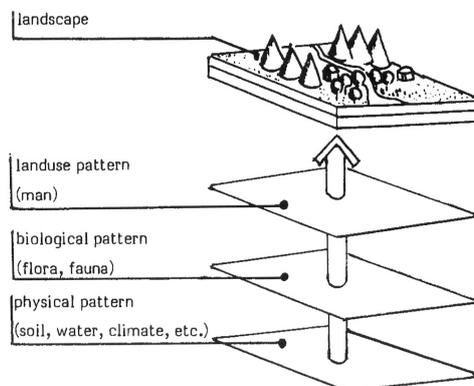
Only Mongolia, protected by its particularly hard climatic conditions and by proud people, succeeded in maintaining control over its own territory and keeping the nomadic culture alive, and living together with the surrounding nature with which Mongolians have an intrinsic relation, also due to the widely diffused sciamanic practice.

The opening - some years ago - of the Institute for Nomadic Studies as department at the Academy of Sciences in Ulaanbaatar, shows the activity and the importance in maintaining the nomadic culture alive.

The basis of the landscape is formed by the physical pattern (soil, water, climate, etc.). This pattern in turn, determines the biological data and patterns (flora, fauna). These two

factors together generate spatial conditions for human society and determine the land use pattern. The result of these interactions we call landscape (Germeraad, 1986, p. 12)¹

Fig. n. 1.



This is due to the fact that nomadic and semi-nomadic traditions are firmly established in the culture of Mongolian people which currently counts almost 12 million souls distributed partly in China, partly in Buriatia in Tuva, in Mongolia, Afghanistan and Russian Federation.

As the members of the Mongolia Academy of Sciences recall - Enkhtuvshin, Tumurjav and Chuluunbaatar (2000) – the consultant group of nomadic settlement of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN) defines in 1972 that the nomads are people who do not settle down in one place for long time and move in search for animal pasture. Confidence in animal husbandry – source for living and do not almost or in reality cultivate land. This group says that some people who live in a certain country while engaging in agriculture together with the pasture animal husbandry or some family members engage in agriculture in some seasons of year and live longer in settlements. They are semi – nomads. Certain number of people engage in agriculture and keep up domestic animals as supplement. They are nomads with the feature of settling down.

Scholars and researchers who study nomads, their way of life and animal husbandry consider that there are six types of nomadic people on our planet.

1. Those who mostly breed sheep and goats and use of camels for riding and transporting are called as (beduins) or nomads of camels who live in North Africa and South East Asia.
2. Those who breed mostly cattle are called as nomads of Africa who live in the South of Sahara desert.
3. Europe – Asia nomads. They increase sheep and cattle. They use of horses and oxes for riding and transporting.
4. Those who have yaks are called as nomads of Tibetan plateau. Yaks are very important in their living.
5. Reindeer people. They live in taiga and tundra of the North Asia and breed reindeers.
6. Ocean nomads. They are engaged in fishing and hunting animals water².

Nomadism exists as an economical system thanks to the constitution of the Republic of Mongolia, the only Country in the world stating that the property of land belongs to people, which also forbids fencing of the lands, thus enabling livestock to a wild pasture. Livestock

¹ Germeraad Pieter W. – Enebisich Zandangin, “The Mongolian landscape tradition: a key to progress. Nomadic traditions and their contemporary role in landscape planning and management in Mongolia”, The Netherlands, 1995, p. 23

² Nomads and use of pastures today, International Symposium, International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, Ulaanbaatar, 2000, p. 7

produces an average income for nomadic families, also due to the high price cashmere wool has on the international market. The use of telematic technology contributes to enhancing the conditions of life of nomadic shepherds as well as producing autonomous electrical power that contributes to make the traditional tent, *ger*, more comfortable.

Prime Minister Ts. Elbegdorj held a video conference with the representatives of educational offices in Arkhangai, Bayankhongor, Zavkhan and Orkhon aimags on 15 November to inaugurate the national system centre for distance learning. The centre was established by the Education, Culture and Science Ministry with the joint aims of using information technology for educational and training purposes and bringing education closer to rural people. Fourteen aimags, including Drakhan-Uul, Arkhangai, Orkhon, Khentii, Bayan-Olgii, Khovd, Khovsgol, Uvs and Sukhbaatar, and Ulaanbaatar are connected by the system.

Using this system, 600 hours of training are to be conducted this year. The training sessions will involve half of all secondary school teachers. In future, all aimags will be connected to the network, through which up to 70% of all teachers are expected to improve their education through distance learning.

Besides education, culture and science, people working in social sciences are also allowed to host international and inter aimag video conferences and to receive information through the network³.

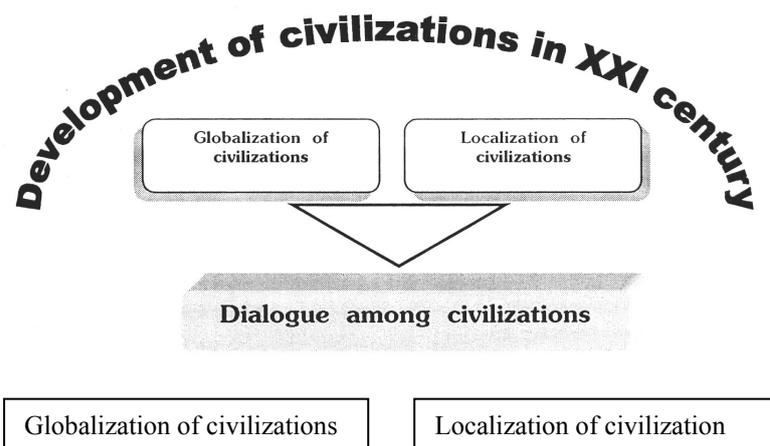
4. Conclusions

The idea of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, particularly of the Institute of Nomadic Studies, is that all civilisations are to be studied in the national, international and global aspects. This way, we are able to understand that the catastrophic consequences of the aforementioned colonisations caused the almost complete extinction of the nomadic civilisations, except for the Mongolian one.

Therefore, also the future preservation of Central Asian culture should be studied in an international context because numerous are the inter – dependencies with the sedentary civilisations.

How is it feasible to provide civilisations with compatibility? A first step was taken by the leaders of many countries that participated in the Round table held on the Eve of the United Nations' Millennium Summit hosted by UNESCO.

Fig. n. 2

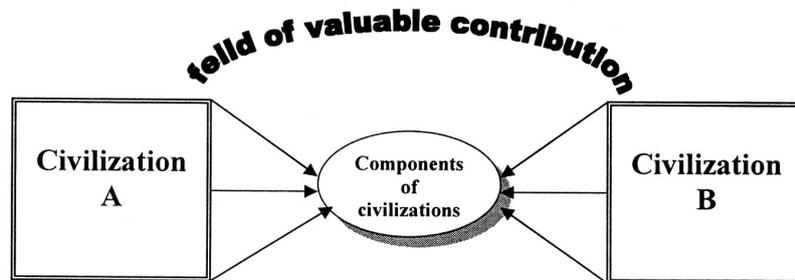


Source: Enkhtuvshin, 2002.

³ The Mongol Messenger, 24th Novembre 2004, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, p. 3

The suggestion is that judging the future of a civilisation by its expansion is obsolete; the alternative way should be assessing its future by its contribution value in relation with the environment and land preservation, and not in relation to the economic income, as expressed in the figure below.

Fig. n. 3.



Source: Enkhtuvshin, 2002, p. 26.

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