

On Nomadic Charisma

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The article closely considers an important aspect of the operation of nomadic charisma that has not yet been sufficiently addressed by historians. To do so, it examines the dynamics of nomadic power relations and the nomads' ensuing sense of properly balanced relations of power that found its manifestation when their rulers were required to share power in an effective way, one that would satisfy all parties involved. This was translated into the requirement to comply with established norms of social reciprocity toward one's kinsfolk that became crystallized into certain patterns of behavior. I argue that adherence to these patterns constituted the essential attributes of the nomads' psychological and cultural expectations that shaped their perception of a charismatic style of ruling.

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Introduction

European and other contemporaries tended to explain the authority of Mongol khans by linking it to a despotic and authoritarian style of ruling, which they believed enabled them to maintain iron discipline among their subjects and secure their unquestioning obedience. For example, according to the famous report of the Italian friar Giovanni di Plano Carpini, who visited the Mongol court in 1245-47,

The emperor of the Tatars has a wonderful power over everyone. No one dares camp anywhere unless the emperor himself assigns the place. He himself assigns where the generals stay, the generals assign the millenarii their place, the millenarii assign the centenarii their place, and the centenarii the decani their place.¹

Yet scholars of nomadism provided ample evidence convincingly showing that due to the factor of mobility, the dynamics of nomadic power relations had eschewed centralization of power under a single ruler. For example, William Honeychurch has stated that nomadic power relations were informed by the interplay of what he calls ‘spatial politics’, which he defines as “a negotiative environment, in which authority, control, resources, and information could not be socially or spatially concentrated, nor really monopolized.”² Multiple seats of power engendered by these dynamics unfolded against an alternative political landscape, one that resisted the top-down, center-oriented trajectories characteristic of power relationships in agrarian societies. These ‘spatial politics’ thwarted the formation of stable political structures, and, hence, contributed to the relatively limited longevity of nomadic states. In this setting power was not about wielding power per se, but about balancing power in an effective way, by sharing it with parties involved in order to meet their expectations.

Against this backdrop, ambitious nomadic rulers tapped into their followers’ willingness to cooperate by undertaking raids, campaigns and long-distance migrations that could significantly undermine their rivals by attracting those rivals’ followers. In addition, successful raids and campaigns provided the rulers with the chance to demonstrate their generosity through sharing spoils with their noble and common followers alike.

These types of interactions were enabled, among other things, by the relative

¹ Giovanni di Plano Carpini, *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tatars*, trans. E. Hildinger (Boston: Branden Books, 1996), 64.

² William Honeychurch, *Inner Asia and the Spatial Politics of Empire: Archeology, Mobility, and Culture* (New York: Springer, 2015), 72.

economic independence that the majority of members of nomadic societies enjoyed. Usually, both noble and ordinary nomadic families owned their own households, comprised of a main tent, several other tents, and a certain amount of livestock that was considered the family's private property. The property could not be taken from its owners unless they were obliged by judges to give away a portion of their livestock as a fine or offered it to their rulers and relatives as a tribute or a gift. Under these circumstances, nomadic rulers were not in a position to impose taxation on their followers, but satisfied with voluntary donations. Nomadic wealth was, indeed, measured by possession of livestock. However, because of nomadic economies' vulnerability to environmental conditions, the number of livestock tended to fluctuate frequently.

The often unpredictable climatic conditions of the Eurasian Steppes put pressure on nomads to make quick and independent decisions about whether to cooperate with or separate from their leaders or other nomadic communities. While their insistence on their right to free choice was a working strategy for meeting the immediate challenges presented by these conditions, the alternative spaces of power contestation this freedom engendered ultimately inhibited the greater potential for effective rulers to emerge, which might have given these communities a stronger chance to survive and prosper under the inhospitable conditions of their native habitats over time. Nomads embraced mobility for purely political and other non-economic considerations, strategically negotiating and renegotiating the terms and conditions of their cooperation. If commoners used this strategy as a means of controlling their leaders' behavior, the leaders used it to reinforce their own status. This suggests that the way of harnessing the nomads' centrifugal aspirations was through investing in 'the sovereign importance of movement' and, in this way, transforming their free choices into a ruler's own choice. Predicated on maintaining their right to economic and political freedom, the nomads' sense of properly-balanced power relations transformed interactions with their leaders into personal, flexible, and non-binding partnerships.

The nomads' centrifugal aspirations shaped by the demands of their economy amplified the element of uncertainty characteristic of their political relationships, which, in turn, came to play a key role in shaping their psychological and cultural expectations. This came to manifest in reinforcing their awareness of belonging to certain kinship groups, usually represented by three generations, and maintaining strong bonds with them. For rather than through submission to remote and abstract rulers, it was through their family networks that members of these groups were able to secure their economic cooperation and protection. Each member was therefore expected to conform to specific patterns of behavior defined by their gender, age, and kinship status and designed to strengthen cooperation within their nuclear and extended families. Violation of these norms was, as a rule, met with strong condemnation by other members

and, could, in some cases, even lead to extradition.

Proper social conduct entailed avoiding conflicts and showing respect to one's kinsfolk, especially to their elder members, in the form of loyalty, generosity, hospitality, protection, and rendering assistance. Many visitors to nomadic encampments, including V. V. Radlov, observed that regardless of the number of items they gave to their inhabitants as gifts, the nomads immediately shared the items with everyone present,³ who most likely represented their relatives. Radlov's observation resonates with the observation of the Swedish traveler Johann Schnitscher, who visited the Kalmyks in 1714: "... this people seems to surpass us Christians by far as regards their mutual affection, because they do not enjoy the least thing solely for themselves, unless they first divide it with their brethren who are present, whether they be 20 or even more."⁴

This suggests that charismatic nomadic rulers were able to attract their followers provided they also demonstrated their adherence to established norms of social reciprocity. The interplay of uncertainty ultimately spelled out the workings of a charismatic nomadic leadership that, among other things, entailed a ruler's ability to consolidate his relatives and other nomads, by showing respect and generosity toward them, as well as preventing and settling their conflicts.

Revisiting the story of the rise of Chingis Khan to the status of supreme Mongol ruler shows how, within the fluidity of steppe political negotiations, Chingis Khan's personal adherence to these norms toward his close relatives and loyal nobility proved an effective strategy for counterbalancing his followers' centripetal aspirations and hence, prevailing over his rivals.

The Mongol Principle of Collective Sovereignty

Hodong Kim has argued that at least until the mid-fourteenth century the Mongol Empire had been run by Chingis Khan and his successors as a family enterprise, which reflected the Mongol sense of world order.⁵ The sense was based on the concept of collective sovereignty of members of the ruling dynasty of Chingis Khan that implied that all members of the royal family were considered legitimate to claim the portion of incomes and spoils from populations placed under Mongol rule. According to the Qazaq historian Tursun Sultanov, the principle mandated that each adult Chingisid prince had the right to his share (*inju*) of populations and lands, along with a certain number of

³ Vasilii V. Ravlov, *Iz Sibiri. Stranitsy dnevnika* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 174.

⁴ I. A. Schnitscher, *An Account of the Kalmyk Land under Ayuki Khan* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 18.

⁵ Hodong Kim, "The Unity of the Mongol Empire and Continental Exchanges over Eurasia," *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 1 (2009), 33-36.

craftsmen and a portion of agricultural land that became property of his ruling family. The *inju* populations and lands were called by the ancient Turkic words *ulus*, *el*, and *yurt*. The latter notions were also used for the designation of groups of nomadic populations without linking them to certain territories.⁶ A closer examination of Mongol and other sources, however, suggest that only truly charismatic figures among the Mongol nobility could benefit from the Chingisid principle of collective sovereignty, including claiming their share from incomes in lands placed under Mongol rule. Batu, grandson of Chingis Khan and the founder of the Golden (Kipchak) Horde, was one of them, who “had his allotted share of every province in the country that had come under Mongol rule, and this share was duly taken away by his agents.”⁷

The proposed imperial unity manifested in recognition of the superior status of Great Khan and upholding the principle of social reciprocity that apart from exchange of envoys, gifts and tributes, entailed adoption of a special code of royal conduct. Generally, the Mongol power succession was governed by the principle of primogeniture, implying that a ruler’s brother or his elder son were expected to replace him. In practice, however, this principle was often correlated through the entertainment of another principle, which Joseph Fletcher called the principle of *tanistry* or the principle of choice. Following *tanistry* practices, participants in the royal meetings (*quryltai*) dedicated to the election of a great khan often ignored the age of candidates and chose those who had succeeded in rallying support from influential Chingisid and non-Chingisid nobles.⁸ The *quryltai* decisions therefore had a strong potential for engendering the rise of contested seats of authority that were followed by succession wars among rival candidates. Hence, predicated on the principle of collective sovereignty, the *tanistry* workings secured each royal member’s right to challenge the established status-quo and claim the superior power status for themselves. The Mongol power succession thus demonstrates a highly competitive environment of the Inner Asian politics and a crucial role of personal charisma in shaping the unravelling of the nomadic leadership politics, including patterns of power-sharing and centralization.

Based on what Nikolai Kradin and Paul Ratchnevsky investigated, we can surmise that Chingis Khan’s code of customary laws *Yasa* or *Yosun* operated also as the code of royal conduct that was bequeathed by the dynasty’s founder on his successors and other members of his family.⁹ Apart from customary regulations, *Yasa* represented the

⁶ Sergei G. Kliashtrnyi and Tursun I. Sultanov, *Gosudarstva i narody Evrazijskikh stepei. Drevnost’ i srednevekov’e* (SPb.: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 2004), 211.

⁷ Peter Jackson, “From *Ulus* to Khanate: The Making of the Mongol States c. 1220-c.1290” in *The History of Mongolia* vol. 1, eds. David Sneath and Christopher Kaplonski (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2010), 234.

⁸ Joseph Fletcher, “The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives” in *Joseph F. Fletcher, Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia*, ed. Beatrice Manz (Aldershot/Brookfield, 1995), 11-50.

⁹ Nikolai Kradin, “Early State Theory and the Evolution of Pastoral Nomads”, *Social Evolution & History*

collection of the khan's oral instructions, advice, and thoughts, which he uttered on various occasions. In Ratchnevsky's view, the *Yasa* instructions were known only to the senior members of the ruling family. They were carefully written on scrolls and preserved in secret archives.¹⁰ This suggests that *Yasa* functioned as a form of social contract that put limits on what each member of the ruling family could do with respect to other members for the sake of achieving the 'common good' in the form of cooperation and establishing peace and order, but also conducting successful campaigns and raids. It capitalized on norms of social reciprocity to be observed by the khan's heirs. In other words, *Yasa* provided a legal basis for the dynasty to retain their integrity and, hence, their superior ruling status, which was viewed by its founder as a strong guarantor of the longevity of his empire.

Historians have established that *Yasa* traced its origin to *törü*, the state concept of the ancient Turks (sixth-eighth centuries B.C.). Along with high principle, high law, and the collection of established laws, the *törü* concept entailed establishing justice, order, or ranking among subject populations, by setting up the institution of co-rulership, as well as dividing and distributing spoils of war.¹¹ Following the *törü* principles, *Yasa's* instructions aimed to resolve periods of heightened uncertainty and to overcome conflict and disagreement among members of the ruling nomadic class. It gave the ruler the ability to settle conflicts in a peaceful way by appealing to the norms of social reciprocity, which he used as a strategy for counterbalancing his subjects' right to free choice.

Sedentary vs. Nomadic Technologies of Power

The cultural historian Peter Burke has contended that the institutionalization of the French ruling class in seventeenth-century France was achieved through the construction of the image of Louis XIV to meet with his subjects' cultural and psychological expectations and demands. The creation of the king's image was therefore not merely the result of a manipulation of French society, but strongly resonated with the centralizing seventeenth-century French state: "... the image of the omniscient and omnipresent monarch cannot be dismissed as nothing but the product of propagandists and flatterers," because the image was "up to a point – the expression of a collective

7, no. 1 (2008): 115.

¹⁰ Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan. His Life and Legacy*, trans. and ed. Thomas Haining (Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 187.

¹¹ Peter Golden, "The Türk Imperial Tradition in Pre-Chinggisid Era," in *Imperial Statecraft. Political Forms and Techniques of Governance in Inner Asia, Sixth-Twentieth Centuries*, ed. David Sneath (Bellingham, WA: University of Cambridge, 2016), 40.

need. It is poor speculation, but it is tempting to suggest a link between the rise of the centralising state in the seventeenth century and the rise of the cult of the king, who represented – indeed, incarnated – the power of the centre.”¹² “The Christ-centered kingship”¹³ that formed one of the basic aspects of court politics in premodern and modern states further reinforced the center-dominated vision of their societies.

The sense of properly balanced relations of power engendered by these dynamics found its spatial expression in the territorial organization of space, where the seat of the monarch evolved into a political, economic and cultural center of a polity comprised of his and his nobles’ lands. The centralization of the monarch’s power was accompanied by the rise of early territorial states, the institutionalization of civil and criminal laws, and the rise of their nobility as a class who shared common interests vs. their monarchs and ordinary subjects.

In agrarian societies, relations over land spelled out relations of domination and dependency. The landowners’ right to impose control on their subjects in the form of payments of taxes and services, which the subjects owed to the landlords for working the latter’s land,¹⁴ was safeguarded by the monarchs, who protected the landlords’ properties and enabled the latter to grow, by asserting legal regulations and using surveillance and punitive mechanisms of their states. Although the king could not directly impose his will on his nobility, the latter had a stake in reinforcing the king’s central status, because they found themselves ever stronger exposed to the king’s punitive forces, bureaucracy, and courts to fix their peasants to land.

Due to the absence of land ownership and a relative economic independence, the nomads’ perception of properly balanced relations of power eschewed describing them in terms of control and dependency. Although nomadic consensus-building also aimed to create an impression of power emanating from a strong ruler, as the anthropologists Philip Salzman and Walter Goldschmitt have remarked, so as “to encourage respect and fear and discourage opposition,”¹⁵ “the pastoralists showed respect for authority but not subordination, obedience or other characteristics suggestive of dependency.”¹⁶ By citing the Iranian nomadic overlord *sardar*, Salzman states that his status rested not on his control of necessary resources, or on his ability to coerce tribesmen, but on the *kabul*, permission or consent, of tribesmen, because he knew that his subjects would

¹² Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 153.

¹³ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1957), 42.

¹⁴ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1961), 289

¹⁵ Philip Salzman, “Hierarchical Image and Reality: The Construction of a Tribal Chiefship,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 1 (2000): 58.

¹⁶ Walter Goldschmitt, “Independence as an Element in Pastoral Social Systems,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1971): 135.

follow him, “only so far as it suited them.” He only made commands that “he knew his tribesmen were willing to obey,” and led only “where his tribesmen were willing to follow.”¹⁷

Fletcher believed that on the basic level of nomadic social organization represented by nuclear and extended families and lineages, leaders were capable of finding suitable pastures and providing their subjects with protection.¹⁸ The well-known Qazaq historian Nurbulat Masanov also stated that members of the basic Qazaq social units, which he identified as minimal and extended communities (*minimal'naia i rashshirennnaia obschchina*), were economically self-sufficient in terms of regulating their migrations and using pasturelands.¹⁹ He contended that any interference with these issues from above could disrupt the nomadic economic process and lead to a disaster.²⁰ Nicolló Di Cosmo, in turn, suggested that the need for an overlord emerged in times of social conflict and ecological disaster that required the nomads to cooperate on a larger scale.²¹ During these times, the nomads united into bigger political units, which Masanov termed associative groups (*assotsiativnaia gruppá*), in which members were connected to each other through true and fictive kinship affiliations.²²

This shows that unlike the kings' institutionalized charisma, a nomadic ruler's charisma functioned as a work-in-progress, convincing his followers that his lasting military success, buoyed by his personal conduct, provided evidence of the Divine's interference. In other words, to secure his status and the integrity of his community, he had to rely mainly on his followers' voluntary recognition.²³

Anda, Father-Son, Guregen, Aka-Ini, and Others

Norbert Elias' study demonstrates that by playing off his nobles against each other, King Louis XIV initiated what is known as favoritism that further reinforced his central status. As Elias notes,

¹⁷ Salzman, “Hierarchical Image and Reality,” 62.

¹⁸ Joseph Fletcher, “Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire”, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3/4, part 1 (1979-1980): 237.

¹⁹ Nurbulat E. Masanov, *Problemy sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Kazakhstana na rubezhe XVIII-XIX vekov* (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1984), 113.

²⁰ Ibid, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov (osnovy zhiznedeiatel'nosti nomadnogo obschestva)* (Almaty/Moscow: Gorizont, 1995), 153.

²¹ Nicolló Di Cosmo, “State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History,” *Journal of World History* 10, no. 1 (1999): 15.

²² Nurbulat E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*, 144-150.

²³ Michal Biran, “Introduction: Nomadic Culture,” in *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Exchange. The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors*, eds. R. Amitai and Michal Biran (Honolulu: Honolulu University Press, 2015), 2-3.

...the king prevented a unification of court society against him, by which he promoted and maintained the desired tension-balance, the precondition of his rule. It is a peculiar type of field and form of rule that manifests itself here in the court, and analogously in the wider dominion of the absolute monarch. What is characteristic of this dominion is the exploitation of enmities between subjects to reduce their hostility towards, and increase their dependence on, their sole ruler, the king...he must carefully channel the tensions, cultivate petty jealousies and maintain within the group a fragmentation in their aims and therefore in the pressure they exert. He must allow opposed pressures to interpenetrate each other and hold them in equilibrium, and this requires a high degree of calculation.²⁴

In contrast, Chingis Khan capitalized on demonstrating his adherence to the norms of social reciprocity with respect to his own family and kinsfolk that strongly resonated with his followers' psychological and cultural expectations. As a matter of fact, the khan extended these norms to his nobility, by treating them as members of his extended family.

The aspect of Chingis Khan's career that linked his charisma to his extraordinary military achievements has been well-documented and researched by historians and therefore will not be discussed here. Yet, his military campaigns could not have been so successful without the strong backing of his family, close relatives, and loyal nobility. Apart from his military skills, it was through Chingis Khan's ability to invest in cultural and psychological norms shared by members of these three groups that he proved able to exert his influence over other segments of Mongol society. As Paul Ratchnevsky remarked, "...above all he understood how to win over his own countrymen, so that they willingly followed him as leader, in every reprehensible deed." Chingis Khan proved able to attract followers even after losing his battles.²⁵ On several occasions during his formative years, his army won decisive battles against his rivals' larger armies.²⁶

As *The Secret History*²⁷ shows, Chingis Khan's ability to impose strong discipline and

²⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society, The Collected Works of Norbert Elias* vol. 2, ed. S. Mennell (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), 131, 133.

²⁵ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 72, 167-68.

²⁶ Rashid Tabib al-Din. *Fazlullah's Jami'-u't Tawarikh. Compendium of Chronicles. Part One: A History of the Mongols*, trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 185-186, 217.

²⁷ Although *The Secret History* was composed under Chingis Khan's descendants sometime after his death in 1227, one can propose that, on the whole, the work adequately conveys the psychological and cultural values of Chingis Khan's epoch. As we shall see, the important medieval Muslim writer Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), the influential member of the Mongol Ilkhanid court, in his famous work *Jami al-Tawarikh* also capitalized on highlighting these values.

his iron will on his nobility was largely due to their willingness to cooperate with him, rather than proof of his despotic personality and rule. His followers' recognition linked the khan's status as supreme Mongol ruler to the backing of the Divine. Subsequently, it legitimized Chingis Khan to not only impose his own laws, but also secure the laws' implementation, as well as granted the khan the privilege of distributing lands, populations, titles, ranks, generous gifts, and spoils.

The Secret History accounts that Chingis Khan learned the tough lesson of the crucial role of relatives in securing survival under the open sky of the inhospitable Eurasian steppes when members of his immediate extended family had wandered off after his father's death and left his mother along with her four young children alone. *The Secret History* describes the survival of the family as a miracle and attributes it to the mother's strenuous efforts aimed to sustain herself and her children.

Rashid al-Din stated that "Chingis Khan urged his sons to concord and unity: 'As long as you are in agreement with one another, fortune and triumph will be your friends and your opponents will never gain the victory.' By reason of this quality," Rashid al-Din remarks, "it has been possible for Chingis Khan and his successors to conquer the greater part of the world."²⁸ The works of the medieval authors Juvaini and Rashid al-Din aptly demonstrate that by capitalizing on loyalty, justice, obedience, and discipline, Chingis Khan proved capable of skillfully playing off his rivals against each other, and, in this way, prevailing over all of them. As *The Secret History* shows, Chingis Khan applied these standards not only to his relatives but also to loyal members of his nobility.

Owen Lattimore called practices associated with these policies "the artificial extension of kinship" and listed among them, along with the *anda* institution, the institutions of *unagan bogol* (lit. subjected slave) and *nukur* (*nökör/nököd*, lit. friend, companion). He defined *unagan bogol* as a "collective subjection of a clan to another clan" that led to the integration of the subjected clan into the genealogical makeup of the dominating clan. *Nukur*, in turn, could be any man regardless of his tribal and social backgrounds, who declared his personal loyalty to a leader of his choice.²⁹ Chingis Khan integrated some of these men as his personal bodyguards (*keshig*).³⁰ The Chingisid nobility also often adopted orphans and other children from related and unrelated families, a practice that was widely spread among the Mongols and other nomadic populations.

²⁸ Rashid Tabib al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 216.

²⁹ Owen Lattimore, "Frontier Feudalism," in O. Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History. Collected Papers, 1928-1958* (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 536-37.

³⁰ Thomas Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism. The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1987), 199-200.

Juvaini and Rashid al-Din linked several well-established patterns of social behavior toward one's close relatives and kinsfolk to the *Yasa* royal code. The patterns mandated respect for elder relatives (the principle of *aka-ini*), relations between father and son, father and son-in-law (*guregen*), and sworn brothers (*anda*), including relations with relatives of one's wife (*anda-khuda*).

In the formative period of his rise to power, Chingis Khan began using the Mongol institution of *anda* to establish relations of social reciprocity to ward off his rivals and attract his followers. In *anda*, two unrelated men took an oath to establish a brotherhood relationship. It was alleged that the *anda* commitments tied men to each other more strongly than those based on blood.

Chingis Khan's father, Esugei, became *anda* of the powerful Kereit leader Ong Khan, after assisting him against his enemies. He did so despite Ong Khan's mean treatment of his brothers and close relatives, which had caused them to leave Ong Khan. During his rise to power, Chingis Khan followed in his father's footsteps, by assisting Ong Khan in similar situations and treating him as his adopted father, while Ong Khan, in turn, treated Temujin as his adopted son. This adopted father-son relationship was instrumental for not only ensuring the decisive contribution of Ong Khan's army to Temujin's victorious battles, but also as a means of demonstrating the future Mongol leader's commitment to upholding his father's legacy, by following the *aka-ini* principle. The last factor gained significance after Ong Khan, under the influence of his son and Temujin's own *anda*, the Mongol noble Jamukha, began to plot against Temujin. In response, Temujin was quick to get rid of Ong Khan by defeating his army, despite Ong Khan's belated repentance and attempts to reestablish the union. According to *The Secret History*, Temujin publically condemned Ong Khan and his supporters for their treachery and ingratitude, in contrast with his acts of generosity toward them. Among other things, Temujin had provided his adopted father with shelter and booty and sent troops to rescue his daughter who had been captured by her father's enemies. In Chingis Khan's own words, quoted in *The Secret History*: "There was not a day I allowed you to go hungry, there was not a month you were not given the things that you needed."³¹

The same fate befell Chingis Khan's other important rival, Jamukha, his former *anda*, who in the steppe political fashion had repeatedly plotted against Chingis Khan and his other close allies and ended up being abandoned by his followers. His several remaining nobles handed Jamukha to Chingis Khan, who suggested a reunion, but Jamukha refused, saying: "My very nature is different than yours. I've been crushed by my *anda's* generosity and greatness."³² Remarkably, Jamukha explained his defeat by

³¹ *The Secret History of the Mongols. The Origin of Chinghis Khan*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 92.

³² *Ibid*, 123.

contrasting his family background with his *anda's*. He pointed to the strong backing of Chingis Khan by his mother, brothers, wives, and children, including close relatives and followers, whom Chingis Khan had treated with respect and kindness. He listened to their advice and rewarded them generously, which enabled him to pacify “every tribe in the world”: “As for me, I lost my parents when I was small and had no younger brothers, my wife is a prattler, my companions untrustworthy. Because of this, I was excelled by my sworn friend, whose destiny was ordained by Heaven.”³³

Rashid al-Din remarked that Jamukha “was always known for his disagreeableness and contentiousness,” assisting his *anda* and, at the same time, intermittently plotting against him.³⁴ Rashid al-Din cited an influential Mongol noble, who reacted to Jamukha’s behavior by saying: “Those who cause confusion among people and engage in trickery and disloyalty were considered not worthy of leadership, despite their noble origin and military skills.” According to Rashid al-Din, Temujin had all of these qualities.³⁵ He always tried to make sure that booty was divided equally, rewarded those of his comrades who did not strive to appropriate the booty for themselves, and praised their behavior as having complied with the great tradition.³⁶

It is well known that Chingis Khan and his successors encouraged their rivals to surrender voluntarily and if they did so, they were generously rewarded by the Mongol rulers. Chingis Khan integrated them into his own nobility by giving his daughters to them in marriage. These nobles came to form a special group among the khan’s nobility and army known as sons-in-law (*guregen*).³⁷ For example, when the Uyghur ruler decided to voluntarily surrender to Chingis Khan and expressed his desire to become the khan’s fifth son and send him precious stones, Chingis Khan was very pleased to hear this. He adopted him as his fifth son and gave him his daughter in marriage, as well as sent generous gifts.³⁸ He also adopted Arslan Khan, the khan of the Qarluq, as his son, after he had voluntarily surrendered to him.³⁹ Chingis Khan appointed another leader who had voluntarily surrendered to head a unit of ten thousand soldiers, giving him power over cities and important regions in China.⁴⁰ On one occasion, Chingis Khan praised his elder son Juchi for conquering the People of the Forest without much suffering or bloodshed.⁴¹

The Mongols’ tolerant attitude toward all established religions also strongly

³³ *The Secret History of the Mongols* vol. 1, trans. Igor Rachewiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 131-32.

³⁴ al-Din, *Fazlullah’s Jami’-u’l Tawarikh, Part One*, 178, 182-84.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 181.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 224.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 55.

³⁸ *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 148.

³⁹ al-Din, *Fazlullah’s Jami’-u’l Tawarikh. Part One*, 213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 222.

⁴¹ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, transl. Igor Rachewiltz, vol. 1, 164-65.

contributed to their ability to establish coalitions with the nobles subjugated to them. Marco Polo remarked: “During his travels through foreign countries he [Chingis Khan – G. K.] constantly thought to attract as many people as possible to himself and make them his allies.”⁴²

It is important to note that Chingis Khan’s choice of Ugedei, his third son from his chief wife, as his successor was motivated by Ugedei’s conciliatory character and not his military skills. The khan preferred Ugedei to his elder brother Chagatai, despite the latter’s knowledge and strict maintenance of *Yasa*, and to his younger brother Tolui, who had distinguished himself as an excellent warrior. Unlike both his brothers, Ugedei was inclined to make compromises and settle conflicts rather than to impose punishment.⁴³

Chingis Khan’s daughter-in-law, Sorqaqtani, the Christian wife of his son Tolui, was highly respected by all members of the Chingisid nobility for her strong adherence to the principle of *aka-ini*. She catered to all of her relatives, by acting with “courtesy and attention,”⁴⁴ so much so that Juvaini and Rashid al-Din attributed the rise of her sons Möngke, Hulagu, and Khubilai to supreme leader status to the fact that their mother had raised them in compliance with the *aka-ini* principle. In the period following the death of Guiyk, who had preceded the ascendance of her son Möngke to the status of Great Khan, Sorqaqtani never missed the opportunity to send generous gifts to her relatives and other nobles and to seek their advice. Ugedei Khan was said to have consulted with Sorqaqtani on all issues, including military affairs. It was reported that Sorqaqtani took care of her noble and ordinary subjects alike, regardless of their religions or social status, by rendering protection and settling conflicts. Despite her Christian faith, she treated the Muslims under her rule with respect and care.

Sorqaqtani’s most beneficial gift was her peace-making ability, for which she was highly renowned. Juvaini contrasted Sorqaqtani to Terken Khatun, the mother of Sultan Jalal ad-Din, the ruler of Khorezm, who had dominated her son’s decisions. In particular, Terken Khatun favored the nobles who shared her Turkish origin. Juvaini attributed the fall of Khorezm to the Mongols, among other things, to Terken Khatun’s plots against the rest of the sultan’s nobility, and her cruel treatment of the sultan’s rivals.⁴⁵

Chingis Khan and His Nobility

⁴² Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 167-68.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 126, 168-169.

⁴⁴ al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 199-200, 203, 562; Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. by J. A. Boyle (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 255.

⁴⁵ Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror*, Vol. 2, trans. and ed. by J. A. Boyle (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 466.

Chingis Khan's investment in his nobility's cooperation seems to have had a crucial impact on shaping the geographical concept of his empire. As Lattimore pointed out, in his formative years the khan strongly prioritized pacifying the nomadic tribes in the interior steppe regions over campaigning in China. These tribes represented the most serious potential threat to his rule, and their backing would secure the successful outcome of his future campaigns.⁴⁶

It's no wonder that Chingis Khan considered the support of his comrades-in-arms 'the Grace of the Heavens' and attributed his leadership status to their endorsement.⁴⁷ This vision seems to have been the result of his previous failures to cater to his followers' expectations. *The Secret History* recounts an episode when Chingis Khan did not treat his brother Khasar fairly, which prompted the khan's nobles to leave him and join the powerful shaman Teb Tengri, who became his rival. Later on, with Chingis Khan's tacit approval, Teb Tengri was murdered by the khan's brothers. Chingis Khan blamed the murder on the shaman's attempt to sow hostility among Chingis Khan and his brothers: "Because Teb Tengri laid hands on my younger brothers and spread baseless slanders among them in order to sow discord, he was no longer loved by Heaven, and his life, together with his body, has been taken away."⁴⁸ What is notable, however, is that Chingis Khan's explanation met with the approval of his followers, who seem to have prioritized maintaining close family ties over fearing the shaman's spiritual powers.

Chingis Khan came to frame his policies toward his nobility in terms of his compliance with the great principle of reward for service. He gave his nobility unlimited freedom over their subjects and enemies and strove to grant all of their desires by distributing the lion's share of booty among them and taking only part for himself.⁴⁹ According to *The Secret History*, during his formative years, Chingis Khan distinguished himself with his acts of remarkable generosity, loyalty, and willingness to cooperate. Several times during his rise to power, his followers' devotion saved his life. He never forgot their contributions, and generously rewarded them favors "without attention to social origin and race"⁵⁰...and, in so doing, "set the lives of all the Mongolian people in order."⁵¹

During the historical 1206 *quryltai* that Chingis Khan convened after his decisive victory over his main rivals, he appointed his adopted brother, Shigu Khutu, as 'a judge of all people,' and put him in charge of keeping legal records. Khutu, however, declined the appointment, asking instead to be rewarded with spoils taken from cities. Chingis

⁴⁶ Owen Lattimore, "The Geography of Chingis Khan," *The Geographical Journal* 129, no.1 (1963): 6-7

⁴⁷ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, trans. Igor Rachewitz, vol. 1, 135-140; Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 173.

⁴⁹ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 105-06, 169, 190.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 148.

⁵¹ *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 125.

Khan agreed. During this *quryltai* the khan listed in detail all leaders' deeds that had contributed to his rise to power and publicly announced his rewards to each of these nobles. Some nobles asked to be granted thirty wives, while others requested certain pastures. The khan met all of their requests.⁵²

Chingis Khan respected his nobility's right to free choice, by consulting with them in all matters of life.⁵³ For example, one of his influential nobles, Koko Chos, was able to settle a conflict that erupted between Chingis Khan's two older sons, Juchi and Chagatai, following their father's appointment of their younger brother Ugedei as his successor.⁵⁴ *The Secret History* capitalizes on the scenes demonstrating Chingis Khan's adherence to the standards that showed his loyalty to his close relatives and other nobles, where he kept his promises to them and granted all their wishes.⁵⁵ Although on several occasions he was enraged by some of his nobles who had violated the principles and ordered them killed, he could also forgive other culprits. He remained, however, vengeful and uncompromising toward enemies of his family and his personal enemies throughout his life. At the same time, he never missed the opportunity to generously reward those among his noble and ordinary men who had complied with his principles.⁵⁶ By demonstrating his personal adherence to the principle of service, the khan was able to secure the moral support of his followers against those nobles who had violated his principles. For example, he was known for severely punishing even those nobles who had switched to his side after having betrayed their patrons.

It is known that Chingis Khan lived in very modest conditions, sharing his meals and blankets with his generals and soldiers. He was quoted as saying: "A man is worthy of leadership who knows what hunger and thirst are and who can judge the constitution of others thereby, who can go at a measured pace and not to allow the soldiers to get hungry and thirsty or the horses to get worn out. The proverb "Travel at the pace of the weakest among you" alludes to this."⁵⁷ On another occasion, he remarked to a Chinese official: "The Heavens rejected China for its excessive wealth and pride. As for me, I inhabit the northern steppes and do not have licentious habits."⁵⁸

By following the great principle of service, he granted one of his wives, Ibaka, to

⁵² Ibid, 133-39. The Mongol rulers, however, did not always adhere to applying their adopted ideas of charismatic rule to the non-Mongol (both nomadic and sedentary) leaders, who had subjugated themselves to them, imposing arbitrary taxation and fostering division among them; see: Jeremiah Curtin. *The Mongols in Russia* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968), Chapter XIII.

⁵³ Ibid, 98, 107, 119; al-Din, *Fazlullab's Jami'-u't Tawarikh. Part One*, 201.

⁵⁴ *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 168-69.

⁵⁵ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 39-40, 51, 63-64.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 57-58, 80, 109; *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 158, 165.

⁵⁷ Rashid Tabib al-Din. *Fazlullab's Jami'-u't Tawarikh. Compendium of Chronicles. Part Two, A History of the Mongols*, trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 296.

⁵⁸ Vadim V. Trepavlov, *Gosudarstvennyi stroi Mongol'skoi imperii XIII v. Problema istoricheskoi preemstvennosti* (Moscow: Nauka Vostochnaia literatura, 1993), 72.

a loyal member of his personal guard (*kesbig*), by saying to Ibaka: “I am giving you to him because of the great principle of reward for service.”⁵⁹ He did so despite Ibaka’s having won his heart with her beauty, charm, warmth, and good sense. According to Rashid al-Din, in addition to giving away his wife, Chingis Khan gave this noble “all the horses, servants, followers, household slaves, herds and flocks, treasures and stores he possessed, except for one cook and one golden goblet from which he drank *kumis*”⁶⁰ both of which he kept as souvenirs.⁶¹

More than merely accounting for Chingis Khan’s eccentric behavior, this episode shows the way his followers associated generous acts with the behavior of charismatic rulers. By giving away his wife and sharing his personal items with the noble, Chingis Khan treated him as his equal partner and, hence, met the requirement of sharing power and wealth with his companions-at-arms.

Chingis Khan’s and Ugedei’s legacy continued to exert a strong influence under the third Great Mongol Khan, Guyuk, according to Giovanni Plano Carpini’s report cited at the beginning of this article. Although Carpini was referring to Guyuk when he wrote about the wonderful power of the Mongol khan, considering that Guyuk’s term was short (it lasted for only two years), it is likely that his impression had largely been due to the legacy of Guyuk’s charismatic predecessors, rather than Guyuk himself. Carpini’s visit coincided with Guyuk’s enthronement and the initial stage of his term as Great Khan.

Chingis Khan’s Successors

Chingis Khan’s immediate successors, his son, Ugedei, and grandsons, Guyuk and Möngke, strictly followed their father’s teachings. Each tried to surpass his predecessor in his demonstration of generosity. All of them, according to Juvaini and Rashid al-Din, rather than being concerned about the state’s treasury, became preoccupied with satisfying the needs of their noble and ordinary subjects alike. According to Juvaini,

Ugedei ordered them to open the deposits of the treasures collected during so many years from the countries of the East and the West on behalf of Chingis Khan, the sum of total of which could not be contained within the bellies of ledgers. He closed the mouths of the censorious with rejection of their advice, and allotted his portion to each of his relatives and soldiers, his

⁵⁹ *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 132.

⁶⁰ fermented mare’s milk.

⁶¹ al-Din, *Fazlullah’s Jami’-u’l Tavarikh. Part One*, 149.

troops and kinsfolk, noble and base, lord and liege, master and slave, to each in accordance with his pretensions; and left in his treasures for the morrow neither much nor little, neither great nor small.⁶²

When Ugedei's nobles mentioned his excessive generosity, he used to reply: "It is known with certainty by all mankind that the world is faithful to none and that wisdom requires a man to keep himself alive by the perpetuation of a good name."⁶³ Ugedei's legendary generosity was preserved for generations in numerous anecdotes cited by Juvaini and Rashid al-Din. One story strikingly demonstrates the Mongol nobility's attitude toward wealth and power. It features one of Ugedei's wives, Möge Khatun, when Ugedei had ordered her to give her two precious pearls to a poor man as a reward:

the poor man went away rejoicing and sold them for a small sum. The buyer said to himself: 'Such fine jewels are fit for the kings,' and the next day he brought them as a present to Qa'an. Qa'an declared: 'I said that they would come back to us and that the poor man would not be disappointed.' He gave them back to Möge Khatun and distinguished the bearer with all kinds of favors.⁶⁴

The Great Khan Möngke also strove to distinguish himself with generosity. On one occasion, he settled all commercial contracts that had been concluded under his predecessor, Guyuk, by ordering that merchants be paid due amounts of money out of his treasury.⁶⁵ Remarkably, Möngke solicited the approval of his most influential nobles before embarking on a campaign against his rival relatives, according to Rashid al-Din.⁶⁶ Juvaini wrote that initially, Möngke was not inclined to punish his rivals, but he finally did so upon the insistence of his nobility.⁶⁷ After his death, the two camps of noblemen who stood behind Möngke's two brothers, Arig Buka and Khubilai, initiated hostility between the brothers by each claiming one of the brothers as their patron.⁶⁸ Arig Buka's defeat by Khubilai Khan was largely facilitated by Arig Buka's nobility, who, in the meantime, had become apprehensive about their patron's unjust deeds ("he was shamelessly killing his rival's innocent subjects and causing hardships") and abandoned

⁶² Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*, vol. 1, 188-89.

⁶³ al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁵ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*, vol. 2, 603.

⁶⁶ al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 211-12.

⁶⁷ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*, vol. 2, 581.

⁶⁸ al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 230, 248-50, 252.

him.⁶⁹

The Mongol nobility adhered to upholding the *Yasa* principles, which they viewed as a source of their legitimacy. The Mongol noble Nogai, who had been the commander-in-chief of Batu and Berke, the khans of the Golden (Kipchak) Horde, was quoted as saying in reference to Chingis Khan's *Yasa*: "We have a *yarlyq* (order, instruction- G. K.) from Chingis Khan, saying that if anyone in his *ulus* and family goes astray and disturbs the *ulus* we are to investigate the matter and incline their hearts to agreement with one another."⁷⁰

Ceremony

The pomp and splendor that surrounded the court ceremonials of European and other monarchs were important for creating a visual and social distance between the monarchs and their immediate surroundings and, in this way, enhancing myths about the divine origins of their authority.

In contrast, the Mongol ceremony was designed to convey a message of a much more mundane nature, one that opted to reflect, in the words of Ratchnevsky, "the informal and frank character of the leader and his comrades-in-law."⁷¹ As Juvaini remarked, "It is one of their laudable customs that they have closed the doors of ceremony, and preoccupation with titles, and excessive aloofness and inaccessibility, and all things customarily associated with the fortunate and the mighty."⁷²

As a rule, the Mongol enthronement ceremony featured only a few rituals, including the lifting of a newly elected khan on a piece of felt by noble participants of the ceremony, who also took off their hats and loosened their belts. This was usually followed by a generous feast, to which all participants were invited.⁷³

The ceremony of the election of Guyuk, Chingis Khan's grandson, to the status of great Mongol khan in 1246 can be cited as a striking case in point. According to the Dominican monk Simon De Saint Quentin, the khan's nobles seated the newly elected khan on a piece of white felt rug and told him:

Look above and see God, look below and see the felt on which you are sitting.
If you rule properly, and will be generous and fair, and treat each member of
your nobility in accordance with his rank, you will become famous, the whole

⁶⁹ al-Din, *Fazlullah's Jami'-u'l Tawarikh. Part One*, 431.

⁷⁰ al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, 145.

⁷¹ Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*, 150.

⁷² Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*, vol. 1, 26.

⁷³ *The Secret History of the Mongols*. An Adaption by Paul Kahn, 157.

world will obey you and God will send you anything you wish deep in your heart. But if you do the opposite, you become hapless and all will abandon you and take everything from you, including the felt on which you are sitting.⁷⁴

The nobles thus made clear that the success of Guyuk's term directly depended on the khan's willingness and ability to share his power and wealth with his nobility.

All three successors of Chingis Khan - Ugedei, Guyuk and Möngke - used their nominations to demonstrate their adherence to the *aka-ini* principle, as well as to make their nobles approve their choice and show loyalty in public. All three became engaged in performing the symbolic act of refusing their nominations, by indicating that their senior relatives were more legitimate to occupy their status. According to Juvaini, Ugedei's resistance to his father's choice lasted over forty days, after which he finally agreed to take over the job. His successor Guyuk used his refusal to ascend to the throne as the pretext for securing his status for members of his family.

When his nobles nominated him, Möngke resisted for four days, according to Juvaini. He finally agreed to ascend to the throne after his brother had pointed out that his resistance violated the principle of *aka-ini*. The brother's remark related to Möngke's uncle Batu, who had proposed Möngke for the throne of Great Khan. Batu was considered the most respected senior member of the Chingisid family by the time of Möngke's nomination. Moreover, Möngke's brother warned him that his behavior could lead to violation of the *aka-ini* principle by other nobles.⁷⁵

Conclusion

This study has capitalized on the crucial role of the mobility factor in shaping the nomads' economic and political life, including their perception of a charismatic leadership. Among other things, its interplay prevents from describing the nomads' interactions with their leaders in terms of either patrimonial⁷⁶ or patron-client relations, despite the latter's personal and voluntary character. For the relations of interest operated predominantly as relations of inequality and economic dependency. As S. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger argue, inequality of power characteristic of the patron-client relations was translated into a reciprocal vertical alliance between the two:

in such a way as to combine access to critical resources – whether to land,

⁷⁴ Sergei G. Kliashtorny and Tursun I. Sultanov, *Gosudarstva i narody Evrazijskikh stepei*, 197.

⁷⁵ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*, vol. 2, 561.

⁷⁶ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. A. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York/London: The Free Press/Collier Macmillan, 1947), 347.

water, manpower or employment opportunities, to scarce skills or favors and services...- with promised reciprocity, signs of goodwill, elements of force and respect, solidarity and interpersonal relations.⁷⁷

Despite certain flexibility of relationships between a patron and his clients, a properly functioning patron-client relationship entailed what Sharon Kettering calls “blind obedience” of a client to his patron. As she states, in seventeenth-century France a client’s independent *intéressé* or self-interest was recognized as a political problem. Clients, therefore, were eager to assure their patrons that the clients’ interests were identical with those of their patrons.⁷⁸ James Scott has also stated that: “First patron and client are not equals. The basic exchange between them both arises from and reflects disparity in their relative wealth, power, and status.”⁷⁹

Although the nomads’ cooperation with their leaders was also motivated by considerations of getting access to pastures, booty, and trade, along with securing protection, their leaders were expected to enable effective cooperation in the first place. This entailed maintaining an effective balance of power through acknowledging their subjects’ right to free choice.

In place of “blind obedience” therefore predicated on control over necessary economic resources that was characteristic of patrimonial and patron-client relations, nomadic leaders and their subjects embarked on mobility to control each other’s behavior, and, in this way, maintain a balance of power, which each side viewed as beneficial. Since finding this equilibrium presented both sides with formidable challenges, the nomadic power relations often tended to acquire an unpredictable character tainted by the element of uncertainty. Because of this element, these relations do not easily yield to describing them in terms of either patrimonial or patron-client relations regardless of the kinship terms, in which they, as a rule, were coached.

Accordingly, this study has invested in highlighting the crucial role of the uncertainty factor in shaping the nomads’ psychological and cultural expectations with respect to each other and their charismatic rulers. It has argued that these expectations became translated into the requirement of social reciprocity implying certain patterns of behavior that each member was expected to adopt toward their relatives and other nomads. An effective leadership, in addition, entailed the leaders’ ability to prevent and settle conflicts in such a way so that their decisions would satisfy all parties involved. It

⁷⁷ S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends. Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 250.

⁷⁸ Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31-32.

⁷⁹ James Scott, “Patronage or Exploitation?” in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* ed. Ernest Gellner and J. Waterbury (London: Duckworth, 1977), 22.

was therefore not coincidental that Qazaq and Nogai customary judges *bis* often headed large communities of their tribesmen organized along fictive and real kinship lineages.

The qualities above proved the indispensable attributes of charismatic nomadic leaders that allowed them to consolidate their communities against a background spelled out by the uncertainty of steppe political negotiations and the family-oriented nature of nomadic economies that were, in turn, strongly exposed to the precarious climatic and ecological conditions of the Eurasian steppes.

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