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THE ROLE OF NOMADIC CIVILIZATIONS IN SHAPING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF KAZAKHSTAN

Annotation. In our article, we analyzed the role of nomadic civilizations in shaping the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan and their impact on national identity. The study used various historical and cultural sources, which made it possible to comprehensively examine the features of nomadic culture.

Special attention was paid to the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. It was their combination that formed the system of values and cultural traditions of nomadic societies.

The novelty of the work lies in the fact that the nomadic heritage is considered not only as a historical phenomenon. In the context of globalization, it continues to develop and acquires a new meaning. Today, elements of nomadic culture are being incorporated into state cultural policy, used in tourism projects, and presented at international cultural venues.

The analysis shows that the nomadic heritage cannot be perceived only as a part of the past. It is a living cultural system that retains its importance in modern society.

The heritage of the nomads combines historical culture with modern cultural processes, contributes to the strengthening of national identity and the development of cultural diplomacy. We can also consider the heritage of the nomads as an important resource for the sustainable development of our country in the global world. The article also noted the need for further research in this area. Interdisciplinary approaches and modern methods, including archaeology, ethnology, and digital humanitarian technologies, can play a special role here.

Keywords: Nomadic civilization; cultural heritage; great steppe; national identity; yurt; epic tradition; dombra music; zhetyzhargy (customary law); kumys and shubat; world nomad games.

Introduction

Nomadic culture occupies an important place in the history of our country and is one of the foundations of the formation of national identity. For many centuries, the nomadic lifestyle has had a significant impact on the worldview of the peoples of the Great Steppe, their social structure and economic traditions. As a result, a special cultural system has been formed, the elements of which are manifested in the language, art, customs and traditions of modern Kazakh society. However, despite a significant amount of research on the history of Central Asia, the role and contribution of nomadic civilizations to the formation of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage is still not fully understood.

In modern conditions of globalization and active urbanization, the issue of preserving intangible cultural heritage is of particular relevance. It plays an important role in maintaining the historical memory of society and preserving national identity. Traditions, epics, musical culture, and social institutions that have been formed in a nomadic environment are facing threats of loss and commercialization. As B. Sharapayeva and et.al. observes, an understanding of Kazakhstan's cultural and historical legacy is impossible without reference to its



foundational elements, among which nomadic civilization plays a decisive role. At the same time, D. Prior (2024) emphasizes that the nomadic traditions of Central Asia, closely interwoven with Islamic culture and processes of socio-economic transformation, possess the potential to adapt to contemporary realities [1; 2].

The focus of this study is the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan, examined through the prism of the influence of nomadic civilizations. The subject of analysis encompasses both tangible and intangible dimensions of this heritage – from archaeological sites and the yurt as a symbol of nomadic life to oral epics, musical traditions, and legal norms. The purpose of this study is to determine the role of nomadic civilizations in shaping the cultural space of Kazakhstan, as well as to consider the possibilities of applying their traditional experience in the modern socio-cultural environment.

To achieve this goal, the paper analyzes scientific research on this problem. Special attention is paid to the basic elements of nomadic culture and their historical development. In addition, the traditional forms of manifestation of the nomadic heritage and its modern interpretations are compared. Based on the analysis, possible directions for the preservation and further development of this cultural heritage are outlined.

The study proceeds from the hypothesis that it was precisely the nomadic civilization that became the key factor in shaping Kazakhstan's cultural code and that it continues to exert influence on contemporary forms of national identity.

The significance of this work lies in both its theoretical and practical potential. On the one hand, the research contributes to the development of historical, cultural, and anthropological understandings of the interrelation between tradition and modernity within the Central Asian context. On the other hand, its findings may be applied in shaping state cultural policy, in designing programs for the preservation of intangible heritage, as well as in the educational and tourism sectors, where Kazakhstan's nomadic culture serves as an essential component of the country's international image.

Methodology and research methods

The materials of the study encompass a broad corpus of sources reflecting diverse dimensions of Kazakhstan's nomadic civilization. The empirical basis includes archaeological evidence such as burial mounds, Saka graves, and findings, with a special emphasis on the so-called "*Golden Man*." A substantial layer is represented by ethnographic materials associated with traditional dwellings (the yurt), oral creativity and epic heritage (*Koblandy Batyr*, *Alpamys*), as well as musical culture embodied in the *dombra* and *kyuis*. Written monuments that codify customary law (e.g., *Zhety Zhargy*) and elements of military traditions also constitute an important part of the source base. Particular attention is devoted to culinary heritage, including traditional drinks and dishes (*kumys*, *shubat*, *ayran*, *tarag*), which are examined both in academic research and in contemporary studies of cultural tourism. An additional body of materials is formed by modern documents and reports related to the World Nomad Games and the implementation of strategic programs of Kazakhstan's cultural policy.

The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach. The work combines historical, cultural and anthropological approaches to the study of the problem. The historical-comparative method was employed to trace continuities across different stages of nomadic societies – from the Saka and Turkic periods to modern times. Cultural-anthropological analysis made it possible to consider elements of material and intangible culture as a unified system that shapes the cultural code. A comparative source-critical approach was applied in juxtaposing archaeological data, written records, and oral traditions. In addition, content analysis of contemporary publications and official documents enabled the



identification of ways in which nomadic heritage is being actualized in the context of globalization and national cultural policy. A systems approach ensured a holistic examination of cultural heritage, where material, spiritual, social, and culinary elements are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

The empirical basis of the study is based primarily on the works of both classics and modern scientists (Akishev, 1996; Suleimenov, 1985; Zhumai & Marach, 2025; Khan et al. 2024; Batyrbek and Chisbiya, 2025, etc.). In addition, official documents regulating the development of cultural policy of Kazakhstan were used with additional UNESCO materials. Consequently, the chosen methodology allowed us to consider the heritage of nomads as historical artifacts and as a living part of modern culture.

Results

The discussion of the history of nomadic civilizations includes various points of view and approaches, as the study has developed at the junction of various scientific fields. Archaeologists – from the classical excavations of burial mounds to contemporary studies of Saka monuments in Zhetysu – maintain that only material evidence provides a reliable foundation for reconstructing the past. The works of M. Khabdulina vividly demonstrate how artifacts and funerary complexes allow us to speak about the social structure of early societies [3].

However, as ethnographers point out, only material artifacts are not enough to fully understand the essence of a nomadic civilization. That is, material artifacts provide important information, but they do not reflect the complexity of the social and cultural structure of nomadic societies. For example, in the work of S. Abashin, it is emphasized that during the Soviet period, ethnography played a significant role in shaping ideas about kinship and differences between the peoples of Central Asia. These scientific approaches have largely determined the subsequent interpretation of their historical past.

For cultural scholars, as noted by C. Chang, nomadic culture is above all a mode of adaptation to the steppe environment. From their perspective, nomadism cannot be regarded as “backwardness”; rather, it is a distinctive form of civilization whose existence is defined not so much by material monuments as by a way of life [4; 5].

In Kazakh historiography, this debate intensifies in the context of Saka and Turkic studies. The scientist, R. Zholdybalin, emphasizes that it is the Turkic heritage that forms the basis of the Kazakh national idea: from the Saka tribes through the Turkic khaganates to the formation of the Kazakh statehood. Others, including B. Otarbayeva, highlight problematic questions: the language of the Saka tribes, the existence of their writing system, and the actual degree of their connection with the later Turks remain matters of scholarly dispute. A critical voice is raised by A. Galiyev, who speaks of the “mythologization of history,” whereby the Saka–Turkic line becomes not only a subject of academic inquiry but also an instrument of national ideology [6–8].

If we compare the contributions of foreign and domestic scientists, this controversy becomes even more obvious. Researchers such as D. Sinor and Thomas J. Barfield consider nomads as part of a broader Eurasian history, interconnected with such countries as China, Iran and the countries of the continent of Europe. Their task is to show the place of Saka and Turkic societies in a global context. Domestic scholars, by contrast, concentrate on archaeological findings and their significance for national identity. N. Zhumay and M. Khabdulina interpret the Saka–Turkic line as the direct prehistory of the Kazakh people, while contemporary authors such as A. Muratbekova extend this framework to include written sources ranging from Chinese chronicles to Arabic and Turkic texts [3; 9–12].



The outcome is a polyphonic discussion in which archaeologists insist on the primacy of material evidence, ethnographers on cultural practices, cultural scholars on ecological adaptability, and historians and political scientists on issues of continuity and ideologization. Such diversity of perspectives does not weaken the field of study but, on the contrary, underscores that nomadic civilizations are not only a matter of the past but also a living element of contemporary national and cultural self-awareness.

Nomadic civilizations played a fundamental role in shaping the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan, with their influence permeating every sphere – from the material to the spiritual, from social institutions to contemporary cultural policy.

The origins of this heritage were laid by the material testimonies of nomadic culture: archaeological monuments, burial mounds, the Saka “*Golden Men*,” as well as the traditional dwelling, the yurt. One of the main symbols of nomadic culture is the yurt. This reflects the practicality and mobility of the nomadic lifestyle, as well as the special philosophy of human harmony with nature [13, 14]. Such cultural elements reflect an important part of the national historical memory and clearly demonstrate the deep roots of Kazakh identity.

At the same time, the material forms of culture cannot be considered separately from the spiritual sphere. The epic, music and various rituals are closely related to them, which formed a system of values and served as a way of transferring knowledge from generation to generation.

The intangible heritage, exemplified by the epics *Koblandy Batyr* and *Alpamys*, consolidated heroic ideals and behavioral models that were mirrored in social practices. Musical culture, centered on the *dombra* and *kyui*, served as a kind of “oral history” of the people, preserving collective experience and emotional memory [15]. Rituals and festivals, particularly *Nauryz*, which has been inscribed on UNESCO’s list of intangible heritage, not only united communities but also functioned as mechanisms of cultural transmission, creating a living bond between generations. In this way, spiritual practices reinforced the significance of material heritage, transforming it into a living culture [16].

Social and cultural institutions provided the foundation for maintaining the cohesion of nomadic societies. The traditional law code *Zhety Zhargy* regulated internal relations within communities and ensured the fair distribution of responsibilities, which in turn was consolidated and reproduced through epics and musical forms [17]. The key factor in the formation of national consciousness was military traditions such as heroism, discipline and collectivism. Which were considered vital conditions in the survival of the steppe [18]. Thus, the basis of Kazakh culture was formed, which consist of material and spiritual culture.

Culinary heritage occupies a distinctive place, as it demonstrates the adaptation of the nomadic way of life to natural conditions and shapes unique gustatory traditions. *Kumys*, *shubat*, *ayran*, and *tarag* are not merely food products but symbols of ethnic culture, reflecting the rhythm of nomadic life [19]. Their contemporary use in the tourism industry underscores their significance for national branding, linking everyday practices of the past with the economic strategies of the present [20]. Here, culinary heritage is closely interwoven with both material and intangible cultures: drinks and dishes are served in yurts, accompanied by rituals and festivals, and associated with hospitality, which represents a foundational social institution.

Modernity illustrates how nomadic heritage is being transformed and institutionalized at the state level. The hosting of the World Nomad Games in Astana became not only a sporting event but also a platform for the popularization of cultural traditions, including epics, music, cuisine, and social practices [21]. Kazakhstan’s national cultural policy actively employs



elements of nomadic heritage as an instrument for shaping a positive international image of the country. The “*Nomad*” brand represents the culmination of this process: it integrates material and intangible values, tradition and modernity, thereby strengthening cultural identity and transforming the nomadic past into a resource for future development [20].

The nomadic heritage of Kazakhstan is multifaceted and manifests itself in various dimensions — from material monuments and housing forms to intangible practices and social institutions. For clarity, the key directions have been structured in the table 1, which makes it possible to see how material, spiritual, social, and culinary elements intertwine to form the holistic cultural code of the nomadic civilization.

Table 1 - Facets of Nomadic Heritage

Dimension	Examples	Significance	Interconnections
Material Heritage	Burial mounds, Saka “Golden Men,” yurt	Formation of historical memory, symbols of identity, connection with ancestral roots	Intertwined with intangible heritage and social institutions
Intangible Heritage	Epics (<i>Koblandy Batyr</i> , <i>Alpamys</i>), music (<i>dombra</i> , <i>kyui</i>), rituals (<i>Nauryz</i> , <i>aitys</i>)	Preservation of spiritual values, transmission of cultural norms and behavioral models	Supports social norms and the culture of hospitality
Social Institutions	Law (<i>Zhety Zhargy</i>), military traditions, national self-awareness	Regulation of society, strengthening solidarity, formation of national self-consciousness	Draws upon spiritual values, consolidates material heritage
Culinary Heritage	<i>Kumys</i> , <i>shubat</i> , <i>ayran</i> , <i>tarag</i> , gastronomic traditions	Adaptation to the nomadic way of life, modern tourism branding, hospitality	Combined with rituals and material culture (yurt, festivals)
Modernity	World Nomad Games, national cultural policy, “ <i>Nomad</i> ” brand	Actualization of traditions in a global context, shaping of international image	Revives and institutionalizes all dimensions (material, spiritual, social, culinary)

The nomadic lifestyle shaped the cultural code of the Kazakh people, created an original economic system based on nomadic cattle breeding, handicraft practices and transcontinental trade routes. If you dig into the history of the world, you can find out that it was through the nomads of the Great Steppe that the caravan routes passed, connecting China, Iran and Europe, thereby turning them into intermediaries of global exchange [9, 10]. This model demonstrated a high degree of adaptability to natural conditions and ensured the sustainable existence of societies within the steppe environment.

The contemporary significance of the nomadic economy is manifested in the integration of its elements into the tourism industry and cultural diplomacy. According to Batyrbek and Chisbiyah (2025), Kazakhstan’s traditional cuisine, deeply rooted in the nomadic way of life, has become an essential component of gastronomic tourism and strengthens the country’s brand on the international stage [20]. *Kumys*, *shubat*, and *ayran* are perceived not only as food products but also as “symbols of ethnicity,” providing cultural authenticity to the tourist experience.

Beyond gastronomy, an important dimension is the institutionalization of nomadic practices through the World Nomad Games and state cultural programs, where yurts, epics, and traditional crafts are transformed into economic resources [21]. This approach illustrates the transition from historical heritage to an “experience economy,” in which cultural products function as instruments of sustainable development.

In the context of climate challenges and the transition to a “green economy,” the experience of nomadic societies acquires additional relevance. Their economic model, based on mobility and the rational use of natural resources, can be regarded as an early form of



sustainable environmental management, offering opportunities for adaptation within contemporary ecological strategies [19].

Thus, Kazakhstan’s nomadic heritage extends beyond the realms of memory and identity, becoming actively incorporated into the country’s economic strategy, where traditions serve as instruments of cultural branding, tourism, and sustainable development (Table 2).

Table 2 - Historical and Economic Importance of Nomadic Culture

Historical manifestation	Contemporary adaptation	Economic significance	Key sources
Caravan routes	Tourism along the Great Silk Road	International image, regional development	Barfield (1989); Sinor (1990)
Pastoralism	Agrotourism, “ <i>Nomad</i> ” brand	Export of products, tourism commodity	Miculescu (2024)
Traditional cuisine (<i>kumys</i> , <i>shubat</i>)	Gastronomic tourism	Cultural brand, economic resource	Batyrbek & Chisbiyah (2025); Khan et al. (2024)
Crafts and yurts	Souvenir production, ethnofestivals	Small business, creative economy	UNESCO (2024); Miculescu (2024)

Despite the richness of cultural heritage and its institutionalization at the level of state policy, one of the key challenges of the present era arises – namely, the transmission of the values of nomadic civilization to younger generations. Under conditions of globalization and the digital environment, traditional forms of preserving memory – books, oral storytelling, museum exhibitions – prove to be insufficiently effective. This challenge opens up new possibilities. If tradition is no longer perceived in its customary form, it can be “translated” into the language of contemporary technologies and cultural practices.

Thanks to modern technologies such as virtual museums, multimedia projects, and archaeological sites, the possibilities of presenting cultural heritage have significantly expanded. Various digital and gaming platforms create new forms of interaction with history and culture.

Thus, in the digital age, the nomadic heritage continues to evolve and acquire new forms of existence. At the same time, cultural memory is preserved, and modern means of communication help to transmit and disseminate it in a new format.

Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to determine the significant role of nomadic civilizations in the formation of the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan. An analysis of the historical and cultural features of the Great Steppe shows that the nomadic lifestyle had a significant impact on the formation of traditions, values and cultural practices of the Kazakh people. It was in the conditions of nomadic culture that many elements were formed, which eventually became an important part of the national cultural system. Thus, it can be concluded that the heritage of nomadic societies occupies an important place in the development of culture in Kazakhstan and continues to retain its importance in the modern socio-cultural space. The main spheres of nomadic heritage are distinguished — from spiritual culture (folklore, dombra music, epic tales) and social institutions (traditions of hospitality, customary law, clan organization) to material culture (horse breeding, yurt and crafts of steppe craftsmen). Thanks to the centuries-old Kazakh nomadic history, our distinctive national cultural code has been formed, based on harmony with nature, love of freedom and collectivism.

The scientific significance of this work lies in the holistic understanding of the contribution of nomadic civilization to the culture of Kazakhstan. At a time when earlier



Eurocentric historiography often underestimated the achievements of nomads, this study fills the gap by summarizing modern data from archaeology, history, and ethnography. The results demonstrate a high level of social organization and cultural development of nomadic society, disproving stereotypes of “backwardness.” The practical value of the material is that it serves as a basis for programs to preserve intangible heritage, to nurture respect for traditions among young people, and to develop cultural tourism. The findings are in line with state cultural policy: President K. Tokayev emphasized that the Kazakh people are “heirs of the nomadic civilization,” and the vast heritage of the ancestors should be carefully modernized and promoted worldwide. In this context, the results of the study have applied significance for forming strategies of cultural identity and the “Nomad” brand of Kazakhstan on the global stage.

The preservation and creative reinterpretation of nomadic respect for the principle of national pride, the transfer of ancestral experience to a new generation and the positioning of Kazakhstan as a bridge between the past and the future. According to the researchers, the preservation of nomadic traditions is necessary not only for the observance of national identity, but also for the transfer of invaluable experience to the ancestral future generations; with a strategy, nomadic culture can be revived in a modern form. Consequently, the high historical and cultural value of the heritage of the Great Steppe is combined with its relevance today — from changing key moments and development to increasing international interest in Kazakh culture.

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Бенке Әлия

КОШПЕЛІ ӨРКЕНИЕТТЕРДІҢ ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ МӘДЕНИ МҰРАСЫН ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУДАҒЫ РӨЛІ

Андатпа. Мақала Қазақстанның мәдени мұрасын қалыптастырудағы көшпелі өркениеттердің рөлін және олардың ұлттық бірегейлікке әсерін талдауға арналған. Зерттеу көшпелі мәдениеттің ерекшеліктерін жан-жақты қарастыруға мүмкіндік беретін әртүрлі тарихи және мәдени дереккөздерді пайдаланды.

Материалдық және материалдық емес мұралардың өзара байланысына ерекше назар аударылады. Көшпелі қоғамдардың құндылықтар жүйесі мен мәдени дәстүрлерін қалыптастырған олардың үйлесімі болды.

Жұмыстың жаңалығы-көшпелі мұра тек тарихи құбылыс ретінде қарастырылмайды. Жаһандану жағдайында ол дами береді және жаңа мәнге ие болады. Бүгінде көшпелі мәдениеттің элементтері мемлекеттік мәдени саясатқа енгізіліп, туристік жобаларда пайдаланылады және халықаралық мәдени алаңдарда ұсынылады.

Жүргізілген талдау көшпелі мұраны өткеннің бір бөлігі ретінде ғана қабылдауға болмайтынын көрсетеді. Бұл қазіргі қоғамда өзінің маңыздылығын сақтайтын тірі мәдени жүйе. Ол тарихи тәжірибені заманауи мәдени процестермен байланыстырады, ұлттық бірегейлікті нығайтуға және мәдени дипломатияны дамытуға ықпал етеді. Сонымен қатар, көшпелі мұра Қазақстанның Жаһандық әлемдегі орнықты дамуының маңызды ресурсы ретінде қарастырылуы мүмкін.



Мақалада сонымен қатар осы салада қосымша зерттеулер жүргізу қажеттілігі атап өтіледі. Мұнда археология, этнология және цифрлық гуманитарлық технологияларды қоса алғанда, пәнаралық тәсілдер мен заманауи әдістер ерекше рөл атқара алады.

Кілт сөздер: Көшпелі өркениет; Мәдени мұра; Ұлы дала; Ұлттық бірегейлік; Киіз үй; Эпикалық дәстүр; Домбыра күйлері; Жеті Жарғы (әдет құқығы); Қымыз бен шұбат; Дүниежүзілік көшпенділер ойыны.

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РОЛЬ КОЧЕВЫХ ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИЙ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу роли кочевых цивилизаций в формировании культурного наследия Казахстана и их влиянию на национальную идентичность. В исследовании использованы различные исторические и культурологические источники, что позволяет комплексно рассмотреть особенности кочевой культуры.

Особое внимание уделяется взаимосвязи материального и нематериального наследия. Именно их сочетание сформировало систему ценностей и культурные традиции кочевых обществ.

Новизна работы заключается в том, что кочевое наследие рассматривается не только как историческое явление. В условиях глобализации оно продолжает развиваться и получает новое значение. Сегодня элементы кочевой культуры включаются в государственную культурную политику, используются в туристических проектах и представляются на международных культурных площадках.

Проведённый анализ показывает, что кочевое наследие нельзя воспринимать только как часть прошлого. Это живая культурная система, которая сохраняет свою значимость и в современном обществе. Оно связывает исторический опыт с современными культурными процессами, способствует укреплению национальной идентичности и развитию культурной дипломатии. Кроме того, кочевое наследие может рассматриваться как важный ресурс устойчивого развития Казахстана в глобальном мире.

В статье также отмечается необходимость дальнейших исследований в данной области. Особую роль здесь могут сыграть междисциплинарные подходы и современные методы, включая археологию, этнологию и цифровые гуманитарные технологии.

Ключевые слова: Кочевая цивилизация; Культурное наследие; Великая степь; Национальная идентичность; Юрта; Эпическая традиция; Музыка домбры; Жеты Жарғы (обычное право); Кумыс и шұбат; Всемирные игры кочевников.