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State-Making and the Origins of Global Order in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Steppe State Making

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Steppe State Making[1]

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Abstract

Recently several distinct literatures have thematically converged around the topic of non-European state-making: political scientists – both comparativists and international relations scholars, historical sociologists, comparative and world historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and others, have begun to interest themselves in state making or state formation in non-European settings, and also in state making in historical periods other that the early modern period (Vu 2010). These various literatures, as is to be expected, both exhibit important similarities and expose different disciplinary foci and obsessions. One difficult-to-exaggerate crucial similarity across these literatures is that Tilly's quip "war made the state, and states made war" figure as an explicit or implicit interlocutory in them. While Tilly presumably would never have de-contextualised this generalization and claimed universality for it, always emphasizing context and initial conditions, the core argument of this paper is nevertheless that nomad state making in the Eurasian steppe,[2] at least, does not follow this pattern. War-like and barbarian as they may seem in Eurocentric and Sinocentric sources and histories, not to mention popular culture, the nomads of Eurasia, I will argue, formed states mainly in order to secure trade, not to conquer and rule. The effect of this pattern of state making was an Eurasian political economy, rather than a Waltzian international system. Let me be clear at the outset; this is not a Marxist or a World System Theory, or economistic reductionist, argument. Modes of production and class conflict do not figure prominently in my argument and material explanatory factors do not weigh heavier than political factors. Instead, my argument is that nomad states took the (non-European, non-Tillean) form they took because they did not need to, and there was no strategic payoff to, develop more centralized, bureaucratic, and socially penetrating and/or responsive forms to achieve the goal of securing trade.

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[1] Prepared for the States and Their Making Workshop in Lund, May 2016.
[2] Nomenclature varies: Eurasia, Inner Asia, Central Asia are not interchangeable. For linguistic, cultural and close historical research there are good reasons to keep these terms apart. In this paper I take a birds-eye view of things, however, and the crucial focus is on *nomads*, rather than a particular geography.

I Introduction

Recently several distinct literatures have thematically converged around the topic of non-European state-making: political scientists – both comparativists and international relations scholars, historical sociologists, comparative and world historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and others, have begun to interest themselves in state making or state formation in non-European settings, and also in state making in historical periods other that the early modern period (Vu 2010). These various literatures, as is to be expected, both exhibit important similarities and expose different disciplinary foci and obsessions. One difficult-to-exaggerate crucial similarity across these literatures is that Tilly's quip "war made the state, and states made war" figure as an explicit or implicit interlocutory in them. While Tilly presumably would never have de-contextualised this generalization and claimed universality for it, always emphasizing context and initial conditions, the core argument of this paper is nevertheless that nomad state making in the Eurasian steppe[3], at least, does not follow this pattern. War-like and barbarian as they may seem in Eurocentric and Sinocentric sources and histories, not to mention popular culture, the nomads of Eurasia, I will argue, formed states mainly in order to secure trade, not to conquer and rule. The effect of this pattern of state making was a Eurasian political economy, rather than a Waltzian international system. Let me be clear at the outset; this is not a Marxist or a World System Theory, or economistic reductionist, argument. Modes of production and class conflict do not figure prominently in my argument and material explanatory factors do not weigh heavier than political factors. Instead, my argument is that nomad states took the (non-European, non-Tillean) form they took because they did not need to, and there was no strategic payoff to, develop more centralized, bureaucratic, and socially penetrating and/or responsive forms to achieve the goal of securing trade.

The ambition of the paper is conceptual and theoretical, not empirical. My material is *studies* on nomad state making, and from this material I try to harvest theoretical insights about possible alternatives to the European lineage of state making and international system making. The main antagonists in the paper is assuredly not i.a. Tilly (1992), Spruyt (1994) or even Waltz (1979), but rather the unilinear and evolutionary "master narrative" that sees the European system of

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nation-states as a pre-determined success story; and that sees nonconformity with the European patterns as deviations, failures, or incapacity.

In the first section of this paper I briefly criticize that nebulous current of thought that posit the European experience of state and system making as the benchmark. The section after that reviews the current standing of historical Eurasian nomads in International Relations scholarship. A third section accounts for contemporary debates about Eurasian nomad state making in history, anthropology and archaeology. In the fourth section I argue that it was not the Tillean preparation for war that drove nomad state making, but the need to increase bargaining power when Chinese imperial dynasties shut down or overly restricted trade. War, which obviously happened a lot, was what happened when bargains, or bargaining processes, broke down and had only an indirect influence over state making processes.

II State making and state dodging

In this paper I work with a wide and inclusive definition of what a state can be. Following Tilly (1992: 1) I define states as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories." More narrow conceptions of statehood (or any other "output" of interest for research), such that criteria of i.e. legitimacy, nationhood, centralization, and sovereignty must be met would make impossible any exercise in comparative history. One particular *empirical* type of state (output) would then constitute an *analytical* and a priori benchmark, rather than being itself the result of particular and contingent processes. In other words, the more narrow the definition of 'state' the less analytical space there is for multilinearity and multiple adaptations to circumstances. Also, observable variation in political organization, at any given time would, with empirical benchmarking, invite retrospective history writing (Hobden and Hobson 2002) focused on explaining the causes for not arriving at the empirical benchmark. Somewhere, there were at some point in time an obstacle that proved difficult to overcome, and political development halted, as it were. For instance, while nomadic and "state-less" ways of socio-political organizations are often seen as archaic remnants – or "living ancestors" (Scott 2009:8) – James Scott argues that "[F]ar from being successive stages in social evolution, such states and nomadic peoples are twins, born more or less at the same time" (Scott 2009: 29). Thus, while Timothy Early (2011:28) is surely correct in stating that "[T]o deny social evolution is folly" the corollary "[E]volution is multilinear" (ibid: 29) is equally important. Only inclusive "output concepts" allow for multiplicity and multilinearity, I contend.

Explicit unilinear social evolutionary theorizing is not common in either IR or the state making literature in general.[4] The few times social evolution is at all marked out for discussion, it is more often than not for the sake of rejecting it, in these literatures (i.e. Mann 1986). Still, there is a strong *assumption* of unilinear social evolution serving as a taken-for-granted historical context in the literature. Whether and how this assumption can be causally linked to Adam Smith's and the Schottish Enlightenment's stages of history (hunting-gathering, agricultural, industrial, and commercial society), to Lewis Henry Morgan's savagery, barbarism, and civilization, to Marxism's primitive communism, feudalism, bourgeois society and true communism, and/or to Elman Service's bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states I leave for another paper. Suffice it to say that IR and much of the state making literature a) rely on some such evolutionary typology, b) focus on the most contemporary of these types, or possibly the transition from the latest to the present, while c) excluding from their interest those polities that by this scheme lags behind in the evolutionary development. This produces a tunnel vision of state making, that reinforces the general Eurocentrism informing much of IR, comparative history, and historical sociology (Hobson 2012; Hall 2015).

In brief the, although no fault of his own, Tilly's dictum was appropriated by much of IR and the state making literature to explain how in the last evolutionary phase the anarchic international system, populated by a certain kind of hierarchical states, came into being. From there on, neorealist, neoliberal, critical, or English school logics take over the explanatory responsibilities. Polities or geographies that do not adhere to this pattern are seen as not-yet modern – they are "living ancestors" – and can safely be relegated to another discipline's empirical scope.

Two recent studies, in particular and each in its own way, complicate this received thinking.[5] First, Victoria Tin-bur (Hui 2005) argues that it is the European state and state system that is a failure and a deviation (esp. pp. 47-50). Hui argues that "whereas war made the state through self-strengthening reforms in ancient China, war in fact deformed the state through self-weakening expedients in early modern Europe" (ibid: 49). For my purposes here, the crucial service provided by Hui is the denial of early modern Europe as a benchmark; that not only variation within Europe is in need of explanation, but that Europe as such is in need of explanation.

Second, James Scott (2009) has persuasively argued that states do not necessarily form the apex of social evolution, but just one possible outcome. Another outcome, often actively sought, is to organize life such that it is "designed to evade both state capture and state formation" (ibid: 9), or what Mann (Mann 1986) has called

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[4] Spruyt (1994) is one important exception. Importantly, Spruyt does not adhere to unilinear evolutionism; his whole point is that social evolution is multilinear.

[5] These are two among several studies. I choose these two studies because they make one singularly important point each. See Vu (2010) for more examples.

"caging." What Scott, and Mann, are emphasizing, in other words, is that the state may not be an attractive or rational institutional equilibrium in all contexts. The dodging of state making, or some of the parts of state making, are also processes that may be important to students of state making. In the following sections of this paper I will not suggest that the Inner Asian nomads at all times dodged state making. I will argue, however, that they typically did not use the full bundle of statecraft techniques known to them from contacts with sedentary states, and thus by choice dodged both dimensions of state making, and intense, or high degrees, of state making.

III Inner Asian Nomads in International Relations

World historians of renown have traditionally not been kind to the nomads of Eurasia. Fernand Braudel (1994: 164) likens them to "the biblical plagues of Egypt," while William McNeill (1964: 7) presumes that "a pastoral conqueror was likely to celebrate his victories by brutal harassment" and suggest that their 'mode of production' (not his terminology) can be described as "a successful transfer of nomadic parasitism from animal herds to human population." In a similar vein Eric Jones (1988: 108) argues that colonialism "simply came too late and too unevenly to account for the sluggish economic record of Asia – unless we are prepared to include the effects of the internal Asian colonialisms which followed invasions by the Mongols and later nomad peoples." For better or for worse, the state making literature ignores rather than besmirches the Eurasian nomad, although Tilly (1992: 21) calls them "predators", that "roared out of the steppe" one after another (138). Mann (1986) seems interested in them, or in pastoralist nomads in general, only as a feature of "general social evolution." In the field of IR the situation is somewhat better, at least in that small segment of IR that has some world historical aspirations, such as i.a. the English School. Thus Adam Watson (1992: 128-9), following ibn Khaldun, does take note of the nomad's dialectic role in world history. Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000: 183-89) devote a section of their book on international systems in world history to nomads and nomadic empires, noting these "deserves more investigation than it has received so far in IR" (ibid: 187). Interestingly, Buzan and Little do not reproach the nomads for their destructive barbarism, instead stating that the aim of the nomadic empires "was to stabilize trading relations" (ibid: 188). This is the same argument I will make later in this paper; however, I will also suggest that a) this policy aim is key in any explanation of steppe state building, thus reversing the time sequence, and b) the relationship (sic) between the Eurasian nomads and sedentary states is more relational (Jackson and Nexon 1999) than seems to be the case for Buzan and Little.

There is also a small but vibrant IR literature more specifically focused on the nomads of the Eurasian steppe (Matin 2007, Pijl 2007, Kang 2010, Kang 2010,

Neumann and Wigen 2013, Mackay 2015).[6] Matin (2007) as well as Neumann and Wigen (2013, see also Neumann 2011) are primarily concerned with showing that there is a steppe-nomadic tradition of statecraft that became hybridized with Iranian (Matin) and Turkish and Russian (Neumann and Wigen) traditions. As Russia and the Ottomans later were included in the European international society these nomadic institutions "was a presence in European politics in the gestation period of European international relations …… [and]… it remains so today" (Neumann and Wigen 2013: 324). MacKay (2015) argues that Chinese elites utilized the nomads as a constitutive other in their search for ontological security, in the process showing how scholars have drawn on this Sinocentric othering and misperceived the steppe history. Also, like Matin and Neumann and Wigen, MacKay discusses the hybridisation of steppe and sedentary (Chinese) polities. Pijl (2007) usefully reviews social science knowledge of nomads from a Marxist point of view, and also emphasize the importance of trade. Kang (2010a, 2010b) finally, argues that the East Asian international system the Eurasian nomads interacted with was legitimately hierarchical, but that the nomads were not part of that system. By and large, Kang (2010a) attaches himself to the Lattimore-Khazanov-Barfield tradition that stands in a direct contrast to my argument.

With the exception of MacKay (2015) none of this works has taken into account the diversity of the huge amount of work on steppe state making that historians, anthropologists and archaeologist have produced in recent years, and that I will review in the next section of this paper. In spite of this Neumann and Wigen incorrectly argues that "few theories of steppe polities have emerged since the 1940s" (Neumann and Wigen 2013: 314).

Available accounts

States have formed on the Eurasian steppe 15 times over the last 2200 years.[7] The mean duration of these states were 155 years, ranging from 18 to 354 years (Rogers, 2012:243). States, or a state, have existed on the Eurasian steppe for about half of this time. To say that states have formed *independently* 15 times would be to pre-empt much of the vigorous debate among scholars attempting to explain this oscillation between stateness and statelessness on the steppe. In his magisterial tome *China Marches West* (2005) Peter Perdue has provided a table summarizing the most prominent positions in this debate.

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[6] Perhaps "a literature" is a misnomer as they with little exception do not cite each other.
[7] This does not include the range of oasis city states that were sedentary outposts on the steppe, or in proximity to it.

	Internalist	Externalist
Structural/cyclical	Environmental/psychological determinism (greedy nomad); Marxism; Ibn-Khaldun	Needy nomad (Lattimore, Barfield, Khazanov)
Historical/progressive	Philological (Golden)	Technological change; fiscal resources (Di Cosmo)

From Perdue 2005: 533, table 15.1.

Structural accounts downplay, or reject, any nomad agential power. Nomads respond (erupts, come roaring) to stimuli such as environmental crisis or concentrated wealth to sate their lust for plunder (greedy nomad) or because they have to in order to survive (needy nomad). There is no crucial relationship among the 15 state formations throughout history; only a predictable response to environmental (broadly understood) pressure. Nomads are automatons. *Historical* accounts emphasize the existence of a steppe statecraft tradition – even if not directly positing a translatio imperii, until after Gengish Khan – and offer (Di Cosmo 1999) a periodization of steppe history in terms of the acquisition and implementation of resource extraction technologies. *Internalist* accounts emphasize developments internal to nomadic society, somewhat like the pristine state formation of archaeologists and anthropologists, whereas *externalist* accounts emphasize relations among polities, including sedentary polities, in a vein more familiar to IR. Whereas I appreciate the heuristic value of Purdue's matrix, and whereas I recognize that it lays out the perhaps two most important axes of the debate, I think a thematic overview of the debate can offer both more nuance and bring out a wider array of arguments. With Purdue's matrix as a varyingly visible back-drop the following six themes constitute the nodal points of the debate on steppe state making.

Steppe vs. sown

Many scholars of Eurasia – and certainly of European and Chinese history – have implicitly or explicitly worked with a strongly bipolarized understanding of nomads and sedentary populations. The upshot of this bipolarization is that the nomad is a tribal natural warrior that has no agriculture and is unable to sustain him/herself with the resources obtainable on the steppe. In earlier accounts, such as Ibn Khaldun and Owen Lattimore the nomads are (in Di Cosmo's wording) greedy for the resources beyond the steppe, and state formation takes place in order to raid the sown more efficiently. Later accounts (Khazanov, Barfield) downplay the psychological motivation, and refer to the nomads' *need* to obtain resources from the sown. Moreover, hitherto dominant anthropological and archaeological theory posits that agriculture is strongly causally connected with hierarchical social organization, while pastoralism cannot support social hierarchies. Agriculture therefore becomes associated with states, and pastoral nomadism with tribes that, again, erupts or come roaring. Archaeological evidence, however, discredit the "need" thesis (Di Cosmo 2015: 51; Rogers 2012: 216). Eurasian nomads were agriculturally self-sustaining, at least to some extent. Moreover, Chinese sources evidence that the loot carried of after raiding, or the goods traded for, was not grain (as would have been the case had the nomads needed the agriculturalists) but silk or tea (when trading), slaves and livestock (when raiding) and luxury items (in both cases). Also, there is ample archaeological evidence of social stratification in steppe nomad society (Rogers, ibid). Finally, a single minded focus on the dependence of the nomads on sedentary populations fails to acknowledge or explain the fact that the steppe nomads spent much more time fighting each other than sedentary states. Thus, neither greed nor need can explain either steppe state making, or even raiding. Moreover, approaching the question of steppe state making with this distinction as a basic conceptual frame will lead the analysis to focus on the relationship between the two categories as the locus of explanation, potentially disregarding logics within each category.

Shadow empires

Following the classical studies of Owen Lattimore and Khazanov (1983), anthropologist Thomas Barfield (1989) has proffered the perhaps best known theory of steppe state making, outside Eurasian nomad studies. Barfield's thesis – summarizable as the shadow empire thesis – is not only well know, it is probably also the most heavily criticized thesis, leaving aside older racist and old Soviet and Chinese Marxist theories. Barfield's shadow empire thesis can be summarized as follows: In order to sustain themselves, the steppe nomads needed various resources

from the sedentary world (China); these they would variously obtain by both trading and raiding. When China was strong and centralized both these technologies were unsatisfing for the decentralized tribal nomads. The strong central Chinese state could on the one hand defend itself from raiding, and on the other control and limit trading opportunities in order to weaken the nomads. To overcome these obstacles the nomads would develop states in order to be again able to raid, and insist on trade. In other words, nomadic states/empires developed by necessity when Chinese states grew strong. When Chinese states weakened, the nomadic empires/states would likewise crumble. Other scholars have criticised the Lattimore-Khazanov-Barfield thesis on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Theoretically, the shadow empire thesis is functionalistic, linking the development of a highly complex civil and military bureaucracy to a simple need. However, scholars arguing for the thesis have failed to provide a mechanism by which a number of tribes develop into a complex state as a response to a need. Empirically, it is at least highly questionable whether this need even existed. Even more problematic, however, is that no synchronicity between the rise and fall of sedentary and nomadic states can be shown to have existed (Di Cosmo 2015: 58; Drompp 2005). In the words of Di Cosmo, steppe and sedentary powers were simply not "two mechanically interlocked forces acting upon each other as cogwheels of a single mechanism" (2015: 52). Finally, the shadow empire thesis ignores the fact that all 15 instances of steppe state making is preceded by intense warfare. Even Gengish Khan spent more time fighting other nomads than conquering most of Eurasia.

Economic relations between the steppe and the sown

I have already presented arguments to the effect that the nomads did not necessarily need the sedentary agriculturalists for mere subsistence. This of course does not mean, in itself, that they were not interested in trade for luxury goods and desirable goods that they could not produce themselves, such as tea and silk. It has long been assumed that China, however, neither needed nor wanted anything from the nomads. That the "trade" between nomads and China was actually an inverted tributary relation in which nomads symbolically paid tribute to China and received lavish "gifts" in return. This situation certainly obtained at times; however, this does not mean that regular trade was not crucial to *both* China *and* nomads. What the Chinese states needed from the nomads were horses and livestock. Chinese states needed massive amounts of horses for their armies, but the ecology of China did not allow high-quality breeding. This Chinese dependence on nomad horse and livestock notwithstanding, a crucial policy for Chinese states were often to monopolize, and sometimes delimit, trade. The balance of interests was straightforward: the Chinese state wanted to be the only purchaser of horses, so that prizes could be kept low. The

nomads wanted free trade so that private procurers would engage in competitive upward bidding. Chinese states would also, in spite of their own need for horses, delimit trade with the nomads. This they would do in order to weaken by impoverishing the nomads. Typically, the nomads would reply with raiding to constricted trade. The shadow empire argument, now, suggest that is now that nomad centralization took place – as outlined above. However, raiding as such rather works against centralization than in favour of it, since raiding is "democratic". That is, the spoils of raiding belong to everyone participating in the raid. But a centralizing nomad state – or rather it's Khan – would instead have required concentrated wealth to discriminately distribute among loyal followers. A centralized state implies, if anything, stratification, and democratic raiding does not produce stratification. Moreover, and only to an extent a specification, nomad state would also need surplus wealth to sustain new office holders that did not necessarily belong to the tribal aristocracy with their own surplus wealth. Again, democratic raiding could not free the developing state from the tribal aristocracy and finance a new state-loyal elite. Trade, however, could much more easily be monopolized – on the nomad side – by an aspiring leader and thus generate the surplus wealth required to construct a loyal following and free the new state from tribal constrictions.

Continuities and discontinuities

I have already suggested that there is little that indicates that an ideology of translatio imperii performs a role in explaining state formation on the steppe, except for the period after Genggish Khan. At the same time, the existence of a statecraft tradition is by now unquestionable (e.g. Neuman and Wigen 2013). Other continuities include primary institutions (Buzan 2004) such as sacred places (the Orkhon River Valley for instance), trade caravans, rights to land access, but not sovereign ownership, a generalized shamanistic religion, and perhaps a few others. Some fundamental preconditions for economic production did not change either, although climatic variations certainly made for varying levels of economic output. It may thus be tempting to interpret a similarity in outcomes – expansive and resource consuming nomad states – as a function of these continuities, and thus strengthen the structural-cyclical interpretation of steppe history, where the sedentary Chinese states contain the variation necessary for explaining the oscillation between stateness and statelessness. But this view disregards the archaeological and historical records. The successful cases of steppe state making were with few exceptions preceded by dissimilar long-term processes, although these in turn eventually all yielded the final mechanism producing states: militarization. Moreover, over the course of our 2200 years the successful state making enterprises behaved rather differently from each other, particularly when it comes to how they extracted resources from vanquished

territories. Di Cosmo (1999) has suggested a periodization of steppe state formation (summarized on 1999:39). The earliest states would exact tribute. In the second phase nomad states had learned to in addition either tax or monopolize trade. The third phase brought with it direct taxation of farmers, made possible by the new "policy" of actual conquest. In the fourth phase, in which tribute and direct engagement in trade played little role, an administratively sophisticated taxation of the economy as a whole was set in place.

So continuity on the steppe plus fluctuation in sedentary China cannot, at least, be the complete model explaining state making on the steppe. Contingencies on the steppe have to be accounted for, or shown to be irrelevant. At the same time, the financial learning curve of the nomads suggests that not every nomad state is new under the sun, either.

Constructing internal order

The idea of the stateless steppe as tribal has recently been harshly criticized (Sneath 2007). In brief, Sneath's argument is that steppe polities never were tribal, but always aristocratic "confederacies" (headless states) whose only joint ventures were ever "foreign policy." I think there is much to be said for Sneath's argument and analysis. However, Sneath himself has been severely criticized by others in the field, and there is still a broad consensus for analyzing stateless steppe nomads as tribes. Moreover, Sneath's argument is not directly pertinent for the question of how nomad states achieved order? There are really two separate, but overlapping, questions here.

The first question is how the nomad states created initial and internal order. How, in other words, did nomad states free themselves from the traditional and kinship-based tribal organisations and loyalties. Usually, the biggest threat to nomadic states, and a common reason for the failure of a range of state making efforts, was inter-tribal conflict. Two techniques were typically used. First, tribes would be broken up and new fighting units, made from multiple tribes, of warriors with their families would be constructed. Second, state leaders would invest a new elite with office-based authority (typically military commanders, but also other offices), thus undermining and eventually displacing the traditional aristocratic, kinship based, and tribal authority. It was for this purpose, primarily, that new states leaders needed to extract significant resources from the sedentary world. The new elite, often early followers of the state leader, needed both to be maintained with ordinary resources and be rewarded with prestige goods for consumption or display.

The second question is how to construct order on a broader scale, including conquered peoples and territories. That nomad states had to include conquered peoples in some sort of order – without necessarily occupying their land or integrating them is evidenced if by nothing else by the sheer size of nomadic armies.

For instance, the amount of warriors Genggish Khan and his successors could muster from the Mongolian tribes was only a fraction of the real size of their armies. Nomad states thus necessarily confronted a problem many would be state makers have confronted: how to deal with linguistic and ethnic multiplicity? There seems to be three available world historical strategies [what to cite here?]: the elimination of diversity, the creation of continuity[8], and capstone governance (modified from Rogers 2007). Nomads only rarely eliminated diversity; while Genggish's Mongols did butcher the Tartar tribe, this was an exception that was never brought outside the nomad world into the sedentary. It did happen that nomad states would kill every human being in a conquered city, for instance, but that would have been a strategic decision to encourage future submission by others rather than the elimination of diversity. Nor did nomad states ever try to forbid languages or diverse cultural expressions. While nomad states actively did work to create social bonds with local elites, through marriages and systems of gift-giving for instance, no sustained efforts of inventions of traditions or imagining communities can be identified in the archaeological or historical record.[9] The third strategy is to ignore, or bypass, diversity by creating governance institutions that are detached from locally and culturally generated institutions. This is the typical imperial strategy, whereby you leave local society alone, except for resource extraction and foreign policy. The steppe states typically used only this last strategy. The blatant exception is the wholesale conquest of parts of China by Kublai Khan, whereby the nomad state became the Chinese dynasty Yuan.

[Parenthetically, it seems to me that these ideal-type strategies invite an alternative (to institutions) for comparative state making studies. Impressionistically, the small empires on the Eurasian westernmost peninsula that would one day become the nation states on which most social and political theory is based on, utilized the two first strategies. On the larger Eurasian continent only the last strategy was systematically used. Is this why it is/was difficult to recognize non-European polities as states?]

The construction of internal order and cohesion is perhaps the least controversial issue in steppe state making studies. It remains to be seen weather a deeper critical engagement with received anthropological categories, pace Sneath, will change this.

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[8] Imagining communities, social construction of reality in practice, the invention of tradition, etc.
[9] The Manchus, who established the last Chinese dynasty of the Qing, did engage in social construction of reality, up-playing a non-existent or weak nomadic and horse-riding past, supposedly in order to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the various post-Mongol nomadic polities.

A Proposed Model

Deliberating these various debates and arguments Nicola Di Cosmo (1999, 2004) has proposed a model for steppe state making. This model has four phases: crisis, militarization, centralization, and revenue extraction.

Crisis. Every single instance of steppe state making was preceded by a major crisis. These crises were of different kinds: economic, climactic or random inter-nomad warfare. What kind of crisis seems to be less important, or even irrelevant. What is important is that the economic need generated by the crisis in itself did not produce centralization and state making. On the opposite, economic hardship led to the breakdown of social relations and thus to "social disaggregation" (Di Cosmo 1999: 15). Tribes would break up and traditional authority would loose legitimacy. At the same time, these would be periods of high social mobility: new war-bands would be forged, clans or families (the smallest social unit on the steppe) would seek protection from new strong leaders as their tribe disintegrated, and these new leaders were not necessarily at all part of the traditional aristocratic elite.

Militarization. While popular culture presents the steppe as an ever lasting war zone, and a constitutive trope of the psychological determinism in figure 1 is that the steppe nomad is a "natural born warrior" it is just not the case that every person able to fight was constantly engaged in fighting or in preparation for fighting. Raiding and skirmishes were endemic, but the whole society was not on a constant war footing. In times of crisis, however, whole societies could be mobilized for warfare where every male able to fight would become a professional solider.[10] Able military leaders would gain prominence over hereditary and religious leaders, and if significant social movement had preceded this process new administratively organized military units would replace tribes as loci of loyalty and suppliers of security, sustenance, and wealth. These military units would typically consist of a mixture of ethnic and linguistic elements, and were constituted by hierarchies reflecting personal or familial (not tribal) relations to a leader rather than by aristocratic hierarchies.

A Leader and Centralization. Militarization would take place in several locations, if not all over, in the steppe. The leaders of the military units would naturally have varying success, and sometimes one particularly able and charismatic leader would conquer and dominate greater parts of the steppe. At times, this leader could then install himself as Khan of Great Khan. In the known cases of steppe state making a crucial element here is that whereas often conquering nomads would enslave vanquished enemy nomads, those leaders that would become Khan or Great Khan rather absorbed than enslaved other nomads. As old tribal loyalties had been

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[10] There is no systematic evidence for female warriors, and no evidence whatsoever for female fighters after/outside of the Scythian period/culture.

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destroyed or weakened, and the military unit was ethically and linguistically heterogeneous to begin with, it would not have been difficult to administratively integrate defeated warriors in the army. Again, to ward off the reestablishment of tribal affiliations individuals loyal to, or in family with, the leader would make up the command of the military units, and governance functions would move from the tribal aristocracies to the leaders military staff.

Revenue extraction. Paradoxically, society could not be demobilized after the investiture of a new Khan as this would have deprived the new military elite of its wealth-generating positions, the old tribal elite would have reasserted itself, and the Khan would have lost his power and most likely his life as well. So the new military elite had to be continuously rewarded, the old tribal elite perhaps had to be mollified, and with half the productive population being professional soldiers, massive amounts of resources had to be extracted from outside the newly formed state. In the short term, the most efficient way to extract vast resources would have been to raid the sedentary world, and this certainly happened. However, as argued above, from a state making perspective, raiding is actually counterproductive, as raiding is "democratice" and does not produce stratification. The new leader(ship) had to monopolize the revenue from whichever mode of extraction could be employed, and it is here that trading and thence conquest and taxation offer themselves as attractive policies. Steppe states we not made *in order to* be able to raid or trade with China; but steppe states were financially dependent on trading with China.[11]

This set of inter-locking mechanisms – this process – was never predetermined. Each mechanism could have, and did, produce results such that the next mechanism was not set off, and eventually no nomad state was created.

IV The Context of Steppe State Making

Taking a step back, which was the larger context in which these instances of steppe state making occurred? Most, if not all, accounts of state making in Europe – whether early modern state making or more archaic state making – posits systemic pressure as a more or less important factor in state making processes. Conceptually awkward as it may be, the international system preceded states in Europe. This international system generated states – through the mechanism of the security dilemma – that in turn generated an international society, constituted by a set of primary, foundational or constitutive institutions (Buzan 2004: 174, table 1) for

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[11] This is not the "needy nomad" argument of Lattimore, Khazanov, and Barfield. Their argument suggests that nomad *society* could not sustain itself. The present argument suggests that nomad *states* could not sustain themselves.

overview and comparison. On the steppe, I suggest, this order was reversed. A *full* international system (Buzan and Little 2000: 96) usually did not exist on the steppe but there always existed an economic international system (ibid), or an international political economy. Three factors explain the absence of a full international system.[12] First, a high degree of physical mobility together with a relatively low population density offered the option of migration, rather than self-strengthening, in the face of external threats. When their neighbours grew stronger, nomads did not have to emulate or go under; they could move (usually westward).[13] Second, and overlapping, socio-cultural mobility was very high. Members of a weaker tribe did not necessarily have to wait to be conquered or enslaved, they could often instead join the stronger tribe without any significant linguistic or cultural hinders. Politics of identity seems to have been unimportant on the steppe. Third, and as a consequence, interaction capacity, counter intuitively was low. Or perhaps rather, the intensity and sustainability of interaction was low. While nomadic pastoralism is a very mobile mode of living, and therefore certainly has a high interaction capacity, it is also true that it is easy to avoid being interacted with, if you so chose. Nomads are not tied to any particular locale and therefore have less to defend than city dwellers or farmers. Moreover, nomadism generates little economic surplus with which to finance standing armies with which to engage in long term warfare or occupation. They would thus have a high interaction capacity in terms of raiding or migrating, but low in terms of conquest. This, of course, changed when states did develop on the steppe, as outlined above.

But there was an international political economy. And while IR theory, and particularly the English School, usually locates primary institutions in the international society of *states*, I am here suggesting that this steppe international political economy was constituted by primary institutions although there were not always states.[14] These primary institutions were co-generative of the states that did develop on the steppe, and the set of steppe primary institutions both overlap with, and is differ markedly from, the set constituting European international society.[15]

A range of candidates for steppe primary institutions is on offer. For instance, Kwan (2016) argues that there were four primary institutions in the international society of the steppe together with China: hegemony, diplomacy, war, and intermarriage. Often the tributary system is offered as a primary institution of ancient China (Zhang and Buzan 2012), but it not at all clear that the steppe was a part of

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[12] This whole section is very tentative. Even so, I tentatively require of a full international system for there to be an observable security dilemma at play.

[13] Of course, they would then displace other nomads who would in turn migrate westward, and so on until the final link caused havoc in Europe.

[14] The option offered by the English School here would probably be to suggest that the primary institutions were somehow located in *world* society (Buzan 2004).

[15] But see Neumann and Wigen (2013) for a discussion on how certain steppe institutions were introduced in Europe.

the society that was constituted by the tributary system. Others have suggested the mandate of heaven, or Great Kahn[16], the personal bodyguard of a ruler, the military decimal system, and clan property[17] for instance.

In comparison to European primary institutions two things stand out. First, Buzan (2004) reviews what Wight, Bull, Mayall, Holsti, James and Jackson have had to say about primary institutions. All of these six scholars list, amongst others, international law, diplomacy and sovereignty (or in Bull's case, the state) as primary institutions. Four mentions war, three mentions territoriality in addition to sovereignty, and only two (Wight and Holsti) lists trade. Diplomacy was certainly a primary institution of the steppe international political economy (Hall 2009), and so was war (and raiding). I have not come across any evidence of any international law beyond the sanctity of agreements and cultural customs. Trade was, I will suggest, the most important primary institution. This is the similarity between Europe's and the steppe's primary institutions. The second thing that stands out is the glaring absence of sovereignty or territoriality as primary institutions on the steppe. The question of why sovereignty and territoriality[18] – or any institution – did *not* develop is methodologically difficult to answer.[19] Recognizing that the question deserves its own paper, however, I would tentatively suggest that it had to do, again, with nomad pastoralism as a mode of production. Moreover, following Scott (2009) nomadism may well have been an active choice in avoiding stateness or caging, and sovereignty and territoriality may therefore have been socio-culturally negatively imagined (Taylor 2002).

So, an international political economy "hosting" the primary institutions of, at least, trade, diplomacy, rudimentary international law, war and raiding, but not sovereignty and territoriality may perhaps be said to have existed on the Eurasian steppe from about 400 BCE until about the 18th century. This may have been a world society or an international society that sometimes did not have states. In the late 19th century this international society received a name by a British commentator: the Silk Road. [20]

The received notion of the Silk Road, or sometimes the Silk Roads, is that is basically was a pipeline of luxury goods and capital between China and the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It is as if Rome and China wanted to trade with each other, and hence they found a way of doing so: great caravans traversing deserts and

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[16] By which a particularly successful Khan would become Khan of all those who "draw the bow," that is, the steppe.

[17] Property, including property to leadership, would typically belong to clans, not individuals.

[18] Following Jessop I define territorialisation as "the enclosure of social relations into relatively bounded, demarcated political units" (2016: 125).

[19] Unless, of course, one sees this non-development as a failure or an aberration of a natural process, as in mainstream teleological Eurocentrism.

[20] This is a misnomer in many ways. In the most immediate way, silk was not the main cargo transported and there never was a, or any, road.

mountains, carrying luxury items from one geographical periphery of Eurasia to the other. This notion of the Silk Road is now being criticized, perhaps most prominently by Christopher Beckwith (Beckwith 2009).[21] [22] Indeed, Beckwith argues that

> The Silk Road was *not* a network of trade routes, or even a system of cultural exchange. It was the entire local political-economic-cultural system of Central Eurasia, in which commerce, whether internal or external, was very highly valued and energetically pursued – in that sense, the "Silk Road" and "Central Eurasia" are essentially two terms for the same thing (ibid: 328)

The constant of steppe life was commerce, and some raiding.[23] Stateness seems to have been a response to interruptions in commerce, whatever the nature of these interruptions. And commerce does require at least rudimentary international law and diplomacy, for large scale continuous trading at least. And if you have organized your mode of living around commerce, war follows downstream from the malfunction of diplomacy when sedentary China strangles trade in order to weaken you. These primary institutions shape and shove the political history of the steppe. However, neither sovereignty nor territoriality has any intrinsic connection to trade. Those two institutions materialize only as society militarizes as a response to a crisis, as outlined above.[24] They are not the "shapers and shovers", as in Europe, but the occasional outcomes.

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[21] Beckwith is certainly controversial and iconoclastic. Most historians, anthropologists and archaeologists of the steppe are skeptical of his ideas of a Central Eurasian cultural complex, and some of his linguistic arguments. I have not come across any specific criticism of the argument I pick up here however: that the Silk Road was what IR scholars would call an international or world society.

[22] Beckwith is not alone, however. I read the work of i.a. Valerie Hansen (2012) as supporting the notion of the Silk Road as an international society, although she does not employ a social scientific vocabulary. A recent statement of the more traditional kind is Liu (2010).

[23] Much like life for the Vikings, who were primarily traders rather than raiders, whatever Christian chroniclers and modern day right wing extremists might say. Also, this makes intuitive sense. What can you do with 120 horses and 250 sheep that you cannot do with 70 horses and 150 sheep, except trade this livestock for other goods?

[24] NB that a) any sovereignty on the steppe is personal or (in the case of Chinggis' inheritors) clan based, not office based, and b) territoriality was never institutionalised or valorised. The value of autochthony so prevalent in modern Europe is unobservable in steppe history.

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