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The Impact Of The Mongol State On The Geopolitical Map Of Eurasia

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Annotation
This article analyzes the rise of the Mongol Empire in the 13th–14th centuries and the profound transformations it brought to the geopolitical map of the Eurasian region. The study highlights the collapse of preexisting states due to the Mongol conquests, the emergence of new political entities – such as the Golden Horde, the Chagatai Ulus, the Ilkhanate, and the Yuan Dynasty and their interrelations. Furthermore, it scientifically examines the revitalization of the Silk Road during the «Pax Mongolica» era and its contribution to the globalization of diplomatic, trade, and cultural ties between East and West. In conclusion, the paper evaluates the historical role of Mongol statehood traditions in shaping the governance systems and borders of subsequent Eurasian states.
Keywords: Mongol Empire, Eurasia, geopolitical map, Chagatai Ulus, Golden Horde, Pax Mongolica, Silk Road, international relations.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongol Empire—which spanned the entire Eurasian continent—emerged as the largest contiguous land-based state in human history. It not only redrew the political boundaries of its era but also elevated the continent's geopolitical architecture, the balance of power between civilizations, and strategies for territorial governance to an entirely new level. The administration of this vast expanse—stretching from Northern China to the threshold of Central Europe, and from the Siberian taiga to the Persian Gulf—from a single, unified center brought about a level of geopolitical integration previously unseen in the history of Eurasia.

In contemporary global historiography and the theory of international relations, the analysis of the impact exerted by Mongol statehood on the geopolitical configuration of Eurasia lies at the heart of strategic conceptual debates. Key perspectives in this discourse include the Eurasianist school—which emerged within Russian émigré circles in the early 20th century and evolved into a distinct paradigm—as well as modern Western "global history" scenarios, world-systems theory, and various systemic geopolitical approaches[1]. All three theoretical frameworks interpret the Mongol conquest as a transformative international factor that defined the territorial and institutional foundations of the modern states of Russia, China, Iran, and Central Asia.

This article provides a scholarly, comparative-historical analysis of the Mongol Empire's geopolitical influence across the Eurasian space. It examines the role of the Golden Horde in the genesis of Russian statehood, the theory of Classical Eurasianism, the systems of imperial succession employed by the Mongols in the geopolitics of China and Central Asia, and these phenomena through the lens of modern geopolitical concepts.

In the 1920s, the Eurasianist movement—founded in Western Europe by Russian émigrés N. S. Trubetskoy, P. N. Savitsky, and G. V. Vernadsky—put forward a revolutionary, yet highly controversial, perspective on the analysis of Russian history[2]. According to this view, Russia is not merely the eastern periphery of Western Europe or a natural extension of Slavic-Orthodox culture; rather, it is a distinct, independent civilizational and geographical space—"Eurasia"—that embodies both Asian and European elements.

[1] Biran, Michal. The Mongols and the Inter-Civilizational Exchange. // Journal of World History. – 2012. – Vol. 23. – No. 1. – P. 113-140.
[2] Trubetzkoy, Nikolai S. The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russia's Identity. – Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1991. – 402 p.

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In his classic work "The Mongols and Russia", George Vernadsky (1887–1973) provided a scholarly argument that the Golden Horde was the primary factor in the consolidation of the Russian lands around Moscow, ultimately transforming them into a vast, economically significant empire[3]. According to Vernadsky's thesis, prior to the Mongol conquest, the Kievan principalities—plagued by fragmentation and constant internecine warfare—were on the verge of collapse as viable political entities. The Golden Horde provided Russia with a centralized administrative structure, an efficient taxation system, principles for population registration, and, most importantly, a geopolitical vision for controlling a unified Eurasian strategic space. As the Muscovite rulers emerged from the orbit of the Golden Horde, they adopted its institutional framework and other elements.

It was the prominent scholar Lev Gumilev (1912–1992) who, in the mid-20th century, brought Eurasianist ideas into the realm of new scholarly research. Based on his work on the geography of ethnic processes and his theory of "passionarity" (passionar-lik), Gumilev declared the traditional term "Mongol yoke" to be scientifically unfounded. In his book "Ancient Rus and the Great Steppe", Gumilev characterized Russo-Mongol relations during the 13th and 14th centuries as a military-political alliance and an ethnic symbiosis directed against the expansion of Western European Catholicism. According to Gumilev's framework, Prince Alexander Nevsky—through an alliance with the Mongol Khan Berke—preserved the Russian Orthodox identity from being subsumed by the West. Ultimately, the integration of the Turkic-Mongol elite from the Golden Horde into the Russian aristocracy served as the foundation for the "passionar" energy that propelled the rise of the Russian Empire.

The ulus (realms) that emerged from the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire—namely the Yuan Empire, the Chagatai Khanate, the Ilkhanate, and the Golden Horde—served as the ultimate benchmarks for state legitimacy and territorial integrity across various regions of Eurasia for centuries to follow. A crucial geopolitical fact—acknowledged alike by modern Western Sinologists (such as M. Rossabi and T. Brook) and the official historiography of the People's Republic of China—is that the Mongol Empire, and the Yuan dynasty it established, defined the geographical space of the modern, expansive Chinese state[4].

Prior to the Mongols, the territory of China was divided into ethnic states—such as the Song, Jin, and Western Xia—that were in a state of constant warfare with one another. The unification of China by Kublai Khan, along with the subjugation of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia directly to the central government in Beijing, established the contours of China's present-day inviolable borders. In modern geopolitical theory, the Yuan Dynasty is viewed as the foundational element that shifted the concept of China's "imperial space" from a regional scale to a continental one.

Even after the Chagatai Khanate in Central Asia fell into fragmentation, the legitimacy of state authority in the region remained defined solely by descent from the lineage of Genghis Khan. As demonstrated in the research of Western Central Asianists such as B. Manz and T. Allsen, the great conqueror Amir Timur—despite his immense political and military power—could never style himself "Khan" due to this traditional geopolitical norm. Instead, he formally placed puppet "Chinggisid" khans—Suyurgatmish and Sultan Mahmud Khan—on the throne, while he himself adopted only the titles of "Amir" and "Kuragan"[5]. This system of Chinggisid legitimacy was so deeply entrenched in the region that it served as the legal foundation for state governance from the 14th century through the mid-19th century, encompassing the eras of the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, as well as the Kazakh Khanates. In other words, this Mongol geopolitical legacy governed the structure of political elite formation in Central Asia for nearly five centuries.

In her seminal work, Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350, the prominent American sociologist and economic historian Janet Abu-Lughod identified the Mongol Empire as the primary architect of a global economic and geopolitical system. Applying Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory to the Middle Ages, Abu-Lughod demonstrated—with the aid of maps—that there were eight major economic and trade circuits spanning all of Eurasia during the 13th and 14th centuries, and that four of the most significant among them were under the direct control of the Mongol Empire.

[3] Vernadsky, George. The Mongols and Russia. – New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. – 462 p.
[4] Mackinder, Halford J. The Geographical Pivot of History. // The Geographical Journal. – 1904. – Vol. 23. – No. 4. – P. 421-437.
[5] Ulashova S.U. **"**Puppet khans" of the Chagatai ulus and their activities in muslim sources // Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research. Vol: 3.. – 2025. – P. 193-202.

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The Mongol Peace integrated the land and maritime trade routes of Eurasia into a single, unified chain. Within this system, no single region—neither Europe nor China—held hegemony; rather, all centers of power stood as equals and operated in cooperation. This scenario of an open economic geopolitics, established by the Mongols, is characterized in historical scholarship as an era of "Early Modernity" or the "First Globalization"[6].

Halford Mackinder, the father of modern classical geopolitical theory, proposed the concept of the "Heartland"—the central part of Eurasia—as the key territory governing global geopolitics, in his famous lecture "The Geographical Pivot of History." According to Mackinder's doctrine: "Who controls the Heartland, commands the World-Island—Eurasia; and who commands the World-Island, commands the whole world".

Modern strategic researchers, such as Timothy May and Nicholas Spykman, in their analysis of Mackinder's ideas, note that the empire of Genghis Khan was the only political force in human history to have achieved complete and absolute control over the Heartland, using it as a base for expansion across the entire world[7]. Through their highly mobile, horse-based logistics, the Mongols secured the continental landmass and long-term restricted the influence of maritime civilizations within the continent's interior. It was precisely this Mongol experience that later served as a theoretical foundation for the "Great Game" between the Russian and British empires, as well as for the strategies underlying modern geopolitical conflicts.

In conclusion, a comparative analysis of the Mongol state's impact on the geopolitical map of Eurasia—viewed through the lens of modern theories—reveals that the empire of Genghis Khan was not merely a medieval military episode, but rather the foundational code for the modern geopolitical architecture of Eurasia. While the Eurasianist school posits the Mongol factor as an integral basis for the genesis of Russian statehood, the "World-System" and "Heartland" concepts reframe the "Pax Mongolica" as the pinnacle of intercontinental economic and strategic integration. The territorial and institutional legacy systems established by the Mongol Empire continue to serve as an underlying historical-geographical matrix for the contemporary geopolitical relations, security architecture, and transcontinental projects—most notably the new Great Silk Road—linking Russia, China, and the states of Central Asia.

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