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## Marks of the Grassland: Spatial Cognition and Perception in Mongolian Nomadic Life

Ziqing Zhao<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper commences with an investigation of regional culture, with a particular focus on the traditional patterns observed in Mongolian society. These patterns are analysed in terms of the Mongolian way of living and travelling, as well as the Mongolian perception of space and the subjective construction of space embodied in Mongolian traditional patterns. This analysis is conducted at the level of body patterns and spatial experience. Finally, the paper presents a summary of Mongolian concepts of space and the pursuit of the "circle" and the yearning for a long-lasting and eternal ideal world. In conclusion, this paper presents a summary of the Mongolian conception of space, the Mongolian pursuit of the "circle" in space, and the yearning for the ideal world that stretches forever.

**Keywords:** Regional Culture; Mongolian; Spatial Perception.

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### 1. Introduction to the problem

Culture can be defined as a set of patterns of behaviour and a system of meanings associated with those patterns. The pattern is observed to be pervasive within a specific group of individuals during a designated period of time (Kluber, 1953). Subsequent studies have seen the concept gradually expanded to encompass human activities and achievements, the products of human behaviour, and the constraints on future developments. Two fundamental principles underpin the formation of human societies: the first is kinship, and the second is geographical proximity. These two ties are inextricably linked. "While territorial ties are a significant factor in the formation and maintenance of human groups, they are frequently reinforced by other ties, such as those based on kinship." (Firth, 2002). The composition of human societies is inclusive of, if not a major part of, territorial ties, and human behaviour gives rise to the formation of distinct cultural practices in different territories. The formation of regional culture is not merely a consequence of the geographic environment; rather, it is shaped by the collective human behaviour within a given territory. This behaviour gives rise to the development of distinctive customs, religious beliefs, temperaments, etiquettes, and other cultural traits.

<sup>1</sup> Master of Arts, Inner Mongolia Normal University. Email: ziqing.zhao2010@outlook.com

Academics have been studying space for a long time, from the earlier reverie with theological implications to the coordinate dimension of physics to the thinking of social space, through the great discussion of the spatial turn, the study of space has gone through a multi-dimensional extension of thinking. The concept of the word space is polysemous; from the natural geographic point of view, space is objective, formed only by matter in the pure sense; from the social point of view, space mainly contains relations of production and reproduction, in which people are engaged in production, thus recognising and creating space. Space is also in people's imagination, with its virtual and metaphorical characteristics, and human art forms are developed in such space. Therefore, it can be said that space is the basic form in which everything exists, and the study of space necessitates an in-depth understanding of the materiality of space, time and the relationship between human beings and space, which is united in the concept of space.

Mongolian people live in space and gradually perceive space, know space, think about space and finally create space. Mongolian traditional patterns, i.e. the virtual space created by Mongolians, are based on the spatial experience of Mongolians and have the imprint of their behaviour and consciousness. People's spatial experience and concepts are based on long-term social activities, and it is people's thinking about their own spatial perception. The Mongolian people themselves have gone through historical changes and ethnic integration, and have created their own culture through cultural development and accumulation. Mongolian people's own body schema feels the rich spatial experience, and from the nomadic life of passing and living in the spatial area, from the development of social production and life with different ethnic regions and cultures, they finally form their own unique spatial cognition.

This paper examines the impact of Mongolian culture and way of life on spatial perception. It considers how the Mongolian people's distinctive approach to living and travelling, shaped by their geography, has influenced their spatial perception. It also analyses how this perception is reflected in Mongolian philosophical concepts and in their literature and art.

## 2. Mongolian Residence and Lifestyle

The manner in which humans subsist on Earth is through the act of living. This term encompasses not merely the act of occupying a specific dwelling, but also encompasses the myriad of activities that humans engage in to ensure their continued survival on this planet (Tong, 2022). The Mongolian people's ability to survive in a harsh natural environment is contingent upon their capacity to live. The act of living gives rise to the construction of dwellings, which in turn constitute the direct result of building. The spatial forms that are most basic to human beings are those that enable the division of space into discrete areas. In this way, a concrete and tangible space is distinguished from the abstract, and becomes a space that can be occupied. In this manner, the human dwelling assumes an external form, and eventually this innate tendency to occupy is transformed into a socially organised occupation.

This occupation is not a straightforward division of space; rather, it is a complex phenomenon that is shaped by a multitude of factors, including environmental conditions, social norms, beliefs, and other aspects of human experience. The Mongols' nomadic lifestyle is reflected in their choice of residence, which is also nomadic and subject to change in accordance with the natural environment. This information is documented in the Qinghai Records. During the summer months, the Mongols reside in the shadow of imposing mountains, with the sun at their backs. Their left, right and front sides are flat and open, with convenient watercourses, and they live in areas characterised by dense, shady tree cover. The optimal altitude for a winter residence in the shadow of a mountain is neither excessively high nor excessively low. High mountains tend to accumulate snow, while low mountains do not effectively block the wind. It would be prudent to construct two narrow passages on the left and right sides, which should be deep and warm if accessed in a circuitous manner. It is not necessary for the watercourse to be a substantial river; a substantial river is susceptible to ice, and the water in ditches does not always freeze (Kang, 1969). The Mongolian steppe is characterised by a seasonal change in vegetation, with the grasslands becoming green in May and withering in August. The Mongols have developed a nomadic lifestyle, setting up their dwellings on high slopes during the summer to avoid humidity and at the back of the wind and facing the sun during the winter to avoid the

cold winds. This mode of existence, which is responsive to the topographical and natural conditions, offers the Mongolian people a secure and agreeable habitat. It is also an intelligent and effective utilisation of the natural environment.

In the process of living according to the situation, Mongolian people not only consider their own interests and needs but also protect the ecological environment. For example, they use cow dung as fuel and willow from the steppe to make utensils. Living in accordance with the situation helps to maintain environmental harmony and promote ecological protection, which is one of the manifestations of Mongolian people's focus on living in harmony with nature. Secondly, living in accordance with the situation is also the ideal choice of Mongolian people to follow nature, reflecting the values of Mongolian people to respect nature with awe and love, and to take the harmony between human and nature as a code of conduct and a measure of value. The Mongolian people believe that the sky and the earth are the source of all things, and human beings and all things in the world are in an inseparable cosmic unity, and nature is the cradle on which they depend for their survival. Secondly, living in accordance with the situation provides a platform for the continuation and inheritance of Mongolian culture. The Mongolian people have unique features in terms of building materials, structures and styles, and these differences are the very embodiment of Mongolian culture.

In their daily lives, Mongolians strive to strike a balance between their own interests and needs and the protection of the natural environment. For instance, they utilise cow dung as a fuel source and willow from the steppe to create utensils. A lifestyle in accordance with the situation helps to maintain environmental harmony and promote ecological protection, which is one of the manifestations of the Mongolian people's focus on living in harmony with nature. Secondly, living in accordance with the situation represents the optimal choice for Mongolian people to align with nature. This reflects the values of Mongolian people to respect nature with reverence and affection, and to pursue the harmony between humanity and nature as a code of conduct and a measure of value. Mongolian people adhere to the belief that the sky and the earth are the source of all things, and that human beings and all things in the world are in an inseparable cosmic unity. They perceive nature as the cradle on which they depend for their survival. Secondly, living in accordance with the situation provides a foundation for the perpetuation and transmission of Mongolian culture. The Mongolian people have developed distinctive building techniques, architectural styles and structural forms, which are integral to the expression of Mongolian culture.

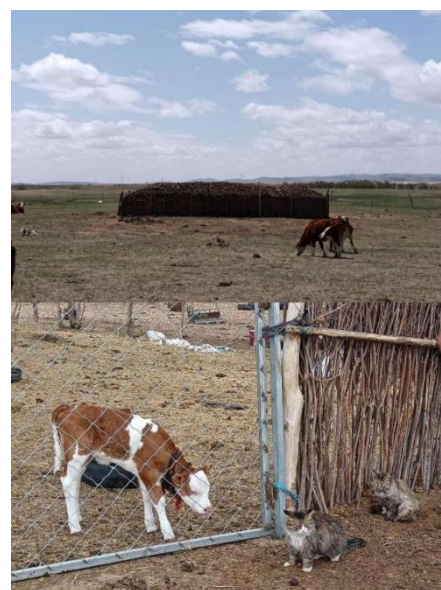


Figure 1. Cow dung heaps and willow fences built by Mongolians. Source: Self-photographed by the author's research in the pastoral area.

Concurrently, the Mongolian people's adaptation to their environment is an illustration of the "soft" transformation of the "rigidity" of the natural space. The term 'rigidity of the natural space' refers to the compulsory spatial facts inherent to the natural environment, such as geography and the presence of boundaries. The Mongolian people, through their own national psychology, perception, concepts and ideology, submit to, overcome and utilise the rigidity of the natural space, and transform it into a malleable space that can be utilised and adjusted by themselves. This reflects the initiative and subjective will of the Mongols, and in this transformation, the Mongolian cognition, imagination, and perception become their own exclusive spatial knowledge system.

The nomadic lifestyle of the Mongols, who are dependent on the surrounding environment for their sustenance, is characterised by a tendency to focus on a specific idealised state of existence, which they refer to as "wandering". This is a poetic state of existence, a state of "wandering", a state of constant movement from one point to another in a small space within the larger space in which the Mongolian people live. In this dynamic context, Mongolians are required to adapt and adjust their life trajectory on a continuous basis in order to ensure their survival.

This wandering state of existence is a reflection of the Mongolian people's parasitism. To "inhabit" means that Mongolians do not see space as a possession, but rather as a temporary place to live in. They come to this space by chance, and although they need to settle and live here, they cannot say that they are the masters of this space. The nature of the "host" cuts off any way of transforming the external into the "mine" under various names and by various means, and rejects any possibility of defining the "mine" in a fundamental juridical sense, as well as the possibility of such an attempt. and rejects any possibility of defining "I" in a fundamental juridical sense, as well as the arbitrary discourse that such an attempt entails. (Tong, 2022). The instability of the climate in the steppe region and the limited resources of the pasture have resulted in the Mongols adopting a nomadic way of travelling to and from different pastures. This has also led to the development of artefacts of life that facilitate the nomadic way of living. For instance, yurts and lechas are designed to be easily relocated, portable, and constructed on a temporary basis when necessary. In the event of inclement weather or a temporary cessation of the migration process, the lecher can also serve as a provisional residence for the Mongols. During this period of transition, the Mongols and their belongings are subject to a state of flux and uncertainty, with the environment and circumstances undergoing a constant, yet elusive transformation. Accordingly, Mongolians adhere to the tenets of the "unity of heaven and mankind" and "return to nature." This peripatetic existence renders the environment they inhabit ephemeral, engendering a sense of futility and the dissolution of conventional norms. Consequently, the natural environment provides a profound depth of meaning, prompting individuals to engage with its illusory emptiness (Gong, 2001). Furthermore, this reflects the Mongolian people's prudent and wise attitude towards the world and the space in which they live.

The nomadic nature of the Mongols is predicated on the necessity to survive and divide the grassland into discrete pastures, which can be conceptualised as a spatial act of demarcation. While the geography of the natural environment, including rivers and mountains, can serve to separate different areas, these features do not possess any significant social implications. The act of demarcation is spatially externalised into a specific form of boundary, the product of complete socialisation (Tong, 2022). It is the process of socialisation that enables the Mongols, in order to survive, to assert an orderly claim to the space that is the steppe, thereby conferring social significance upon the demarcation. The outward manifestation of this demarcation may be physical, as evidenced by the use of fences, boundary markers, and other such structures. Alternatively, it may take the form of social institutions, such as the existence of distinct tribes. The boundary formed by this spatial demarcation is not static but rather exhibits a variety of dynamic and changing forms. The fixed natural landscape serves as the boundary, but the nomadic activities of the Mongols themselves have delineated it, rendering it subject to constant alteration in accordance with their nomadic lifestyle. This mobile spatial boundary is clearly defined.

The Mongolian nomadic way of life is characterised by a collective approach to life and living. For the individual Mongolian herdsman, the individual needs only a space for his own existence. However, the development of individual subjectivity means that the individual must also include the space of the Other and the group in his vision. Furthermore, it is within the context of group activity that a sense of belonging is acquired. In the context of nomadic life, Mongolian people engage in collective action and mutual assistance, which are shaped by a range of factors, including kinship, ethnicity, religion, and culture. Furthermore, Mongolian people establish their own distinctive social space through these activities.

It is not possible for a single individual to constitute a society, nor can a single tribe (Coleman, 1999). The subjectivity of a single individual can only be constituted through the simultaneous coexistence with many different individuals. Similarly, the group or tribe develops in the environment of coexistence with different groups. In this manner, the Mongolian people have established their own social space and social relations, which are characterised by distinct features. The existence of different practices gives rise to the formation of distinct social relations. It is erroneous to posit that we live in a void where we can place individuals and things. Similarly, it is inaccurate to suggest that we live in a void rendered by the shadows of changing light. Rather, we live in a set of relations.

In natural space, it is impossible for two objects to be in the same space, but in social space, differently separated spaces can be connected. People's activities create boundaries that divide spaces, and social activities link these spaces, unifying them. For example, for two spaces to be connected, the

most direct manifestation is a road, through which people arrive at different spaces and establish connections. This model is called "dumbbell structure" or "1-2-1 model" by Professor Tong Qiang of Nanjing University. There is no time sequence between the two, they are not existing different divisions, but are generated spontaneously under the same social activities, because social space is necessarily premised on connection and communication. At the same time, if there are no boundaries in the social space, then it means that all the subjects are the same, and naturally, there will be no connection, therefore, when the social activity divides the space, it also establishes the connection. Different houses are the spaces inhabited by different individuals, and a road is the way to connect with each other, i.e. from space 1 to space 2. This spatial structure is called the "dumbbell structure" or "1-2-2". This spatial structure is called "dumbbell structure" or "1-2-1" model (Tong, 2022). Through different combinations, various composite spatial structures are formed. This emphasises that space does not exist in isolation but is interconnected in social life.

The Mongolian people's concept of space is centred on the yurt, with a gradual extension outwards. The inner circle represents the daily life of the Mongolian people, encompassing activities such as sheep herding, cattle rearing, horse breeding, and the management of fences that extend in a circular fashion, symbolising the interconnectedness of all aspects of their lives. The spatial interconnectivity between the members of the entire ethnic group is not a singular "dumbbell structure," but rather a network of intertwined "small circles" that are mutually reinforcing and interconnected.

The Mongolian people are connected to each other in this spatial structure, engaging in the production, reproduction, creation and other social activities within this social space. This generates their own unique national culture. Similarly, Mongolian national culture is a composite rather than a singular cultural entity. To illustrate, the Mongolian traditional patterns are also fused with the artistic characteristics of many ethnic groups, from the belief in shamanism to the belief in Tibetan Buddhism, as a result of historical intermingling. It is important to note that the original culture did not disappear; rather, it was selected and reinterpreted from foreign cultures, and then reintegrated into the original culture layer by layer. Furthermore, the culture of different times and places has been blended on numerous occasions. As a result of this time-space cultural blending, the culture has been imbued with increasingly complex meanings, thereby engendering a rich tapestry of connotations in the Mongolian people's philosophical thinking about space.

### **3. Mongolian travelling patterns**

The perception of space is an articulation between the individual and the external world. At one end of the spectrum is the individual's internal subjectivity and volition, while at the other end is the external world, which both receives impressions from the outside and has a role originating from the individual's subjectivity (Tong, 2022). Spatial perception occupies a position between these two extremes and represents the most fundamental mode through which individuals engage with the spatial environment. This spatial perception is not a singular perception and feeling of space; rather, it encompasses a multitude of complex and nuanced sensations pertaining to depth, width, up and down, front and back, and other dimensions of space. Interpreting these sensations is a challenging endeavor. Consequently, the perception of space is not solely a spatial perception; it also encompasses spatial experiences shaped by imagination, custom, memory, habit, and particularly those formed during social interactions. Just as people who live on an island cannot imagine how to walk between valleys, people who live in valleys cannot imagine the vastness of the sea. The perception of space changes according to the area and state of life in which people live and varies from person to person. As Morris states (Morris, 2004), "The perception of depth occurs between the perceiver and the world. This depth of depth is a perception formed by the perceiver's relationship to that place in which they are located. This relationship involves life and movement and is neither on the side of the perceiver nor on the side of the world, but spans between the two."

The distinctive ecological environment of the steppe has compelled the Mongolian people to adopt a way of life centred on nomadic herding, which represents a form of human adaptation to the natural environment. The Mongolian people inhabit a dynamic and ever-changing environment. Due to the necessity of survival, they are compelled to migrate constantly, traversing both water and

grasslands. In doing so, they observe and experience the natural dynamics of movement across the ever-changing grasslands and forests of the steppe. Through this, they achieve a harmonious integration of the external form and internal meaning of humanity and nature. The Historical Records of the Xiongnu make the following mention: In the morning, Shan Yu would leave the camp to worship the sun at its earliest appearance, and then return to worship the moon in the evening. "Raise an affair and wait for the stars and the moon; when the moon is full and strong, he attacks and fights; when the moon is deficient, he retreats." (Sima, 1982). It can be observed that the Mongols structured their lives in accordance with the rhythms of nature, and their social activities were aligned with the principles of natural law. In this way of life, the Mongolian body gradually becomes aware of the space in which it lives, namely the interaction between the body and the space.

This interaction begins with the human body, and human subjectivity incorporates space into the fabric of its own growth at its origins (Tong, 2022). This process is known as 'body schema', which is an instinctive response and unconscious adaptation of people's bodies to their environment. Merleau-Ponty explains that body schema can be understood as a generalisation of the experience of the self-body, which can reflect to people the change of the specific position of a part of their body during movement, the position of a local stimulus in the whole body, the sum of the successive movements of a complex action, as well as the successive expression of the current impression of the movement and joints in the visual language (Ponty, 2001). For example, people need to be physically present in a place in order to establish a spatial perception of it, and if they live there for a long time, they can gradually establish a physical schema of the place through their own activities. Just as we can't get lost in our own homes without closing our eyes, this kind of perception can't be built up by someone else's talk or by watching a film. Therefore, Mongolians are able to adapt to the constant migration in nomadic life, and are able to determine their orientation at once in the boundless steppe without getting lost easily. The body is a dynamic structure that is not simply in the space of general concepts of up and down, left and right, and depth, but is in a space that is limited by geographical factors, limited by social factors, and difficult to be formalised by theory. The body being in space is in fact the process of socialisation.

The Mongolian body, as a dynamic structure, is inextricably linked with the steppe environment through its inherent movements, enabling it to adapt to the ever-changing steppe environment. This process of coordination and integration allows the body to extend beyond its physical boundaries, becoming an integral part of the social space, which in turn enhances the perceptual content. These experiences and sensations are distinctive and encompass sensory, experiential, and multi-sensory elements. They are both tangible and imaginative, encompassing memories and imaginations as well as sensory perceptions. The migratory life of the Mongolian people, characterised by a constant movement between different locations, represents a continuous process of spatial unfolding and presentation. This is achieved by changing the position of the body in space, thereby experiencing and engaging with the surrounding environment. As a result of this ongoing presentation of space, Mongolians gradually develop a relatively comprehensive and objective understanding of space. This



Figure 2. Mongolians build yurts. Source: TS Batsaikhan & G. Mende Oyao. (2017). *Material Culture of Mongolian Nomads* (pp. 10). Liaoning, Liaoning Nationalities Publishing House.

spatial perception is a consequence of the distinctive nomadic lifestyle of Mongolians and is inextricably linked to it.

In this kind of physical walking and active awareness, people's perceptual system maps into their minds what they can remember and what they see. The nomadic migration of Mongolian people in the grassland has resulted in the landscape and the different flora and fauna on the grassland becoming imprinted on their collective memory. Mongolian people traverse the grassland, pausing to observe its diverse topography from a multitude of vantage points, including close-up, aerial, and oblique perspectives. This multifaceted engagement with the landscape fosters a rich tapestry of spatial experiences and perceptions, which in turn inform the depiction of plants, animals, and landscapes in traditional Mongolian patterns. What Mongolians see in their daily life is combined into a whole perception and imagination of things. For example, the horns of cows and goats are seen in the daily herding process, and there are a lot of images of cows and goats' horns in Mongolian patterns that correspond to this.

The Mongolian people developed a distinctive spatial perception as a result of their migratory history, and the objects they observed became recurring motifs in traditional Mongolian patterns. The depiction of these subjects is not an accurate representation of the objective reality; rather, it is a kind of reproduction. Raymond Williams elucidates the term 'reproduction' by positing that representations are typically representative and embody the notion of precise reproduction. This entails the act of rendering things visible to the eyes (e.g., in paintings) or to the mind (e.g., as conveyed to the people by the tales of heroes) (Williams, 2005). The objective external world

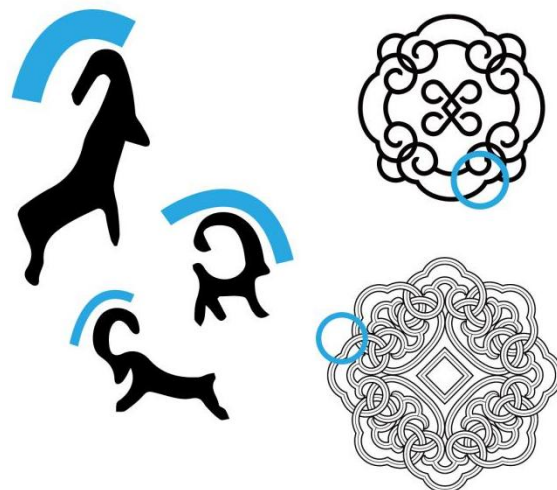


Figure 3. Imagery of Ox and Sheep Horns in Mongolian patterns. Source: Self-drawn by the author.

is furnished with a vocabulary that corresponds with it and is also represented in a depictive manner. Upon encountering these vocabularies and images, individuals develop a corresponding concept and establish a system to organize their understanding. In this system, all previously observed and heard phenomena are mentally represented as concepts. The system categorises and structures these concepts, establishing connections between them in accordance with various methodologies.

When individuals are situated within the same cultural context, they tend to exhibit a shared conceptual system. Mongolian people comprehend the world around them in a similar manner and engage in seamless communication within their own distinctive national culture, which is shaped by this shared conceptual system. It is evident that the Mongolian national sentiment evinces a profound affinity for animals and the natural world. From the perspective of empathy, the Mongolian people's affinity for animals and nature can be conceptualised as a form of "primitive worship". This affinity is accompanied by a psychological apprehension towards the ever-changing natural environment. Therefore, the pursuit of happiness through art does not entail immersing oneself in external objects or engaging in self-reflection through external objects. Instead, it involves distilling the individual elements of the external world from their perceived unpredictability and transforming them into a form that is almost abstract, thereby providing a sense of stability amidst the transience of phenomena (Wallinger, 2019). (Wallinger, 2019) To illustrate, the horns motif is designated the "Ebull motif" in Mongolian, where "Ebull" signifies horns. The depiction of animal horns as motifs is attributable to the fact that the Mongols reside in close proximity to animals on a daily basis, and thus exhibit a natural inclination towards the horns of cows, sheep, and deer, which they find fascinating. This is related to the fact that Mongolian people live in close proximity to animals on a daily basis and are naturally drawn to the horns of cows, sheep, and deer, which they depict in their art. In the Mongolian love song "Senjidma," the two braids are likened to the horns of a golden deer, while the two braids pressed by flowers are compared to the horns of a large deer (Chen, 2001). The Mongolian people employ a

metaphorical comparison between the braids of the desired girl and horns, which illustrates the Mongolian people's affinity for animal horns.

The presence of one's own body provides a genuine spatial experience. The vast expanse of the Mongolian steppe and the undulating horizon constitute a distinctive experience for the Mongolian populace, situated within this environment. The experience is rooted in the scene and spatial narrative presented, namely the irreplaceability of space. The dynamic patterns of traditional Mongolian culture within the field of vision engender the concept of "distance," whereby the expanse of space appears to be limitless. Mongolians adhere to the belief that life is immortal. The Mongolian people have inhabited the grassland for millennia, during which time they have developed a profound understanding of life and a reverence for nature. The Mongols adhere to the conviction that existence progresses in a cyclical manner, encompassing the stages of birth and death. This belief not only postulates the existence of an immortal soul but also demonstrates an acute understanding of the uninterrupted continuity of life. Concurrently, the uninterrupted and reversible lines, cyclical and symmetrical configuration of conventional Mongolian motifs mirror the philosophical tenets of the Mongolian populace concerning existence and the idealisation and aesthetic appeal of life. The patterns create an endless spatial field of vision, allowing the observer to experience the infinity of life within the constraints of the sensual space. This enables a profound metaphysical contemplation, which in turn fosters a sense of reverence for nature and the eternity of life.

#### 4. Mongolian's unique perception of space

The Mongolian people have developed a distinctive spatial concept that informs their approach to life and social activities, particularly with regard to their relationship with the natural environment. The Mongolian people perceive themselves to be inextricably linked with the natural world, with a sense of being wrapped up in heaven and earth in the vast grassland. This leads to a perception of the universe as a harmonious and interconnected whole, with the sky and earth seen as two concentric spheres. Although this view is no longer considered valid in the context of modern, highly developed science, it has nevertheless exerted a profound influence on the Mongolian perception of space as a reflection of the Mongolian understanding of the universe. The significance of the circle is a recurring theme in ancient texts from a multitude of countries, as evidenced by references in the Book of Genesis. The circle represents the egg, which can be considered the fundamental unit of the universe in philosophical terms. It symbolises the initial state of the universe, akin to an embryo (Zhu, 1988). The Pythagorean school of ancient Greece also posited that the most aesthetically pleasing three-dimensional figure is the sphere, and the most aesthetically pleasing two-dimensional figure is the circle.

The Mongolian people adhere to the belief that the universe is an eternal, cyclical entity. In the Mongolian language, the term used to describe the universe is "Orchilang," which signifies the concept of "constantly rotating and changing." The Cile Song posits that the sky is akin to a dome that encompasses the four fields. The term "dome" is a euphemism for a yurt, and the comparison between the sky and a round yurt that covers the earth illustrates the Mongolian people's perception of the universe as an endless circle. When Mongolian people stand on the vast, unending prairie, they regard themselves as the centre of the universe, taking in the curved horizon of the prairie that intersects between heaven and earth. This gives them a sense of the vastness of the sky and the earth, and of their own place in the external world. In their nomadic existence, they become attuned to the movement of the universe, gradually acquiring an understanding of its rhythm and laws. This perception of the universe as an eternal and ever-changing entity is shaped by the experiences and sentiments evoked by the natural environment. The Mongolian people are profoundly fascinated by the arc shape in terms of its spiritual connotations and the philosophy of existence. This fascination is reflected in the Mongolian pattern, which also changes and unifies on the basis of the arc shape. The pattern comprises numerous curling and rotating arc lines, creating a sense of constant movement. Furthermore, an examination of Mongolian patterns reveals that they are predominantly arranged around a circle or a similar shape, such as a circle, diamond, oval, or hexagon. This arrangement suggests an expansion from the centre of the circle, which can be seen as an embodiment of their cosmic view.



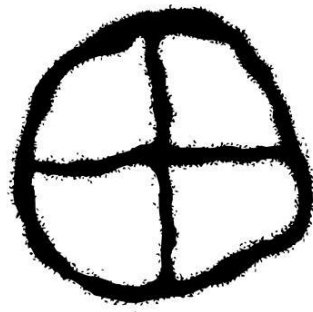


Figure 4. The image of the dome in the rock paintings of Yinshan Geer Baogou in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Source: Liu Zhaohe. (2008). *Mongolian Nomadic Hut Culture* (pp. 14). Beijing, Wenwu Press.

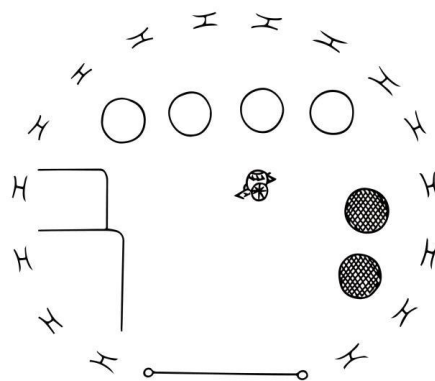


Figure 5. Illustration of Guliyan. Source: TS Batsaikhan & G. Mende Oyao. (2017). *Material Culture of Mongolian Nomads* (pp. 246). Liaoning, Liaoning Nationalities Publishing House.



Figure 6. Typical Mongolian yurt skylight composed of concentric circles, supported by four pillars, with leopard skin covering the top of the skylight. Source: Liu Zhaohe. (2008). *Mongolian National Cultural Relics Atlas - Mongolian National Thatch Hut Culture* (pp. 53). Beijing, Wenwu Press.

The shape of the yurt, the traditional dwelling of the Mongolian people, reflects their cultural preference for a circular form. The yurt's distinctive round roof is inspired by the vast expanse of the blue sky, while the skylight represents the sun, evoking the shape of the daytime sky. This is the dome, representing our Mongolian family (Liu, 2008). This folk song, which is widely known and performed in the eastern Mongolian steppe, provides insight into the profound emotional attachment that Mongolian people have towards the yurt and their perception of the concept of "roundness". The rounded nao and the uni radiating from the rounded point are analogous to the light of the sun spreading throughout the yurt, thereby exemplifying the function of communicating with the earth and the sky. A number of Mongolian words pertaining to dialogue are derived from the term "circle". To illustrate, the Mongolian term "kulun" is a polysemous word that signifies both "circle" and "wall." In the Mongolian language, the words "approve", "praise" and "agree" are derived from the word "kulun" (Gergelytu, 2004). When the Mongols migrated from one place to another, they would establish their yurts and waggons in a circular configuration. The yurt of the leader is situated at the centre of the circle. The yurts of the tribal leaders are situated in the centre of the circle, with the yurts and wavering wagons arranged in a circle around them. In the context of social gatherings, Mongolian people have a proclivity to sit in a circle on the ground to engage in conversation. In the context of singing and dancing, men, women and children form a circle, moving at a slow pace and singing beautiful songs. It is evident that the pursuit of the circle has been integrated into all aspects of Mongolian culture, becoming an integral part of the nation's identity. The patterns depicted not only exemplify an understanding of the circle, but also reflect the Mongolian people's comprehension of the universe and space-time, as well as their reverence and experience of life. This illustrates a relationship with the spirit of the relationship between heaven and earth.

Since the beginning of time, in addition to perceiving space, being in space, thinking about space, and behaving in space, human beings have attempted to express the structure of their world in the image of the real world, which can be defined as the creation of space. The description of artistic space, like that of cognitive space, necessitates an abstraction, a conceptualisation of space that encompasses all the properties that artistic space may possess (Schulze, 1990). Through their own social activities, Mongolians have transformed the originally rigid natural space, creating a series of social spaces that are both separated and linked, as well as facilitating connections between individuals. Concurrently, they have established a hallowed site within their social activities, which Foucault designated as "the space of difference." It would be erroneous to assume that our lived experience is confined to a homogeneous and empty space. Rather, we inhabit a world that is imbued with quality and whimsy, where our fundamental perceptual spaces, including the spaces of dreams and passions, retain their ontological qualities (Bachelard, 2013). The Naadam Festival of the Mongolian people and the worship of the Altar are good examples of "the space of difference".

The space of difference is populated by a utopian fictional character. In contrast to the spatial dimensions of nature and society, the space of difference is a space of direct transformation of universal relations, presented in a perfect form. The space of difference is a ubiquitous phenomenon in all cultures and civilisations, constituting the fundamental basis of social space. Furthermore, the space of difference manifests in diverse forms across different cultures and civilisations. In the context of Mongolian culture, the Ovoo and the Naadam Assembly serve as exemplars of the space of difference.

In Mongolian religious beliefs, the ovoo is an important spiritual object, regarded as a conduit for spiritual energy and a symbol of traditional Mongolian culture. It is also considered to be a spiritual carrier, linked to ancestors and a great force of nature. The ovoo is regarded as an incarnation of a deity. It is a small, rounded structure made of earth, stone, and wood with a wicker top and a flag of scripture hanging above it. Ovoos are often located on the high slopes of grasslands and at the top of mountains. In Mongolian religious beliefs, the ovoo is regarded as an extremely important spiritual carrier, as it is considered to be a spiritual and great natural force linked with ancestors. Each ovoo is associated with a specific role, and they are regarded as a source of spirituality linked to the great forces of nature. They represent the continuity of life and the souls of the ancestors.

It would be remiss to ignore the significance of the Naadam Conference within the context of Mongolian culture. The Mongolian people consider this to be one of the most significant festivals. The festival serves to represent the collective identity and cultural identity of the Mongolian people. Naadam represents a distinctive and historically evolved aspect of Mongolian culture. The Naadam

Festival provides an opportunity for the Mongolian people to demonstrate their appreciation for nature, life, and culture. Tens of thousands of Mongolians congregate on the grassland to demonstrate their cultural heritage through a multitude of traditional performances, encompassing music, singing, dancing, archery, and other forms of traditional entertainment. The entire grassland is imbued with a jubilant ambience.

In this spatial field, the Mongolian people enter a different space from the real space, a space that is distinct from the material world and imbued with a broader and deeper significance. This distinction between the sacred and the secular is evidenced by the fact that this space is regarded as an independent entity separate from the real society. This independent space represents the Mongolian people's connection and interaction with nature, as well as their own imagination and creation of space. This space and time are intrinsic to the life, beliefs and culture of the Mongolian people, symbolising the collective wisdom and enduring spirit of the Mongolian people.

The individual is a being that exists in space and is simultaneously a constituent of that space. The human being's existence is contingent upon the act of thinking; thus, it can be argued that the essence of the human being is existence itself. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the human being to externalise this existence and to understand and interpret it. The human body and soul perceive space in two distinct ways: material and spiritual. The human body is a structure that exists in space and is simultaneously connected to it. From this perspective, the human body is neither an idea nor a thing; rather, it is a measure of the ideas and material things that surround it. The human body is, simultaneously, both a site of vision and a visible entity. As the body surveys its surroundings, it is also capable of observing itself, thereby discerning the duality inherent in its capacity to see (Ponty, 2007).

Consequently, the perception of people, which represents the primary mode of apprehending space and spatial existence, also encompasses the perception of the self in relation to objective phenomena. Of all the senses, vision is the primary mode of perception. Mongolian people live in and move through the natural environment, engaging with their surroundings through vision. This enables them to perceive phenomena that are not solely mental. The world as perceived by Mongolians encompasses not only the visual realm but also the mental domain. The space that the mind perceives is conceived as infinite, and this space is regarded as an enduring entity with the capacity for continuous existence and evolution. This concept is derived from the reverence and admiration that humans hold for the formidable capabilities of the natural world. In the vast grasslands, Mongolian people perceive the immense power and limitless energy of nature, which further stimulates their imagination and observation of space. The connection with space is made by the human mind and its intentions, reflecting the conscious viewpoint and self-knowledge ability of the human being.

The nomadic life of the Mongols has also given them a unique perception of space. They are well aware that the huge grassland, the mountains with lush vegetation, and the boundless sky are spaces that Mongolians can hardly conquer and dominate their own lives. But in the imagination of the mind, spiritual space is constructed that breaks through these limitations, transcends all things, and expands infinitely. In the Mongolian sacred songs and wine rituals, things seen in the natural space are imagined as having gods or becoming gods, and the mountains, rivers, and meadows in the lyrics are the space in which the Mongols live in their daily lives. For example, the wine offering is dedicated to Mangyu, the mother earth with rich plateau pastures, headed by Altai Mountains (Amurbatu, 1997):

A Wine Offering to Hang Ai Shan Manjiu  
A Wine Offering to Mount Harguna Manjiu  
A Wine Offering to Altai Mountain Manjiu



Figure 7. Obo at the site of the former capital of the Yuan Dynasty. Source: Self-photographed by the author's research in the pastoral area.

A drink offering of nine full glasses of wine to Dobb's Juice.

A Wine Offering to the Hinjulan Mountain Manju

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The conceptual space constructed by the Mongolian mind is characterised by a rich tapestry of "transcendence". In contrast to the constraints of the physical world, the spiritual realm allows Mongolians to traverse its vast expanse according to their own volition, attaining a sense of liberation in the mountains, rivers, sky, and universe. They are able to interact with celestial and terrestrial entities, fostering a unique form of communication. In this space, communication with deities and spirits is possible, as is interaction with the natural world, which exists beyond the boundaries of the physical universe and is not subject to the laws of the state in the real space. The philosophical outlook of the Mongolian people is reflected in this space, with a particular emphasis on the pursuit of freedom from the perspective of both existence and the sensory experience of life.

## 5. Conclusion

By integrating their corporeal movements with their spatial cognition, the Mongols have established themselves within the social milieu, thereby creating a distinctive spatial experience and sensibility. The traditional patterns of the Mongols depict the objects they saw during their migration. These patterns not only reproduce the objective things but also symbolise the visual impression with a sense of dynamics, thereby demonstrating the irreplaceable spatial nature of the Mongols. In their adaptation to the natural environment, the Mongols employed a strategy of wise use, dividing different areas through the construction of houses to facilitate social occupation. The Mongolian people's nomadic lifestyle exemplifies their affinity for and immersion in nature, which can be perceived as a poetic state of existence akin to "swimming." This kind of "tour" of the Mongols maintains an ecological balance with their cultural and ecological environment. This state of affairs also reminds us that the Mongolian perspective should not be closed, static, and non-historical, but rather an open, dynamic, and historically fluid form. In their social lives, Mongolians have established their own ethnic social relations and formed a distinctive living circle, which is closely connected to the spatial links between individuals across the entire ethnic group. The Mongolian people are in touch with the spirit of heaven and earth, and perceive the universe as a dynamic entity in which change and eternity are inextricably linked. The creation of diverse spatial forms, such as ovoos and the Naadam Assembly, exemplifies the Mongolian pursuit of an infinite poetic space. They transcend the limitations of time and space, transcending the boundaries of the physical self and engaging in a spiritual dialogue with the divine. In this realm, they seek to attain a state of freedom and beauty that transcends the constraints of this world.

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