

Exploring the Artistic Evolution and Cultural Expression of Modern Nomadic Transportation Tools

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Abstract: This article investigates the artistic and cultural significance of wooden carts within nomadic transportation. By examining both traditional and modern iterations of these carts, the study traces their design evolution in response to changing environmental, social, and technological factors. The wooden cart, as a key element in nomadic life, reflects not only the practical needs of nomadic peoples but also their cultural expressions and adaptations to diverse landscapes. This paper explores how these carts, as utilitarian objects, have carried rich cultural meanings across generations, becoming symbols of resilience, mobility, and resourcefulness. The study also looks at the broader context in which these carts were developed, analyzing how shifts in natural environments, societal structures, and technological advancements have influenced their design and use. Through an examination of their aesthetic features—such as form, structure, and ornamentation—the article reveals how wooden carts embody both utilitarian function and artistic expression. Additionally, the symbolic meanings attached to these carts, such as their connection to nomadic identity and community, are explored in relation to the ways nomads interact with and adapt to their surroundings. Ultimately, this paper aims to offer a deeper understanding of nomadic culture by focusing on the role of transportation tools like the wooden cart in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, while highlighting the ways in which these tools evolve over time to meet the needs of their users.

Keywords: Nomadic Peoples, Wooden Cart, Transportation Tools, Artistic Evolution, Cultural Expression, Environmental Influence, Symbolism, Identity.

1. The Origins, Types, and Classification of Traditional Nomadic Wooden Carts

1.1. Basis for the Classification of Wooden Cart Types and Terms

From ancient times to modern times, besides horses and camels, Wooden cart have become the main means of transportation for nomads.

The history of wooden carts in Asia dates back to around seven thousand years ago, when livestock farming and agriculture were just emerging and had not yet reached a developed stage.

At that time, people were primarily engaged in hunting and fishing, and had not yet become creative producers; they remained as direct consumers of ready-made natural resources. Over the course of time, from the seventh millennium onward, the agricultural practices were at this rudimentary level.

From the domestication of animals for farming, the creation of carts, sledges, and other types of vehicles developed as subsequent practical uses. As livestock farming, agriculture, and similar practices evolved, the attaching of plough and the use of oxen, horses, and camels to pull carts became directly linked to their development. It is believed that the domestication and training of wild animals began when people started hunting[1].

The terminology for the wooden cart, its design, usage, and structure, which have been passed down through history, have developed over many years of use, influenced more by long-standing traditions than by any specific ethnicity, tribe, or nationality. This development reflects a historical and cultural

legacy tied to nomadic traditions that have been studied for many years.

Professional woodworkers, craftsmen, and researchers, by consulting with experienced elders who have a deep knowledge of the wooden cart culture, have gathered primary materials on the structure and design of wooden carts for their research. Based on the relevant documents and materials, they have independently established their own general terminology for the wooden cart.

In this regard, in the book "*Bargha Nomad*" by the renowned researcher and scholar Chultem, from the Bargha region of Hulunbuir in Inner Mongolia, the wooden cart used by the Barghas is referred to as the "Bargha wooden cart." The book discusses how this term distinguishes and compares the cart in terms of its characteristics

Based on the long years of experience in the research and comparisons observed, it has been concluded that the distinctive features of the wooden cart, particularly in terms of its axle (main) and wheel hubs, have evolved significantly through traditional changes in design and usage. The research also highlights that while the shafts and beams of most wooden carts are generally similar, the wheels of different carts show considerable variation in their shapes and forms, as noted in the study.

The size and height of the wooden cart's wheels and hubs are a clear example of how the design has evolved based on practical needs and usage. Over the course of its historical use, some wooden carts have been found to have smaller and more compact wheels, which are attributed to the specific demands of the environment, such as local soil conditions and the nature of loading and unloading[2]. The research also reveals that the shape, size, materials, and structure of the wheels and hubs of wooden carts vary greatly, each having its own distinctive characteristics.

The main distinction between wooden carts is, first and foremost, their wheels. For example, the wooden cart from the Bargha region of Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, features tall wheels with a long axle, large hubs, and a design made entirely of solid wood without any metal fittings. The wheels, which are about 1.7 meters in height, are constructed from two sides of the wheel's rim. This unique design highlights the cart's characteristic features.

The larger the hub of the wooden cart, the more it is designed to fit at both ends of the axle, with a joint placed at each end to prevent wear, damage, and friction. This design directly relates to the use of two different materials with distinct surface characteristics[3]. One type of cart created and used by the nomadic Mongols is the Khazakh cart, which is constructed by connecting six short hubs, resulting in a wheel that is about one meter in height.

The wooden cart has been a key mode of transportation for nomads since ancient times, evolving alongside agricultural and livestock practices. The history of wooden carts in Asia dates back around 7,000 years, when people transitioned from hunting and fishing to farming and animal domestication. As these practices developed, carts, sledges, and other vehicles became essential, with the design and terminology of wooden carts shaped by long-standing traditions. The research on wooden carts, including their structure and cultural significance, has been informed by consultations with experienced elders and scholarly works that document their development across various nomadic groups.

1.2. Classification and Terminology of Wooden Carts

Wooden carts are classified based on three factors, including the region, ethnic group, traditional naming customs, usage, wheel shape and design or structural characteristics, the cart manufacturing terminology, country, and the intended purpose for use in traditional transport[4].

The terminology for wooden carts is derived from historical documents, writings by scholars about wooden carts, field research, and other sources. The classifications are based on the following features:

Region, Ethnicity, and Tradition:

1. Bargha Wooden Cart (goat Cart)
2. Khazakh Cart
3. Khalkh Cart (Ox Cart)
4. Buryat Cart

For Human Transport:

5. Palanquin Cart
6. 13th Century Princess's Palanquin Cart
7. Bogd Khan's Royal Cart
8. Bogd's Ceremonial Cart
9. Stall Cart (integrated Cart)
10. Booth/Cabin Cart
11. Khodog Cart
12. Ger Cart
13. Palace Cart
14. Coach Cart
15. Hashvaa sledge
16. Large Cart
17. Cage/Container Cart
18. Cart with a Lock (Rope, Erkhineg) Cart
19. Water Cart
20. Short Cart
21. Ambler Cart
22. Daacha Cart (Thick Cart)

23. Freight Wagon

By Country:

24. Russian Cart
25. Shansh Cart
26. Ganju Cart



Figure 1. Bargha cart. Uvurbulag soum, New Bargha East province, Hulunbuir city, Inner Mongolia. 2012



Figure 2. Khazakh cart. Ar Khorchin province, Inner Mongolia 2023

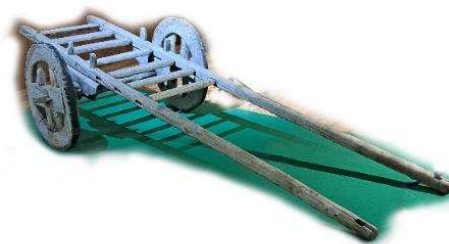


Figure 3. Khalkh cart. National museum 2024

2. Overview of the Artistic Evolution of Modern Nomadic Transportation Tools

Throughout history, nomadic peoples have maintained a close connection to their transportation tools, which are integral to their unique way of life. These tools have always been more than just means of moving goods—they are deeply intertwined with nomadic culture, art, and daily routines. From the ancient use of horses and camels to the development of the wooden cart, these transportation tools have undergone an evolution marked by both artistic and technological innovations. The wooden cart, in particular, stands as a symbol of this evolution, bridging the functional with the artistic. As nomadic peoples adapted to changing environments and expanded their territories, the wooden cart became not only a practical tool but also a canvas for cultural expression, reflecting the values, creativity, and adaptability of the nomadic way of life.

2.1. The Artistic Charm of Traditional Transportation Tools

Traditional nomadic transportation tools, such as horses, camels, and wooden carts, are not just functional vehicles but also hold significant artistic value. These tools, essential for

travel and trade across vast, often harsh landscapes, have been crafted with not only practicality in mind but also with a deep aesthetic sensibility[5]. Wooden carts, in particular, stand out as remarkable examples of this dual role. Carved with intricate patterns and adorned with bright colors and symbolic motifs, these carts serve as canvases that reflect the artistic expression of nomadic cultures. The decorations on these carts are not mere embellishments but carry profound meanings, often linked to the ethnic identity, regional influences, and spiritual beliefs of the nomads. These designs, created by skilled artisans within the community, incorporate elements drawn from nature, daily life, and religious practices, transforming a simple cart into a vibrant depiction of the nomads' worldview. The wooden cart, with its sturdy wheels and crafted framework, becomes a living work of art that tells stories of the landscape, the people, and their way of life. Its design, from the finely carved wooden spokes to the detailed painting of symbols, reflects the deep connection the nomads have with the environment, their understanding of life cycles, and their respect for the divine. The artistic charm of these carts, therefore, extends beyond their functional role—they embody the nomads' creativity, resourcefulness, and reverence for the world around them, turning transportation into a meaningful cultural expression.

2.2. The Rise of Modern Transportation Tools

As technology progressed and modernization took hold, traditional transportation tools, like the wooden cart, were no longer sufficient to meet the growing demands of mobility and transport for nomadic peoples. For centuries, the wooden cart had been the primary means of transporting goods and people across vast landscapes, but its limited capacity and reliance on animal power made it less effective in the face of modern needs. With the advent of cars, trucks, and tractors, nomads could now move more quickly, carry larger loads, and navigate harsher environments that the wooden cart could not handle[6].

While these modern vehicles greatly improved the quality of life for nomadic peoples, enhancing productivity and facilitating connections with other cultures, the legacy of the wooden cart remains significant. The introduction of automobiles, for instance, allowed for faster and more efficient transportation, transforming how nomads interacted with the world. Yet, despite the technological advancements, the values embodied by the wooden cart—such as adaptability, mobility, and resourcefulness—continue to resonate within nomadic cultures. Modern transportation tools, while vastly different in function, still reflect the same spirit of innovation and cultural identity that the wooden cart once symbolized.

2.3. The Combination of Art and Modern Transportation Tools

Although modern transportation tools far surpass traditional ones like the wooden cart in terms of functionality and efficiency, nomadic peoples have not abandoned their artistic heritage. The wooden cart, once adorned with intricate carvings, symbols, and vibrant colors, was a key form of artistic expression in nomadic culture. This tradition continues today, albeit in modern vehicles. While the decorations on contemporary vehicles may not be as elaborate as those on the wooden carts of the past, they still carry the cultural meanings and emotions of the nomadic peoples. The practice of integrating art with transportation, whether through painted ethnic patterns or colorful adornments,

reflects a deep connection to tradition, even as modern technology shapes their daily lives.

This fusion of traditional art with modern technology not only demonstrates the nomads' enduring love for art but also highlights their adaptability and acceptance of new ways of living. Just as the wooden cart once served both functional and symbolic roles, modern vehicles now carry forward this cultural tradition. Nomads may decorate their cars and trucks with patterns and symbols that reflect their heritage, infusing modern transportation tools with artistic flair. These decorations serve to beautify the vehicles and, more importantly, showcase the nomads' ongoing passion for art and their respect for the traditions that have defined their culture for generations.

3. Factors Influencing the Artistic Evolution and Cultural Expression of Nomadic Transportation Tools

The artistic evolution and cultural expression of nomadic transportation tools are complex and multifaceted phenomena, shaped by a range of factors including the natural environment, historical events, social development, and cultural exchanges. Among these tools, the wooden cart stands out as a prime example of how functional necessity and artistic expression can converge. Historically, the wooden cart has been integral to nomadic life, serving not only as a practical means of transportation but also as a canvas for cultural and artistic expression. Its design and decoration have evolved over time, reflecting the changing needs and influences of nomadic peoples. The materials used, such as wood, leather, and metal, were chosen for both their durability and their potential for artistic embellishment, allowing nomads to express their identity and relationship with the environment. As nomadic societies encountered new technologies and cultural influences through trade, war, and migration, the wooden cart adapted, incorporating new materials and design elements. This ongoing evolution illustrates the dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation, where the wooden cart serves as both a symbol of cultural heritage and a testament to the adaptability of nomadic peoples in a rapidly changing world.

3.1. Natural Environment

Nomadic peoples are closely tied to their natural environment, which plays a critical role in shaping the transportation tools they use. The vast grasslands, deserts, and mountainous regions they inhabit each present unique challenges, directly influencing the design and functionality of their tools. In grassland areas, the wooden cart becomes an essential means of transport, perfectly suited to the expansive and uneven terrain of the plains. Pulled by horses, these carts were built with a focus on mobility and endurance, enabling nomads to travel long distances with their goods and livestock[7]. The structure of the wooden cart was crafted to handle the rugged conditions of the grasslands, and its design evolved to ensure both practicality and durability in such a challenging environment. Whether for transporting people, goods, or supplies, the wooden cart was an indispensable part of daily nomadic life, facilitating survival and cultural exchange across vast spaces.

In addition to their practical functions, transportation tools like the wooden cart also carry the aesthetic values and cultural expressions of the nomadic peoples. Over time, the

natural environment influenced not only the form and construction of these tools but also their artistic decoration. In the grasslands, for example, the wooden cart was often adorned with intricate patterns and symbols, reflecting the nomads' reverence for nature and their relationship with the land[8]. The wheels of the cart might be embellished with painted motifs or carved designs that echoed the shapes of local flora and fauna. Similarly, the materials used in the cart's construction, such as wood and leather, were chosen for both their practicality and their ability to be decorated with artistic flourishes. The same artistic practices that adorned horse saddles and harnesses, with their beautiful horsehair, copper nails, and leather elements, were applied to the wooden carts, turning functional transportation tools into reflections of the nomads' cultural identity. These decorations were not merely ornamental; they represented a deep connection to the environment and a celebration of the resources that the natural world provided, blending form with function in a way that was uniquely nomadic.

3.2. Historical Changes and Social Development

Throughout history, nomadic peoples have undergone numerous migrations and conflicts, each event shaping their cultural traditions and lifestyle in profound ways. These social and historical shifts are clearly reflected in their transportation tools, which have adapted over time to meet changing needs and environments. In ancient times, the wooden cart, crafted from locally sourced wood and reinforced with leather, was a central part of nomadic life, providing the means to transport goods, livestock, and people across vast distances. The simple yet effective design of these carts mirrored the nomads' practical needs, with the materials chosen based on availability and durability. The wooden cart's structure, often pulled by horses or oxen, was tailored to the particular challenges of nomadic life, such as rough terrain and the need for portability during migrations.

As nomadic peoples encountered new regions, technologies, and materials through trade and conflict, their transportation tools began to evolve. The traditional wooden cart, while still retaining its basic form, began to incorporate newer materials such as metals, textiles, and advanced joinery techniques. These innovations enhanced the cart's strength, versatility, and aesthetic appeal. Metal reinforcements made the wheels sturdier, while textiles, often woven with intricate patterns, were used to line the carts or create coverings for protection against the elements. These changes in the design and decoration of wooden carts were a direct result of the nomads' ability to adapt to new technologies and their desire to maintain a connection to both their traditional craftsmanship and the evolving cultural influences around them. Thus, the evolution of the wooden cart not only reflects the practical needs of nomadic peoples but also the broader historical and social developments that have shaped their way of life.

3.3. Historical Events and Cultural Exchange

Historical events and cultural exchanges have played a crucial role in shaping the artistic evolution of nomadic transportation tools. One of the most significant cultural exchanges took place along the Silk Road, where nomadic peoples encountered goods, ideas, and artistic traditions from distant regions. The introduction of Chinese silk, porcelain, and other luxury items into nomadic territories not only

enriched the material lives of these peoples but also inspired changes in their craftsmanship and artistic expression. The influence of these foreign goods and aesthetics is evident in the design and decoration of their transportation tools, particularly the wooden cart. As nomads began to incorporate elements from the East, they adopted new decorative motifs, materials, and techniques that transformed the once utilitarian wooden cart into a vehicle of artistic and cultural fusion.

The blending of Eastern and local artistic traditions led to the emergence of unique and diverse styles in nomadic transportation tools. For example, the intricate patterns and vibrant colors that once adorned textiles and pottery found their way onto the wooden carts, with painted designs on the wheels or carvings along the cart's frame. The use of metals, such as bronze or silver, became more prominent in reinforcing these carts, borrowing from the craftsmanship seen in Chinese art and other cultures along the Silk Road. These cultural exchanges not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal of the wooden cart but also reflected the nomads' ability to adapt and incorporate external influences into their own traditions. The result was a distinct fusion of artistic styles that showcased the nomads' openness to innovation while still maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage.

3.4. The Introduction of Foreign Cultures and Technologies

With the acceleration of globalization, the introduction of foreign cultures and technologies has significantly impacted the traditional lifestyles and cultural practices of nomadic peoples. This influence is particularly evident in the evolution of transportation tools, where new design concepts, manufacturing techniques, and artistic decoration styles have emerged. For centuries, the wooden cart was the primary means of transporting goods and people across vast landscapes, shaped by the practical needs of nomadic life. However, the advent of modern vehicles, such as cars and motorcycles, has drastically altered the transportation dynamics for nomadic peoples, offering faster, more efficient ways to move goods and people across large distances. These new technologies have not only improved the functionality and scope of transport but have also introduced fresh artistic styles and design principles.

The influence of globalization on transportation tools is also reflected in the artistic evolution of these vehicles. While the wooden cart once embodied the local traditions and craftsmanship, modern vehicles now integrate global design aesthetics, blending the old with the new. For example, the decorations and ornamentation of traditional carts, often inspired by the surrounding natural environment, have evolved into more modern artistic expressions on cars and motorcycles. These new forms of transportation incorporate elements from various global cultures, as seen in the use of new materials, colors, and patterns. However, the spirit of artistic expression remains, as nomadic peoples continue to infuse their vehicles with cultural significance, reflecting both their adaptation to modern technologies and their desire to preserve traditional artistic practices.

4. Conclusion

Through the study of the artistic evolution and cultural expression of modern nomadic transportation tools, we have gained a deeper understanding of the rich history and cultural

fabric of nomadic peoples. These transportation tools, particularly the wooden cart, are more than mere functional objects; they are living representations of nomadic values, traditions, and artistry. As nomadic peoples adapted to changing environments and social transformations, their transportation tools evolved, reflecting their resilience and resourcefulness. The design of the wooden cart, with its intricate craftsmanship and artistic embellishments, highlights the wisdom and creativity of these cultures, which have thrived despite the challenges of migration and harsh landscapes.

In the face of globalization and modernization, nomadic peoples have demonstrated remarkable adaptability by embracing new technologies while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage. The wooden cart, once a staple of nomadic life, has evolved alongside the introduction of modern transportation tools such as cars and trucks. However, the core principles of artistic expression remain intact. Today, the fusion of traditional craftsmanship and modern design in nomadic vehicles not only makes them practical and efficient but also infuses them with cultural significance and identity. This synthesis of old and new illustrates the nomads' enduring commitment to preserving their artistic traditions while integrating the advantages of modern technology.

Ultimately, the study of nomadic transportation tools, from the wooden cart to contemporary vehicles, offers valuable insights into the ways in which cultures evolve and adapt. The spirit of innovation and integration that characterizes these tools provides inspiration for understanding the broader processes of cultural exchange and integration in today's globalized world. By exploring how nomadic peoples have managed to retain their cultural identity amidst rapid societal

changes, we are reminded of the power of art and tradition to survive and flourish, even in the face of modernity.

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