



## PREFACE OF THE DIRECTOR - GENERAL OF UNESCO

The preparation of the *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* undertaken by the International Scientific Committee began in 1980. This scholarly team, composed of 19 members until 1991 and just 16 members after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, comes from the region of Central Asia (as defined by UNESCO) and from other parts of the world. They are responsible for the preparation of this six-volume work, which covers the period from the dawn of civilization to the present day.

More than three hundred scholars, mostly from the Central Asian region, have contributed to this major work, which is now completed with the publication of the present volume. For each scholar who has invested his or her knowledge and expertise in this great undertaking, the work on this *History* has been a difficult task since Central Asia is a complex region, composed of a variety of cultural entities and influences that have undergone major changes over the centuries.

Today, in an era of rapid globalization, it is increasingly vital to find ways to respect the world's human values. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the General Conference at its thirty-first session is a major step towards finding avenues of dialogue between peoples living on our planet. We know that human beings forge their identity through the cultures which have enriched them. Their sense of worth and personal dignity very much lies in the recognition by the other of the special contribution that each and all – women and men, majorities and minorities – have made to weaving the rich tapestry of the world's civilization. Indeed, civilizations are fertile mixtures and all borrowed from one another well before the advent of our age of electronic communications.

The term 'civilization' must denote a universal, plural and non-hierarchical phenomenon, since every civilization has been enriched by contact and exchange with others. History is a shared experience.

The historical relationship existing between nomadic and sedentary peoples, living in quite different environments – steppes and oases – played a key part in shaping the cultural diversity of Central Asia and made an important contribution to its originality. To what extent and in what ways did the same influences affect different societies and fulfil different functions in extremely varied environments? In this work, we find numerous examples of diverse cultures living together, distinguishable but nevertheless sharing a common heritage.

Therefore, this work strongly attests that each and every culture has made its own distinct contribution to the common heritage of humankind, as recalled in the words of the great Iranian poet and philosopher Saadi Shirazi several hundred years ago: 'All human beings are like organs of a body; when one organ is afflicted with pain, others cannot rest in peace.' The *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* illustrates perfectly the wealth of diversity and the foundation it provides of a shared future. Today, we are faced with a new challenge: to make of that diversity an instrument for dialogue and mutual understanding.

**Koïchiro Matsuura**