

THE MONGOL EMPIRE IN THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

East-West Relations

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The Nomadic Society of the Mongols

The geographical position of Mongolia in the heartland of Central Asia was the main environmental factor that determined both the internal development and the external situation of the country. It was an essential factor that had much to do with the shaping of a unique nomadic civilization. On the other hand, the vast mountainous steppe zone of Mongolia is part and parcel of the two major regions of world civilization, i.e., Central Asia and the so-called Eurasian steppe belt stretching from the Danube and the Mediterranean up to the Great Wall of China. For centuries Mongolia had been at the crossroads of world communication. Two major roads, the “Great Silk Road,” and the Eurasian steppe corridor, the “Silk Road of the Steppes,” linked Mongolia with the centers of civilization in the East and the West.

Mongolia is regarded as a *locus classicus* of Central Asian nomadism, which, by the early thirteenth century, had reached the peak of its development, and produced an advanced socio-economic and political system in Mongolia.

Ghengis Khan and the Foundation of the Mongol State

It was historically important that the advent of Temüjin, Ghengis Khan, (1162- 1227)¹ coincided with the period in which Mongol society went through substantial change. The general situation of the country offered a good opportunity to those who aspired to power and glory in the steppe. It was Ghengis Khan who distinguished himself through his will-power and aptitudes, and made the best use of the situation that prevailed in Mongolia at that time.

It was in 1206, after having successfully waged several decisive battles against his most powerful rivals, that Ghengis Khan convened a Quraltai, the Council of Mongol nobility, at the head of the Onon River. At this Quraltai he was finally granted the status of ruler of all the Mongols, with the rank of Khan and the title of Ghengis.² The event meant, in fact, the birth of a new state—a unified Mongolia that stretched a thousand miles from east to west, all the way from the Khingan Mountains to the Altai Range, and more than six hundred miles from north to south, from Lake Baikal to the southern range of the Gobi along the Great Wall.

In 1206-1211, Ghengis Khan was engaged in the establishment and reorganization of a civil and military administration in the country. According to a Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1346, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Ghengis Khan, i.e., 1220, the capital city of Qaraqorum had been founded in the valley of the Orthon River.³ Thus Ghengis wished to rule his empire from Mongolia.

Shortly after the creation of a strong political and military machine in his own country, Ghengis Khan embarked on the path of expanding his power. However, it is difficult to say whether, from the outset, he had any serious intention of conquering the settled civilizations that surrounded Mongolia. His priority of subjugating other countries shows that having settled his internal affairs, he began, firstly, to incorporate all other nomadic peoples living outside Mongolia in his state. It is true that on two occasions Ghengis Khan had campaigns organized against the Chin empire of China (in 1210 and 1214-1215). By doing so he wished to demonstrate his might and fame rather than to subjugate China. He soon put an end to the war against China and continued bringing the nomadic tribes, wherever they could be found, under his control, throughout the Eurasian steppe areas. He conquered practically all the nomadic peoples of Turkic origin up to the north-eastern edge of Persia.

In 1219-1224, Ghengis Khan successfully carried out his campaigns against the empire of Kharism-Shah 'Ala'al-Din Muhammad, which at that time was on the decline due to internal discord and feuds. As a

result, all the lands of the empire with their ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench, Utrar (Otrar), Nishapur, and Merv, among others, were brought under the rule of the Mongol Khan. But soon the Mongol cavalymen, headed by Ghengis Khan's generals who had pursued the defeated Kharism-Shah, returned home the long way to Mongolia via the Caucasus, following a route north of the Caspian Sea.

It is unlikely that Ghengis Khan had devised a clearly formulated war strategy, it is more probable that he just preferred to carry out his intentions immediately. If his wide-ranging conquests are judged by their real outcome, it becomes clear that he did not really intend to build a world empire in the true sense of the word. His main aim was to subdue all his rivals so that all the nomadic peoples existing throughout Central Asia became his subjects. The most suitable pasture lands which were occupied by the nomadic peoples were in the east-west directions from Mongolia, but not from north to south.

The campaigns Ghengis Khan launched against the countries of Central and Western Asia were not followed by regular land-occupation by the Mongols, and when Ghengis Khan returned home, he took his army with him, leaving behind only a few military governors as representatives of his power and his tax collectors. Mongol authority was, therefore, not felt so strongly in the countries of Central and Western Asia during the reigns of Ghengis and his immediate successors. It was exerted more in the form of sporadic raids to collect tributes and to punish those who showed disobedience. This situation continued practically until the reign of Möngke Khan, who finally created an effective administrative system for ruling the domains in Central Asia.

It should be noted that the traditional form of submission typical of all steppe empires must have corresponded to Ghengis Khan's general conception. According to this, it was more important to master the peoples as appanage (*ulus*) rather than to govern the territories of the conquered countries. With regard to sedentary societies, Ghengis preferred to ensure the economic exploitation of those countries by establishing a system of tax collection and of receiving tributes. Keeping this in mind, he distributed the conquered peoples among his four sons. The empire of Ghengis Khan was more a nomadic confederation than a world empire which ruled, in the real sense, the countries of sedentary civilizations.

The World Empire of Ghengis Khan's Successors

Contrary to Alexander the Great whose Graeco-Asian Empire did not even survive his death, Ghengis Khan left a great empire capable of functioning both in time and space. Many of his successors were from his

own family and continued his imperial policies. During their reigns the Mongol nomadic empire became the largest empire that has ever existed in world history, stretching from the Far East to Eastern Europe, and including most of Asia, as well as a good deal of Europe.

Ghengis Khan's successors, although declaring their adherence to the commandments of their great predecessor, had in fact departed from his fundamental principle of staying outside "civilization" and not sacrificing the ideals of the nomads for the sake of others. Ögedei (1229-1241), Güyük (1246-1248), and Möngke (1251-1259) went on expanding their empire by way of conquering great sedentary societies.

There is no doubt that this unprecedented territorial expansionism by the Mongol nomads caused much misfortune and distress to humanity. However, the bloodshed and destruction of settled civilizations must not have been as terrible and unimaginable as some terrified and horrified contemporaries naturally tried to depict in their descriptions of the invasions of unknown peoples.

The world empire of the Mongols can be divided into five major parts, mainly based on the following geographical division: Mongolia itself as the center of the empire, beginning with the rise of Ghengis Khan and ending with the death of Möngke Khan in 1259; the Yuan Dynasty in China, beginning with the enthronement of Khubilai; the Il-Khans in Persia; the Golden Horde in Russia; and the Chagadai Khanate in Middle Asia. Despite the fact that the Mongol Empire represented a conglomeration of extremely varied peoples and countries and socio-economic structures, it had many common features and important similarities that made it a coherent entity almost for the whole period of its existence. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there were specific differences and incompatibilities between the sub-divisions of the Empire that were, in the end, the cause of its disintegration.

Having conquered a world empire, the Mongols were confronted with the most difficult task—a task which had never been attempted before by any society, nomadic or sedentary. The complexity of the problem was due, not so much to the immense size of the territory involved, as to the fact that it was difficult to reconcile, within the framework of one empire, two worlds so entirely different one from the other (the nomadic and the sedentary).

Nevertheless, Ghengis Khan and his successors managed to set up the organization of a world empire that was capable of maintaining its unity for dozens of years after its foundation. They ensured the supremacy of the members of Ghengis Khan's clan for several generations in the Khanates, which had eventually become independent but still remained allied to the central part of the empire. What had been done in this respect? Yeh-lü Chu-tsai, a noted Khitan adviser to Mongol Khans, is said

to have repeated the old Chinese proverb to Ögedei: “Although the Empire can be conquered on horseback, it cannot be ruled from a horse.”⁴

There is no doubt that the Mongol Khans realized this fact when they were faced with the problem of governing their world empire. The problem as to whether or not the Mongols should part with their nomadic way of life was really a vital issue for them. Anyhow, it should be said that the first successors of Ghengis Khan had decided to make a historical attempt to govern the great empire by means of creating an administrative system that combined the traditional nomadic, political, and military institutions with the centralized, bureaucratic administrative structure of the Chinese and Persian-Central Asian models. It seems to mean that the Mongols resolved, anyhow, not to dismount from their horses, but to combine, in their own way, the two types of civilization—the nomadic and the sedentary. Let us consider what they could do in this respect and what was the final result of their historical experiment.

With the conquest of many countries and direct contact with the great sedentary civilizations, the Mongols had not only to revise the nomads’ age-old feelings of primordial antipathy and estrangement towards their counterparts—cultivators or settled peoples—but also to come seriously to terms with the significance of the advantages of the sedentary civilizations, useful for their empire-building efforts. First of all, the Mongols had borrowed and adapted cultural gains, including the art of writing and literature. In their attempts to substantiate ideologically their political supremacy, they resorted not only to their own Shamanistic belief, but also to different religious and political concepts and postulates from other countries. To give but one illustration, *The Secret History of the Mongols* propagated a concept of the heavenly origin of the “Golden Clan” of Ghengis Khan. It is said in the book by the words of Alan-goa herself, the legendary foremother of the Golden Clan, concerning the story of the birth of Bodoncrar, who was believed to be the genuine ancestor of Ghengisids, as follows:

Every night, a bright yellow man entered by the light of the hole at the top or [by that] of the door top of the tent and rubbed my belly. His light was wont to sink into my belly. When he went out, like a yellow dog he was wont to crawl out by the beams of the sun or moon ... If one understands by that, it is evident [that] its sign is [that] “They are sons of Heaven ...”⁵

This quotation reveals the basic concepts, regarding the origin of Ghengisids, which was a final result of the lengthy process of cross-meeting and fertilization of indigenous and alien religious and political views on the genesis of khanship against the background of the nomadic civilization in Mongolia. These concepts are those of Heaven and of Light.

Here lies a unique example of how a great syncretic idea came into being as an outcome of meeting different traditions and cultures. It is true that the worship of Heaven was initially characteristic of Shamanism, and it must be regarded as an indigenous belief of nomadic peoples. It was this worship that was the bedrock of the old Mongolian political conception of Khanship; but it does not exclude that the Heaven-sanctioned Khanship conception of the Mongols might, in the final phase of its evolution, have been inspired by the highly developed political doctrine of the Chinese, the doctrine of the mandate of heaven (*t'ien-ming*).⁶ As the above quotation shows, Ghengis Khan could be considered to have descended from “the son of Heaven.” Moreover, we can go still further in order to discover another stratum of influence, this time, the influence of a more distant civilization, namely the Iranian, or to be more exact, the Zoroastrian-Manichaen concept of Light which might have inspired the Mongols to elaborate their own version of an immaculate conception of Alan-goat by means of Light.⁷

The sources witness that Ghengis Khan and his successors widely propagated the idea of their celestial mandate and their extraordinary origin, and referred, on every occasion, to the might of Everlasting Heaven.

Despite the cruelty that accompanied the conquests, religious fanaticism was, however, alien to the Mongols. They pursued a policy of religious tolerance in their multinational empire. And it is difficult to think that this policy was determined simply by the indifference or ignorance of the Mongols, as some scholars suppose. Rather, it was a premeditated policy necessitated by “holding the soul” of their subjugated peoples belonging to different ethnic groups and beliefs.

Coming to the political structure of the Mongol Empire, reference has to be made to some traditional institutions of nomadic society which acquired special significance, having been, in many instances, modified in conformity with new requirements. By this period the Quraltai, the oldest form of political institution of the nomads, assumed much more importance than had ever been the case before. It had become a real assembly of élite Mongol leaders—princes and nobles—acting on the basis of old traditions and customs, to handle most important matters of state, like the acclamation of a Khan, questions of war, and establishment of law and policy.

The Mongol Empire was created through military conquest, and the Mongol Khans regarded the army as the most basic amongst all the imperial institutions. It was military supremacy that provided the political domination of the Mongol Khans. The military organization, based on a decimal system, had not only been sustained for generations of Khans, but had served as the model of the army constructed by later followers and pretenders to the right of the members of Ghengis Khan's

family throughout Central Asia. A new important element of the Mongol army structure during the post-Ghengis Khan period was the institutions of Tamma. Tamma forces were originally established by order of the central imperial government for the purpose of maintaining conquered territories. Some Tamma armies ultimately became the nuclei of the permanent military forces of the empire's subsidiary Khanates, such as Hülegüs's IL-Khanate in Persia.⁸

The Mongols were the first to innovate a worldwide network of communications that in fact linked East and West, thus facilitating the movement of peoples and ideas. A horse relay postal system was introduced by Ögedei in 1234.⁹ He began by setting up post stations (*jam*) in his own domain. This was further extended by his brothers, Chagadai and Tului and his nephew Batu, to include the lands under their direct rule; it was a very important mechanism which made it possible to link the empire's center in Mongolia with its other parts. The structure of the system was based on the building of a post station at stages equivalent to a day's journey; that is about 25-30 miles. The stations held stocks of horses and fodder for those who traveled. Normally, messenger traffic was about 25 miles a day, but express messengers could go much faster, 200-300 miles per day.¹⁰

Based on the travel accounts of contemporary travelers, like the famous friars John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, we can reconstruct the route along which the horse relay post stations had functioned. The two missions followed more or less the same route. They passed through Eastern Europe, proceeded by way of Kiev into Mongol-ruled territories in Russia, in which Sarai on the Volga, the Ordu of Batu, was an important passing point. Further on, the travelers crossed the country of the Kanli Turks north of the Aral Sea and, following the Syr Darya, passed through the towns of Yanikant (near modern Kazalinsk in Kazakhstan), Barchin (near Kizil Orda), and Otrar. From northern Khwarism they moved into the old Kara-Khitai territory south of the Balkash, crossed the Chu, Ili, and Emil rivers, then through Omyl (now Tacheng in Sinkiang), and by way of Lake Ulyungur and the river Urungu. They passed the Altai mountains and entered into western Mongolia, the region between Kobdo and Uliastai. From there they proceeded due east, crossed the Khangai range and reached Qaraqorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire.¹¹ In this way John of Plano Carpini's mission covered a distance of almost three thousand miles, in three-and-a-half months. All across Central Asia and Mongolia they rode Central Asian or Mongol horses, suitable for lengthy travel in the steppe-mountainous regions, coping with a severe climate and changing their mounts regularly at the post-stations set up all along the route. Thus, with the creation of the Mongol Empire a

new great Eurasian road was opened linking Mongolia with Europe. This road could be called a Mongol Öртеge Road or a Mongol horse relay post station road that ran in its Central Asian part parallel to the famous Silk Road which led from the western point of Gansu towards Lob Nor and then along the foot of the Kunlun all the way to Khotan, Yarkand, Kashgar, and up to the Near East. Although one cannot assert as categorically as did Henry Howorth, when he wrote that the Mongols, for a while, made the desert as safe as the Queen's Highway, it is true they maintained and protected communications between East and West effectively and by so doing greatly contributed to history and obtained closer contact between peoples and cultures. No doubt that the Mongols, having monopolized East-West relations, not only gave a new lease of life to the traditional Silk Road, but also played a key role in the way it functioned.

As regards the practice of ruling great sedentary societies like Persia and China, the Mongols invented some original institutions and offices which not only functioned efficiently in various parts of the empire, but left a noticeable mark on the civil administration and government of conquered countries. One of the key institutions in the Mongol's administration of the empire on the local level was the office of the "*daruqaci*." The institutional system of "*daruqaci*" had been set up in all the Mongolia-ruled regions of Eurasia-Persia, China, and Russia.

The Mongol Khans had also introduced various forms of taxation in the regions of their empire. They had to procure the best way of economic exploitation of the conquered peoples all over the empire. To take the original Mongolian taxation, for example, it could be divided into tribute (*alba*) and levy (*qubciur*). Both *alba* and *qubciur* were paid in kind. With the conquest of the sedentary population of Persia and Central Asia, *qubciur* acquired a rather different context, and it became the term used for a poll tax, either flat rate or graduated, imposed on the conquered sedentary peoples.

The first three successors of Ghengis were staunchly in favor of maintaining Mongolia as the center of their empire. In this respect the reign of Möngke was the most important period in the history of the empire. It was during his reign that the Mongol Empire not only expanded greatly, but eventually acquired a clear organizational form. Möngke Khan managed to create an efficient administrative system for ruling the empire from the center in Mongolia. He established the supremacy of the Great Khan in Qaraqorum over any prince, regardless of his lineage, and over any clan or family alliance. The Great Khan had to preside over a strong bureaucratic structure staffed by supranational personnel which included, besides the Mongol themselves, Uighurs, Khitans, Chinese, Central Asians, and Persians. Möngke Khan intro-

duced an institution of viceroys for governing the conquered territories; Mongol princes, instead of being granted people as their appanage, were assigned to specific territorial domains. Möngke Khan appointed five viceroys who were responsible for the administration of their domains and personally accountable for that administration to the Great Khan. Henceforth, the Great Khan acted as the supreme overlord. Of the five appointees, three were Möngke's brothers.

By the time of the reign of Möngke, the Mongols, who had been a small, imperceptible nomadic people, had become, for all practical purposes, the rulers of the then-known world. Mongolia had become the vortex of great events and innovations. Embassies from all over the world, including the European kingdoms and the Vatican, undertook the long voyage to the Mongol court. It was characteristic of Möngke Khan, just as his predecessors, that he was tolerant enough to let activists of different religions attend his court, proposing their services, and he was ready to accept advice and help from experts.

It was thanks to experts and defectors from civilized countries that the Mongol Khans could set up an efficient administrative system created in order to rule their world empire.

Almost all the great world religions had become well known to the Mongols during that period. Under Möngke the Nestorians held a privileged position. As witnessed by William of Rubruck, the Franciscan friar who met Möngke Khan, the Mongol Khan's official attitude towards different religions was as follows: "We Mongols believe that there is but one God, by Whom we live and by Whom we die, and towards Him we have an upright heart ... But just as God gave different fingers to the hand, so has He given different ways to men."¹² That was a truly pluralistic policy as regards religions and ideas.

Mongolia had for a while become a meeting place of different peoples, cultures, and religions. During the reign of Möngke Khan, the city of Qaraqorum became the true center of the world empire. It was a cosmopolitan city, where one could meet Armenians, Buddhists, Chinese, Christians, Europeans, Hungarians, Muslims, Russians, and others. The city was linked to all parts of the empire by the wide network of roads connecting the horse relay post stations.

Contemporary travel accounts give lively descriptions of the artistic activities within Qaraqorum and the open display of works of art. Friar William of Rubruck was greatly impressed by the Khan's palace and a large tree at its entrance made of silver by Master William of Paris. He writes that the Khan's palace resembled a church, with a middle nave and two sides beyond two rows of pillars and three doors on the south side. There were two quarters in the city: one for the Saracens (Persians), where there were bazaars and where many traders gathered, the other

being the quarter of the Catalans, Chinese who were all craftsmen. There were also large palaces belonging to the court secretaries and twelve Buddhist temples, two mosques, and one Christian church.¹³ According to another source, under the reign of Ögedei, foundations to a Buddhist edifice were laid, which was completed by Möngke. A great stupa covered with a tall pavilion constituted rooms around which the statues of various Buddhas were arranged, completely in accordance with the indication of the sutras.¹⁴

The city was enclosed by a mud wall and had four gates. At the east gate, millet and other kinds of grain were sold; at the west gate, sheep and goats; at the south gate, cattle and wagons; and at the north gate, horses.¹⁵

The Mongol Empire and East-West Relations

With the creation of the Yuan Empire in China, the center of gravity of the Mongol Empire had shifted to foreign countries, mostly to China and Persia.

It is characteristic that during the reign of the Yuan emperors, East-West relations had attained the highest degree of development. Scholars may argue whether there was a *Pax Mongolica* or not. Whatever the political and military consequences of conquests may have been, the fact is that the period of the Mongol Empire had, in one way or another, facilitated a wide-scale exchange of material and cultural wealth between peoples and countries. Complicated processes of blending, merging, and mutual influence of all kinds of social, political, and cultural traditions and values took place within the Empire's boundaries.

During the Mongol Empire, thanks to the safety of the trade routes and the generosity of traders, intercontinental and international trade increased as never before.¹⁶ By the end of the thirteenth century, fabrics were even being imported from Egypt, and through Venetian traders, from Europe.¹⁷ Persian, Sogdian, and Central Asian merchants were most active in developing trade throughout the Empire. The Mongol and Turkic nomads served mostly as caravan drivers and guides, and supplied the merchants with means of conveyance—camels, horses, food, and accommodation all along the route. Different kinds of fabrics, including cotton, silk, and brocade, were imported into Mongolia from China.

Merchants prospered, particularly during Khubilai's reign. They imported camels, horses, carpets, medicines, and spices and exported Chinese textiles, ceramics, lacquer ware, ginger, and cassia.¹⁸ Overseas trade between China and India, Southeast Asia, and Persia had been developing.

One has to underline the significance of the exchange of intellectual innovations between East and West. In 1267 Khubilai invited the Per-

sian astronomer, Jamal al-Din, to China to make known his discoveries. He brought along diagrams of an armillary sphere, sundials and astrolabe, a terrestrial globe, and a celestial globe, as gifts for the court. He also presented a new, more accurate calendar, known in Chinese as the Wan-Nien Li (calendar for Ten Thousand Years), as a gift to Khubilai.¹⁹

Four years later, in 1271, Khubilai finally established an Institute of Muslim Astronomy. There, the Chinese astronomer, Kuo Shou-ching (1231-1316) used the Persian diagrams and calculations to build his own instruments and to devise his own calendar, the Shou Shih Li (Calendar Delivering the Season), which with minor revisions was employed throughout the Ming Dynasty.²⁰

Muslim medicine also enjoyed great popularity in China under Mongol rule. Khubilai, himself afflicted with gout and other ailments, was particularly hospitable to physicians. In 1285, 1288, and 1290, he dispatched envoys to South India to seek not only precious goods but also skilled craftsmen and doctors. Two branches of the Kuan-hui ssu (Imperial hospitals), composed primarily of Muslim doctors, were established in K'ai-P'ing and in North China to treat the Emperor and the court. Khubilai also sought to obtain medicines from Korea. Thirty-six volumes of Muslim medicinal remedies were placed in the court library. Khubilai established an Imperial Academy of Medicine (Ch. *T'ai-i-yuan*) which laid down the criteria for the selection of instructors of medicine and supervised the training of physicians and drafting of medical texts.²¹ Western Asian surgery greatly impressed the Chinese, because physicians from the Near East who performed all sorts of difficult operations are frequently mentioned. Some of them were not Muslim but Nestorian Christians, like Ai-hsieh (1227-1308) whose Chinese name is a rendering of Syriac Isa, Yehoshua, or Jesus.²² He was not only a famous physician but also served for some time as a Court astronomer under Khubilai Khan, prior to the arrival of Jamal al-Din. He reached high offices at Khubilai's court and was honored posthumously by having his biography included in the Yuan Dynasty history.²³

The Mongols are known to have used Chinese and Central Asian experts in the field of engineering and technology from the beginning of their conquest. Some Muslim experts were involved also in hydraulic engineering works in China. Sayyid Ajall Shams-al-Din, the Muslim engineer who was the Governor of Yuunan, did much for the irrigation of the K'un-ming Basin.²⁴ There was another great Arab engineer called Shams (1278-1351). He was the author of a treatise on river conservation, the *Ho-fang t'ung-i* (Comprehensive Explanation of River Conservation), published in 1231. Shams's grandfather had come to China in the wake of the Mongol conquest of Arabia and settled in China. Apart from hydraulic engineering, Shams is described in his biography as hav-

ing been an expert in astronomy, geography, mathematics, and musical or rather acoustic theory.²⁵

The creation of the world empire had greatly broadened the geographical outlook of the populations. Travelers and merchants were the main disseminators of first-hand information about diverse countries and peoples. The Mongols and their Empire had not only become the focus of world interest, but they themselves had accumulated extensive knowledge of the countries and peoples they had incorporated in their empire. *The Secret History of the Mongols* displays not only a remarkably accurate knowledge of the geography of Mongolia itself, but also contains fairly accurate information on foreign countries, their towns, and peoples.

The Europeans who visited Mongolia and China, like John of Plano Carpini, Friar William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, and others, had transmitted a wealth of information on Mongolia and other Asian countries to their countrymen; while the Arab and Persian travelers had introduced the countries of Central Asia and the Middle East to the Mongols and the Chinese. A world map drawn during the Mongol rule in China, probably based on the information derived from Muslim sources, gives a fairly accurate rendering of Asia and Europe.²⁶

It should be noted that East-West relations during the period of the Mongol Empire were not at all a one-way movement. With the foundation of the IL-Khanate by Hulegu (1256-1265), Persia and Iraq, together with much of Anatolia, had been finally brought under Mongol control. Hulegu, as did his brother Khubilai, decided to settle in the center of the sedentary society, Persia. He set up his capital at Maragheh in Azerbaijan. The IL-Khanate existed for seventy years. The position of IL-Khans was that of a subject realm to the Great Khanate. The prestige of the Great Khans, particularly that of Khubilai, was immense, and the connection between China and Persia remained strong and friendly under Mongol rule. This factor greatly favored the development of the relations between the two great centers of civilization.

Under Mongol rule, the East Asian or, to be more exact, the Mongol-Chinese impact on Persia and the Middle East became stronger than ever before. In Persia, as in China, the Mongols were confronted with a flourishing culture. The Mongol conquest, particularly in its initial stage, had caused great damage to this culture, simply because a great number of intellectuals and artisans were annihilated or forcefully deported to Mongolia and China. As a nomadic people, the Mongols could not offer anything culturally superior in exchange for what they had destroyed. However, what could be regarded as a positive point in favor of the Mongols was the fact that they played an active intermediary role in introducing some East Asian elements into Persian culture and religion. To take the case of religion, the single homogeneous Islam

had undergone drastic changes; prior to the Mongols, of the two Islamic sects, the Sunni and the Shiah, the former dominated in Persia. Under the Mongols the Shiite sect took the upper hand and Persia became a Shiite state. Moreover, the policy of religious tolerance pursued by the Mongols directly resulted in the revival of non-Islamic traditions in Persia. The persistent Mongol attempt in Persia to establish a political alliance with the Christian West against the Mamelukes led to increased sympathy towards Christians. On the other hand, the Christian powers, the popes in particular, never ceased to hope that the Mongols would become converted to Christianity. There were good reasons for this as Nestorian Christians were known to be influential in the IL-Khanate. Some of them served the IL-Khan's Court as Mongol ambassadors to the countries of Europe. For instance, Rabban Sauma and Mark—the two Uighur Nestorian Christians whom Khubilai Khan first sent to Jerusalem as his envoys for the purpose of collecting information about the country, but under the pretext of making a pilgrimage to sacred places—were granted the Golden Gerege (Emperor's Credentials). When they arrived at the IL-Khanate, they were received with great honor as personal ambassadors of the great Khan.

In the 1280s, Rabban Sauma was sent by Arghun as his envoy to Europe, where he visited Constantinople, Rome, Paris, and London; he had an audience with the kings of those countries and handed them letters and gifts from the IL-Khan. Subsequently under the name of Yabalaha III, Mark became *Catolicos*—supreme head—of all the Nestorian churches of Asia, his seat being within IL-Khanid territory.

The most intriguing aspect of religious life under the IL-Khans was the fact that Buddhism, which was quite a new and alien faith for the bulk of the population, enjoyed a brief period of official favor. That was a distant reflection of the general religious policy of the Mongol Empire. Hulegu, who had close contact with his brother Khubilai, displayed sympathy towards Buddhism; his successors, especially in the reign of Arghun, tolerated Buddhism more and more. The preferred form of that faith, as in Yuan China, was a variety of the Lamaistic Buddhism of Tibet. Thus some kind of Tibetan religious and cultural influence had reached Persia through the Mongols. Nevertheless, material evidence of Mongol-Tibetan Buddhism in Persia is very scant, for Buddhist monuments were destroyed or converted for Islamic use after the conversion of the Mongol rulers to Islam. Only a few Buddhist ruins subsist near Maragheh.

Perceptible East Asian or Mongol Buddhist and Chinese influence is visible in some examples of Persian painting of the Mongol and post-Mongol periods, as in the case of a pair of miniatures in Miscellany Collection H. 2152 of the Topkapi Library, made for the Timurid prince Baysungur and mainly composed during the IL-Khanid and Timurid

period. The two miniatures were classified by those who had collected works of various origins in Miscellany albums as the “work of masters of Hitay,”²⁷ namely Mongolia and China.

It was under the impact of Buddhist art in the reign of the IL-Khans that figurative painting, previously neglected in Islamic painting, was first introduced into Islamic countries, particularly Persia. The characteristics of the “school of Hitay” aroused the admiration of Muslim artists. The Muslims found occasion to become acquainted with this school in the Mongol period, when Buddhist princes invited *baksi* (Buddhist masters) to build temples in Samarkand, Khurasan, and Azerbaijan. In general, it must be said that the Persian miniature was quite a new form of painting that emerged during the period of Mongol rule.

The IL-Khans are known to have patronized and promoted sciences, particularly astronomy. The famous philosopher and astronomer, Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274), was one of Hulegu’s advisers. Under their guidance, large observatories were built, some of which are still extant. The most famous observatory was in Maragheh which in addition to the studies conducted there, show that astronomy was far more advanced in Persia than in Europe.

Historiography enjoyed no less attention and patronage on the side of the IL-Khans who were naturally interested in immortalizing their “great deeds” and those of their predecessors. For that purpose, they mobilized the connoisseurs of old times and historians of different nations, and made available their archives and official chronicles for those who wrote history. Under these circumstances, historiography in Persia reached its apogee, and historians took advantage, more than anyone else, of acquainting themselves with other cultures and peoples. This is illustrated by two famous works of the period of the Mongol Empire, namely, *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gusha* (The History of the World Conqueror) by the Ata Malik Juvaini (1226-1283) and *Jami-altawarikh* (The Compendium of Histories) by Rashid al-Din (1247-1318). Both authors held high political positions in the IL-Khanate and witnessed or took part in many important events in their day. Juvaini began working on his book during his residence in Qaraqorum in 1252-1253 at the suggestion of his “faithful friends and pure-hearted brothers”²⁸ from the court of Möngke Khan. He must have completed his work shortly after 1260 and it was to be the first history of the non-Islamic world that appeared in Persian historiography. He wrote of the Mongols on the basis of their oral and written sources which he probably collected during his stay in Qaraqorum. He was one of the great Islamic apologists of the universal policy of the Mongol Khans.

Rashid al-Din wrote his book in 1300-1311 by order of the IL-Khans-Ghazan and Öljeitu. His *Compendium of Histories* was the world’s

first real universal history. Rashid al-Din had a unique opportunity of obtaining the assistance of scholars from different nations resident at the IL-Khan court. The history of India was written with the help of the Kashmiri hermit, Kamalashri, and the history of China with the assistance of two learned Chinese, on the basis of a book compiled by three Buddhist priests.²⁹ It is not known what Europeans supplied Rashid al-Din with material for the history of the Franks, but there is no doubt that he used European sources.

Pride of place was given in the book to the history of the Mongols, based almost exclusively on native sources. The author could avail himself of the assistance and favor of influential Mongols, such as Pulad-chinksank, the representative of the Great Khan at the IL-Khanate courts, and Ghazan Khan himself whose knowledge of history was surpassed by that of Pulad alone.

We have every reason to think that all those details included in his book must have been retold or especially prepared for him by his Mongol colleagues from such Mongol sources as the famous *Altan debter* (Golden Book), which was always preserved at the treasury of the Khan in the hands of the oldest emirs.³⁰ Some scholars assume that the first draft of *Jami-altawarikh* was not originally written in Persian, and goes back to a Mongolian version, most probably compiled by Pulad-chinksank and other Mongol genealogists.³¹

One cannot underestimate the role played by Pulad-chinksank in composing the *Jami-altawarikh*. He was a great Mongolian historian who might in turn have collaborated with other Mongolian and East Turkish connoisseurs of history. He held the high rank of chancellor at the court of Khubilai Khan and was sent to the IL-Khanate as the Great Khan's envoy and was appointed emir and commander-in-chief of the army in Iran and Turan. He died in 1312 or 1313.

Thus, as W. Barthold noted, Rashid al-Din's work took the form of a vast historical encyclopedia, such as no other people, either in Asia or Europe, possessed in the Middle Ages. The very possibility of the creation of such a work with the assistance of learned men of all nations shows what might have been the results, under more favorable circumstances, of the Mongol invasion, which had connected the most distant civilized peoples with one another.³²

No matter how great the contact and mutual influence of peoples and cultures might have been during the period of the world empire of the Mongols, they could not actually change the nature of great civilizations, either in Yuan China or in IL-Khanid Persia. Moreover, the highly developed civilizations in conquered countries went on developing, having successfully overcome all obstacles and damage. The nomadic conquerors who had settled in conquered countries were assimilated

everywhere in varying degrees by existing local civilizations. In the IL-Khanate, unlike in Yuan China, the Mongols had adopted the main local religion of Islam. This factor removed the most conspicuous point of difference between the heathen conquerors and their subjects and did much to foster the assimilation of the Mongols into the Muslim population. The fate of the Mongols in Persia and Middle Asian countries turned out quite differently in contrast to those in Yuan China. They were not driven out of those countries, but they could not return to their homeland and so remained there forever, having been assimilated with the local populations, especially with the Muslim Turks to whom they were close both ethnically and linguistically.

Although the Mongol conquest was mainly military and political rather than cultural or religious, in contrast to Roman, Buddhist, or Islamic conquests, worldwide Mongol expansionism had much more far-reaching consequences in many spheres of the lives of various peoples than expected.

The Mongols of those days had not played an exclusively negative role in history—as empire-builders they greatly encouraged and facilitated the meeting and intermingling of peoples and cultures on a worldwide scale. It seems to me that the great historical experience—both negative and positive—that humanity had accumulated at that time should receive serious consideration henceforth, all the more so in that it could be useful for the development of mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples and countries in our time.

Notes

1. The date of birth of Genghis Khan is not quite certain. See P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1959), pp. 281-8; O. Lattimore, "Genghis Khan and the Mongol Conquests," *Scientific American*, vol. 209, no. 2 (1963).
2. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, translated and edited by F.W. Cleaves (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), vol. 1, p. 141, para. 202. See *The History of the MPR* (Ulan Bator, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 170-91.
3. F.W. Cleaves, "The Sino-Mongolian Inscription of 1346," *HJAS*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2 (1952).
4. The quotation is taken from Lue Kwanten, *Imperial Nomads* (Leicester University Press, 1979), p. 142.
5. Cleaves, *The Secret History*, par. 21, p. 142.
6. Igor de Rachewiltz, *Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Ghengis Khan's Empire* (Paper on Eastern History No. 7 March 1973), pp. 21-26.
7. Sh. Bira, "On the Traditional Historiographical Mutual Relationship between India and Mongolia," in *Mongolia and India*, edited by Sh. Bira (Ulan-Bator, 1989), pp. 30-3; and *The Secret History of the Mongols* is a great historical and cultural monument" (in Mongolian), *Bulletin, The IAMS News Information on Mongol Studies*, no. 2 (6) (Ulan-Bator, 1990): pp. 11- 13.
8. D. Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 73.
9. Cleaves, *The Secret History*, par. 281, p. 142.
10. A. Ricci, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London, 1931), p. 157.
11. Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London, 1971), pp. 95-96.
12. See de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 136; See de Rachewiltz, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, translated by P. Jackson with David Morgan (London, 1990), p. 236.
13. de Rachewiltz, *The Mission of Friar William*, p. 221.
14. Cleaves, "The Sino-Mongolian Inscription of 1346."
15. de Rachewiltz, *The Mission of Friar William*, p. 221.
16. P. Ratchnevsky, *Ghenghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*, translated and edited by Thomas Nivison Haining (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 205.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
18. M. Rossabi, "The Muslims in the Early Yuan Dynasty," in *China under Mongol Rule*, edited by John D. Langlois Jr. (Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 270-77.
19. J. Needham, *Science and Civilization of China*, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press; reprint 1979), p. 49.
20. H. Franke, "Sino-Western Contacts under the Mongol Empire," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 6 (Hong Kong, 1966); M. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1988), pp. 125-26.
21. Jutta Rall, *Die Vier grossen Medizenschulen der Mongolen-Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970), pp. 30-1.
22. Franke, "Simo-Western Contacts," p. 60.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Needham, *Science and Civilization of China*, vol. 1, p. 141.
25. Franke, "Simo-Western Contacts," p. 61.
26. W. Fuchs, *The Mongol Atlas of China by Chu Su pen* (Peking: Monumenta Serica, Monographs, 1946).
27. E. Esin, "A Pair of Miniatures from the Miscellany Collections of Topkapi," *Central Asiatic Journal* vol. 21, no. 1 (1977): p. 15.

28. Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, translated by J.A. Boyle, vol. 1, (Manchester University Press, 1958), p. 5.
29. W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, second edition translated from Russian by A.R. Gibb (London, 1958), p. 45.
30. Rashid ad-Din, *Jami-altawarikh*, vol. 1, part 1 (Moscow-Leningrad: The Russian Translation, 1952), p. 18.
31. A. Zeki Velidi Togan, "The Composition of the History of the Mongols by Rashid ad-Din," *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March 1962): p. 64; see Sh. Bira, *Mongolskaya Istoriografiya XIII-XVII vekov* (Mongolian Historiography of the 13th-17th Centuries) (Moscow, 1978), pp. 133-37.
32. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, p. 46.