CHAPTER 7

Inner Asian Rule:
The Liao, Xi Xia, Jin, and Yuan Dynasties 907–1368

The rapid evolution of Inner Asian statecraft in the tenth to thirteenth centuries allowed four states formed north of China proper to support formidable armies. Their military strength offset China's advantages in wealth and population and allowed expansion into lands settled largely by Han Chinese. The Tanguts' Xi Xia dynasty (1038–1227) was a multi-ethnic regional state with a relatively small Chinese population, but the other three ruled over large Chinese populations and have traditionally been considered part of the sequence of Chinese dynasties. Liao (907–1125), Jin (1115–1234), and Yuan (1215/1276–1368) each built on the achievements of its predecessor to gain greater dominance over Chinese populations. The Khitans' Liao dynasty did not merely extort material benefits (as the Uyghurs had in late Tang) but also occupied a strip of territory south of the Great Wall, populated primarily by Han Chinese. The Jurchens' Jin dynasty, once it defeated the Liao, expanded the occupied zone to include all of north China. The Mongols' Yuan dynasty, after defeating the Jin and much of Eurasia, built up the machinery needed to conquer south China, the first Inner Asian state to rule south of the Yangzi River. Even though all four of these states developed writing systems, the great bulk of the surviving documents are in Chinese, making it easier to discern how the Chinese perceived their rule and adapted to it than to discern the values of the Inner Asian peoples themselves. These dynasties all were patrons of Buddhism and adopted some Chinese practices, such as building capital cities, collecting taxes, and compiling law codes, but they also preserved their distinct ethnic identities and privileges. Equally worthy of attention are the ways the Chinese subjects adapted to their rule.

KEY DATES

907–1125	Liao dynasty
907–926	Reign of Abaoji, Liao founder
1005	Peace agreement between Liao and Song
1038–1227	Xi Xia state
1115–1234	Jin dynasty
1115–1234	Reign of Aguda, Jin founder
1153	Jin moves capital to Yanjing
1194	Yellow River shifts course
1206–1227	Reign of Chinggis as Mongols' khan
1215	Mongols capture Beijing
1218	Yelü Chucai meets Chinggis
1234	Mongols conquer Jin
1260–1294	Reign of Khubilai
1271	'Yuan' adopted as name for the Mongols' state in China
1271–1295	Travels of Marco Polo
1314	Mongols first hold civil service examinations
1330s–1350s	Widespread epidemics
1340s	Red Turban rebellions

The Mongols' extraordinary war machine led to a pan-Eurasian Mongol empire that facilitated communication across the continent. Foreigners from west Asia and Europe visited China in unprecedented numbers. Chinese inventions – such as

Rubbing of a 'Map of the Chinese and the Barbarians' carved on a stone about 2½ feet (79 cm) square in 1137. The map depicts the major rivers and cities of China and the Great Wall, and gives historical accounts of the various non-Chinese people settled along the borders, including the Khitans, Tanguts, and numerous smaller tribes and city-states.

printing and gunpowder – spread westward, as did demand for Chinese goods such as porcelain. The cultural flow the other way was more limited, but would include a larger place for Islam. The impact of Inner Asian rule can be seen in many other realms as well, from institutional innovations to the development of drama as a literary art.

Post-Tang Inner Asia

Despite changes in the dominant ethnic groups in Inner Asia – from the Xiongnu, to the Xianbei, Turks, Uyghurs, Khitans, and Mongols – the geopolitical realities of the region remained much the same. Although as large as China proper, Inner Asia was always much more sparsely settled because most of it was unsuited to crop agriculture. China proper at the end of the Tang had a population of perhaps 60 million people, but perhaps as few as 5 million lived in all the Inner Asia regions from Tibet through modern Mongolia and Manchuria. Even fewer would have been able to survive in Inner Asia if pastoralists had not had access to the settled agricultural society of China. Herders could trade animals and animal products for grain, textiles, and ceramic and metal utensils from China. When drought or disease

among their animals reduced their resources, or when the Chinese refused to trade on acceptable terms, the herders had the mobility and military skills to make raids to get what they wanted.

Among nomads, predatory activities were taken as normal; clans and tribes were regularly at odds with each other, seizing cattle, horses, and people, thus setting off cycles of revenge. Captives would be incorporated into the victors' clans as slaves, serfs, or wives. The alternative to fighting was to form alliances, and at times a tribal leader would build up a large coalition or confederation through a combination of military victories and alliances, making possible much stronger, more militarized states. Personal loyalty of warrior to chief, of chief to lord, and lord to overlord tied such structures together. Major decisions were typically reached at deliberative assemblies of a small group of military leaders. Great leaders who had defeated or won over other tribes could aggregate huge armies and keep them happy with the spoils of conquest.

Between regions where no one farmed and those where most people did, there were fluid frontier zones where distinctions of ethnicity and way of life were not so clear-cut. Chinese farmers and non-Chinese herders might live intermixed. Some of the non-Han became farmers, others remained herdsmen or served in military units. Some non-Han were still very much members of a tribe, responding to the orders of tribal leaders, while others identified themselves as subjects of the Chinese government or were even assimilated into the Chinese population. Han Chinese in the frontier zone often made their living rendering services to non-Chinese, whether as farmers, traders, craftsmen, or government advisers, and some of them intermarried with and were assimilated into the Inner Asian groups. Nor were Inner Asian peoples exclusively nomads. In some areas, such as Manchuria, ways of making a living were more diverse, with hunting, fishing, and farming playing significant roles.

Found in a Liao tomb, this pair of silk boots is decorated with images of the Chinese phoenix. They probably belonged to a woman in the Liao imperial family.

The period after 900 witnessed a new stage in Inner Asian state formation, with the development of progressively stronger, more militarized states, better able to secure resources from external sources, principally China. In contrast to the non-Chinese regimes of the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Dynasties, who were able to rise to power above all because the Chinese state tore itself apart through civil war, the Khitan, Tangut, Jurchen, and Mongol states overlapped with the Song, a strongly centralized state willing and able to devote vast resources to its defence. They also ruled in a different way. The Inner Asian states of this period preserved much more of Inner Asian modes of governance, creating dual forms of government.

The Khitan Liao dynasty

The first to succeed in this way were the Khitans, a Mongolic people from the fringes of the steppe in eastern Inner Mongolia and adjacent areas, where they practised agriculture along with animal husbandry and hunting. During the Tang, the Khitans had sent envoys to Chang'an and engaged in border trade, but they also fought and raided when circumstances allowed. As the Tang dynasty disintegrated, Abaoji (872–926) united some eight to ten Khitan tribes into a federation, secured control of the steppe, and proclaimed the Khitan dynasty (later renamed 'Liao') as the successor to the Tang. Abaoji set aside the traditional Khitan practice of electing chiefs for limited terms. Not only did he rule until his death in 926, but he set up hereditary succession on the Chinese model to ensure that his son would succeed him. The ruling family adopted the family name of Yelü and married exclusively with the aristocratic Xiao clan. The two clans dominated government affairs throughout the Liao dynasty. Women in these families could gain considerable power, especially as regents for child emperors. Hunting was a favourite pastime of the Khitan elite, and one that helped them maintain their identity as warriors.

In 918, Abaoji built a walled Supreme Capital in northern Inner Mongolia with a northern section for Khitan, who lived in yurts, and a southern section for their sedentary subjects, who lived in houses. Soon Liao armies expanded the realm into modern Mongolia and to the east conquered the sedentary Bohai kingdom in southern Manchuria, adding a large farming area to the state. After 938, Liao also gained territory south of the line of the Great Wall settled primarily by Chinese farmers. In 947, hoping to gain even more, the Khitan armies campaigned further south, reaching Kaifeng, which they occupied for months before withdrawing with much loot. A few decades later they repelled the efforts of the new Song dynasty to push them out of the 'sixteen prefectures' that they had gained in 938. Peace on their southern border was reached in 1005 with an agreement that involved Song making large annual payments and both sides sending envoys to the other biannually.

Many tombs of the royal Khitans have been excavated, giving a good sense of their distinctive material culture, with extensive use of gold, including gold masks. The Khitans had traditionally worshipped of the sun but had widely adopted

Buddhism as well. The Liao authorities built many Buddhist temples, a dozen or so still standing, and had an edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon printed.

Abaoji and his successor had two as yet undeciphered scripts created so that documents could be kept in the Khitan language. Both scripts used graphs that look like Chinese characters, the 'large script' logographic, the 'small script' phonetic. Although no printed texts in this script survive, there are quite a few surviving epitaphs engraved on stone and placed in Khitan royal tombs as well as some miscellaneous objects, such as mirrors, with Khitan writing on them. Records were also kept in Chinese, and Chinese were recruited into the government. In 988, an examination system modelled on the Tang was introduced, open only to Chinese subjects. Those who were recruited through the examinations were eligible for mostly lower-level posts, as the highest posts were reserved for Khitan nobles.

A distinctive feature of Liao burial practice was the use of metal funeral masks, found in many royal Liao tombs.

At the peak of their power, the Khitan probably numbered about 750,000 and ruled more than 2 or 3 million Han Chinese. They created a dual administration, with distinct Khitan and Chinese areas. The government was a mobile organization with the emperor and his important officials moving from one of their five capitals to another in different seasons. It handled military and tribal matters and collected tribute from subordinate peoples like the Jurchens. The southern section encompassed 16 prefectures in north China (compared to 300 under Song control), and was governed through the institutions of the civil bureaucracy inherited from the Tang, but with counties and sometimes even prefectures carved out as fiefs for Khitan imperial relatives and high-ranking officials. The main city of this region was their southern capital at modern Beijing, which until then had been little more than a border garrison city.

Even though the Liao ruled over a population tiny by Song standards, its armies had such striking power that they were the dominant power in the region, able to intimidate other neighbours as well, including at times the Korean state of Goryeo and the Tangut state of Xi Xia. Probably because they employed a dual administration, the Khitan effectively preserved their language and traditions. The ruling elite became culturally dual – adept in both Khitan and Chinese ways – but the bulk of the Khitans preserved their ancient customs. After Liao fell to the Jurchen in the early 1120s, a member of the Khitan imperial family led an army westward to

The Song court celebrated the completion of the peace treaty with Liao in this painting of the arrival of Liao envoys at the Song court.

modern Xinjiang where they founded the Khara Khitai state, which survived until conquered by the Mongols in 1211. The bulk of the Khitans, however, stayed in the east, many serving under the Jurchen and later the Mongols.

The Tangut Xi Xia dynasty

The Tangut state of Xi Xia had a smaller area and population, in some ways making it more like the states formed on Tang's borders like Bohai and Nanzhao, and like them never had a dynastic history written for it. Xi Xia's military was more formidable, however, making it a bigger presence in the history of its neighbours. In addition, the discovery of large caches of documents in both Chinese and the Tangut's own language have sparked interest in their state.

The Tanguts spoke a language related to Tibetan but saw themselves as a distinct people. In the late eighth century, under pressure from the Tibetans, the Tanguts got permission from the Tang to move north and east from the Qinghai region to an area in northern Shaanxi south of the Ordos Desert, an area best suited to herding. They provided military assistance to the late Tang and their chieftain was recognized as

Many printed documents have survived in the script created to record the Tangut language, including many with Buddhist purposes.

the regional military governor and given the title of Duke of Xia. The Song, in its early years, tried to get them to accept subordinate status, and the Liao did also, but Xi Xia was able to play their two large neighbours off against each other and maintain their autonomy. The Xi Xia state successfully expanded to the west along the Gansu corridor, into both desert and areas with excellent grazing for camels and horses. This gave it control of the overland trade across the Silk Route and a diverse population that included Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other ethnic groups besides Chinese and Tangut. Song objected strongly when in 1038 the Xi Xia ruler took the title 'emperor' and announced the establishment of the Xia dynasty. Still, to avoid costly wars, the Song agreed in 1044 to make annual payments to Xi Xia of silk, silver, and tea, much as they did to Liao, in exchange for peace along their common border.

A Tangut script was created in 1037, using some 6,000 characters, which like the Khitan scripts resemble Chinese characters. The script was used for official documents and many books were printed in it by the state printing bureau. Much more progress has been made in deciphering this script than the Khitan scripts as so many more documents survive. Culturally, the Xi Xia state was a major patron of Buddhism and the ruler presented himself as a Buddhist ruler. He accorded high status to the Tibetan lamas at his court and had many Buddhist texts translated into Tangut. The Chinese population in the Tangut state seems to have been rather small, probably no more than a million people, and Chinese cultural influence waxed and waned, some rulers encouraging it, others trying to limit it.

When the Jurchen supplanted the Khitan, the Tanguts were able to retain their territory, and even enlarge it slightly. But they no longer shared a border with Song and did not get annual payments from them. They also suffered a major earthquake in 1143 near their capital, which disrupted farming and led to a famine. But the state survived until destroyed by the Mongols in 1227.

The Jurchen Jin dynasty

The third of these Inner Asian states was founded by the Jurchens. They originated further east than the Khitans, in the mountains of eastern Manchuria and spoke a Tungusic language (like the languages in nearby Siberia). Those classed as 'wild Jurchen' by the Liao practised hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, and some agriculture. They had accepted the status of vassals of the Liao and were expected to make annual payments of falcons, furs, and pearls, but otherwise were largely independent. In the early twelfth century, Aguda, of the Wanyan clan, formed a confederation of Jurchen tribes and began to challenge the Liao. In 1115, he chose the dynastic name Jin, clearly intending to supplant the Liao. The Liao capitals fell one after the other to his armies. After a long series of negotiations through envoys, Aguda concluded a treaty with the Song calling for a joint attack on the Liao's southern capital and a division of Liao territory. When Song failed to contribute much to the capture of Yanjing in 1122, Jin sensed Song weakness, and soon decided to conquer Song as well. Although they were not successful in their repeated efforts

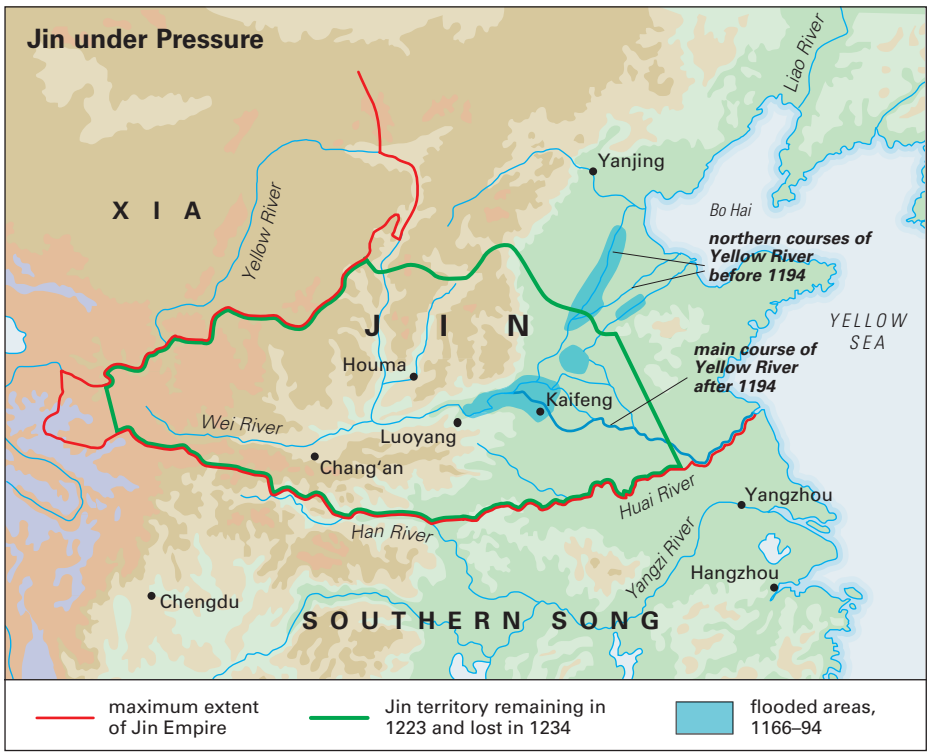
to gain territory south of the Yangzi River, they did acquire most of north China, giving them a much larger Chinese population than Liao had ever ruled.

Jurchen military successes against Chinese-fortified cities owed much to Jurchen willingness to incorporate Chinese experts in siegecraft into their army. To take the medium-sized city of Taiyuan they brought in thirty catapults to throw a barrage of stones, and built more than fifty carts protected by rawhide and iron sheeting to bring in troops to fill the moat. Kaifeng, defended by 48,000 troops, many of whom were equipped with powerful crossbows and flame throwers, posed an even greater challenge. The Jurchens brought in siege engines, including mobile towers higher than the city walls, in order to fire incendiary bombs into the city. After Kaifeng fell and the Jurchens carted off enormous booty and thousands of captives, their armies tried to extend their control over the rest of Song territory, but failed to hold the regions south of the Yangzi River. In 1142, Jin reached a peace agreement with Song which involved annual payments from Song and the exchange of envoys, much like the earlier agreements between Song and Liao.

Thus, in less than a generation, the Jurchen went from being a group of tribes concentrated in the far eastern edges of Inner Asia to being the masters of north China, the lords of a densely settled land with more than 40 million residents, in possession of the treasures of both the Liao and Song capitals. Having gained power so quickly, the Jurchens initially continued the Khitans' dual government and employed former Liao officials, both Chinese and Khitan. The Jurchens created two scripts to write their language modelled on the Khitan scripts, though Chinese and Khitan also continued to be used for government purposes. Even though the language of the Jurchen is better known than the language of the Khitans, as it was ancestral to the language of the later Manchus, the script has not been fully deciphered because there are not many examples of it extant.

This ceramic pillow, shaped like a recumbant tiger, was made in a north China kiln during the Jin dynasty. Someone wrote on the bottom that it was purchased for thirty-four coins.

The Jin dynasty moved its capital from central Manchuria to Beijing in 1153 and to Kaifeng in 1161, as it made greater use of Chinese political institutions and employed more Chinese officials. The Jin continued the salt and wine monopolies, for instance. The Song monetary system was also copied, beginning in 1157 when coins were cast and paper money issued. As the Liao rulers had before them, the Jin rulers found that Chinese political institutions provided them with a potent weapon in their competition with their own nobles. Hereditary monarchy and a bureaucracy of officials willing to do the ruler's bidding enhanced the power of the ruler. Moreover, Chinese institutions were often modified to suit Jurchen customs or preferences. A law code drawing on Tang, Song, and Liao precedent was compiled, but it made distinctions according to ethnicity, especially in matters related to the family. The



In the 1180s and 1190s the Jin suffered a heavy blow with a shift in the course of the Yellow River, then in the 1210s lost much of its territory to the Mongols.

Jurchen emperors instituted the practice of flogging high officials in open court, a brutal violation of the Confucian dictum that corporal punishment should not extend to the educated elite. Court politics were frequently volatile with succession disputes and other conflicts among the Jurchen nobility.

The Jin government settled the bulk of the Jurchen in north China so that they could aid in maintaining control over the Chinese population. Jurchen who settled there had privileged access to military and civil posts, but tended to adopt Chinese language and dress. Jurchen commanders who objected to the trend toward assimilation assassinated the Jin emperor in 1161, and the succeeding emperor sought to revitalize the Jurchen heritage. He promoted the use of Jurchen as a written language, commissioned translations of the Confucian classics into Jurchen, ordered Jurchens to study at specially established Jurchen schools, set up civil service examinations for Jurchen candidates which would test their mastery of Jurchen, and issued terrible threats against those who adopted Chinese customs. Later emperors were more comfortable with Chinese ways, and in 1191 an emperor even forbade referring to Jurchen as people 'of the border areas', not wanting them to be seen as outsiders. Many Jurchens received Confucian educations but did not simply merge with the Han Chinese local elite, as they socialized primarily with other Jurchens. Moreover, Confucian universalistic political ideology was used to the Jurchen's own advantage. By the thirteenth century, the Jin emperors presented themselves as supporting an order in which Chinese subjects and non-Chinese conquerors would live

together in peace and prosperity under a universal empire. One of the last Jin emperors has come down in history as a model Confucian ruler, the patron of a cultural revival led by Chinese Confucian scholars.

The relatively short duration of the Jin dynasty owes something to economic and environmental setbacks. Beginning in the late 1180s, the Yellow River formed new courses, breaking through dykes, with a lot of resultant flooding. In 1194, the river finally shifted its main route from north of the Shandong peninsula to south of it, merging with the Huai River and causing more inundation. Before long, the Jin army had to deal with new defence problems in the north with the rise of the Mongols. Soon, the Jin government was trying to deal with revenue crises by issuing so much paper currency that severe inflation resulted.

By the end of the Jin dynasty, most Jurchen living in China proper spoke Chinese, wore Chinese clothes, used Chinese-style surnames, and married with the local population. To the Mongols, the ethnic term 'Han' applied equally well for the Chinese, Jurchens, and Khitans living in north China. Some Jurchens, however, still lived in their traditional homeland, where they spoke Jurchen and maintained their old customs.

Chinggis Khan, the Mongols, and the Yuan dynasty

The Mongolian steppe is considerably colder, with harsher winters than the regions that were the heartland of the Khitan, Tangut, and Jurchen peoples. Neither the Khitan nor Jurchen empires ever fully controlled the Mongolian steppe, though they sometimes got the various Turkic- and Mongol-speaking clans and tribes that occupied the area to recognize their overlordship. In the late twelfth century this region was facing a subsistence crisis because a drop in the mean annual temperature had reduced the supply of grass for grazing animals.

The man who saved the situation by gaining access to the bounty of the agricultural world was Temujin, better known as Chinggis (Genghis, *c.* 1162–1227). We know of his early life from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, a work based on oral traditions and written down in the Mongolian language within a few decades of Chinggis' death. Compared to sources that were written in Chinese, this book provides much better access to Mongol ways of thinking. It depicts the tribes of Mongolia in near perpetual conflict, with cycles of revenge involving raids on each other. It tells the story of Chinggis' father abducting his mother from a passing Merkid tribesman, then twenty years later three Merkids in return seizing Chinggis' wife, followed by Chinggis in revenge not only getting his wife back but killing as many Merkids as he could. Other dramatic stories include the poisoning of Chinggis' father, his own capture at the age of twenty, his daring escape, and the ways he won allies and followers through displays of personal courage in battle and generosity to his followers. With his army of loyal followers, he subdued the Tartars, Kereyid, Naiman, Merkid, and other Mongol and Turkic tribes. A brilliant and utterly ruthless military genius, Chinggis proudly asserted

Chinggis Khan's conquests had as much impact on west Asia as they did on China. This Persian illustration of Chinggis pursuing his enemies is from a manuscript copy of the history of the Mongols written by Rashîd al-Dîn (1247–1318), a Persian administrator in the employ of the Mongol Ilkhans in Iran.

that there was no greater joy than massacring one's enemies, seizing their horses and cattle, and ravishing their women. Sometimes he would kill all the men in a defeated tribe to prevent later vendettas. At other times, he would take them on as soldiers in his own armies.

In 1206, the most prominent Mongol nobles gathered at an assembly to name him their great khan. He then fully militarized Mongol society, ignoring traditional tribal affiliations to form an army based on a decimal hierarchy, 1,000 horsemen in the basic unit. A new military nobility was thus created of commanders loyal to Chinggis. They could pass their posts to their sons, but the great khan could remove any commander at will. Chinggis also created an elite bodyguard of 10,000 sons and brothers of commanders, which served directly under him. To reduce internal disorder, he issued simple but draconian laws; the penalty for robbery and adultery, for instance, was death. He ordered the Uyghur's phonetic script to be adapted for writing Mongol, seeing the utility of written records even though he was illiterate himself.

His organization in place, Chinggis initiated one of world history's most astonishing campaigns of conquest. He began by subjugating nearby states. First he would send envoys to demand submission and threaten destruction. Those who submitted without fighting were treated as allies and left in power, but those who put up a fight faced the prospect of total destruction. City dwellers in particular evoked his wrath and were often slaughtered *en masse* or used as human shields in the next battle. In the Mongol armies' first sweep across the north China plain from 1212 to 1213, they left ninety-odd cities in rubble. When they sacked the Jurchen's northern capital at Beijing in 1215, it burned for more than a month.

Chinggis' battle-hardened troops were capable of enduring great privation and crossing vast distances at amazing speed. In 1219, he led 200,000 troops into Central Asia, where the following year they sacked Bokhara and Samarkand. Before his death in 1227, Chinggis had conquered Mongolia and Manchuria, brought Korea into submission, driven the Jurchen south of the Yellow River, destroyed the Tangut state of Xi Xia, overrun Central Asia, and plundered the Grand Duchy of Kiev in the Ukraine. He ruled from the Pacific Ocean on the east to the Caspian Sea on the west.

Chinggis' death created a crisis due to the Mongol tradition of succession by election rather than descent. In the end the empire was divided into four sections, each to be governed by one of the lines of his descendants. Ogödei, Chinggis' third son, got control of Mongolia. In 1234, he crushed the Jin and became ruler of north China. By 1236, he had wrested control of Sichuan from the Song. Ogödei's troops also participated in the western campaigns begun in 1237. Representatives of all four lines, with some 150,000 Mongol, Turkic, and Persian troops, campaigned into Europe in 1237, taking Moscow and Kiev in 1238 and striking into Poland and Hungary in 1241 and 1242. Although they looted cities in central Europe on these campaigns, the Mongols soon retreated to Russia, which they dominated for more than a century.

The Mongols could not have numbered more than 1.5 million. Their success, thus, was due in large part to their willingness to incorporate other ethnic groups into their armies and government. In their campaigns against the Jurchens, they recruited both Khitan and Chinese who felt no great loyalty to their Jurchen lords. Chinese catapult experts enabled the Mongols to storm walled cities, and Chinese shipbuilders enabled them to engage the Song in naval battles. Whatever their nationality, those who served the Mongols loyally were rewarded and given important posts. Uyghurs, Tibetans, Persians, and even Russians came to hold powerful positions in the Mongol government.

The Mongols conquered in order to enrich themselves, but their perception of how best to do this changed over time. Looting and pillaging were a standard feature of the first phase of conquest. Lands and those living on them were appropriated and assigned to military commanders, nobles, and army units, to be exploited as the recipients wished. Skilled workers were brought back to Mongolia to provide

Seaborne commerce thrived under the Mongols. These fine celadon figurines are from a ship that sank off the coast of Korea in 1323 while en route from Ningbo to Japan. The 17,000-odd ceramic pieces found in the shipwreck came predominantly from major kilns in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian provinces.

The Mongol conquests expanded contacts across Eurasia, which led to the spread of deadly plagues but also the transfer of technical and scientific knowledge. Visitors like Marco Polo brought back to Europe reports of the wealth and splendour of Chinese cities and information on Chinese inventions such as gunpowder and printing.

the Mongols with the material goods of civilized life and to help populate the new capital city of Karakorum. After Bokhara and Samarkand were captured, some 30,000 artisans were seized and transported to Mongolia to work as slaves, and many Chinese craftsmen suffered the same fate. More sophisticated methods of extracting revenue took longer to master. After Ogödei conquered the Jin, some Mongols suggested that he turn all of north China into pastureland. An alternative was proposed by a sinified Khitan, Yelü Chucai, who had taken up service with the Mongols early on. Yelü convinced Ogödei that greater wealth could be gained by taxing farmers, calculating an annual revenue of 500,000 ounces of silver, 80,000 bolts of silk, and more than 20,000 tons (20,321 tonnes) of grain. But his institutional arrangements did not last long. Soon Yelü's rivals convinced Ogödei that Yelü's method of direct taxation was less lucrative than their plan to let Central Asian Muslim merchants bid against each other for licences to collect

taxes. These Central Asian tax farmers quickly gained a reputation for rapaciousness and came to be as hated by the conquered Chinese as the Mongol soldiers.

It was not until Chinggis' grandson Khubilai (r. 1260–94) came to power that the Mongols gained control of south China. Before succeeding to the title of great khan, Khubilai had ruled a prefecture in Hebei as an appanage and thus knew something of Chinese ways. He had Chinese as well as Uyghur and Central Asian advisors, and even knew some spoken Chinese. In 1264, he transferred the capital from Karakorum in Mongolia to Beijing, known then as Dadu, and in 1271 he adopted the Chinese name 'Yuan' for his dynasty and instituted Chinese court rituals. In preparation for battle against the Southern Song, he had a river fleet built and set siege to Xiangyang, a city on the Han river in Hubei recognized by both sides as the key to control of the Yangzi valley. It was a siege that lasted five years (1268–1273). The Song continued to resist until the Mongols approached the Song capital at Hangzhou in 1276 and the empress dowager surrendered rather than see the inhabitants of the capital slaughtered.

By the time the Mongols had conquered the Song, there was no longer a pan-Asian Mongol empire. Much of Asia was in the hands of Mongol successor states, but these were generally hostile to each other. Khubilai was often at war with the Khanate of Central Asia, then held by his cousin Khaidu, and he had little contact

Yelü Chucai

The ethnic and cultural complexity of Inner Asian dynasties is perhaps best captured by the case of Yelü Chucai (1189–1243), a descendant of the Khitan imperial clan. His father had served the Jin court as a translator from Chinese into Khitan and Jurchen and eventually rose to high court office. Totally fluent in Chinese, Yelü Chucai also knew the Khitan writing system, the last known person able to write in it. He was in the service of the Jin court in Beijing when the Mongols set siege to it. The city fell in 1215, with much slaughter, and for the next couple of years Yelü Chucai studied Buddhism under a leading Chan master. In 1218, at the age of twenty-eight, he accepted a summons to Mongolia for an audience with Chinggis Khan.

When Yelü Chucai first met Chinggis, we are told, Chinggis tried to argue that as a Khitan, he should be happy that the Mongols had defeated the Jurchen: 'Liao and Jin have been enemies for generations; I have taken revenge for you.' To this Yelü Chucai responded: 'My father and grandfather both respectfully served the Jin. How can I, as a subject and a son, be so insincere as to consider my sovereign and my father as enemies?'

Winning Chinggis' respect with his answer, Yelü Chucai was given a place in Chinggis' retinue as a scribe, astrologer, and advisor. Presumably he became fluent in Mongolian during these years. He accompanied Chinggis on his campaign in 1219 into Central Asia and did not return to China until 1226. As someone who understood both civil administrative practice and how the Mongols thought, he gained Ogödei's support and was able to introduce some important policies that mitigated the harshness of Mongol military rule in north China. He is credited with convincing them that it would be to their benefit to tax farmers rather than turn farmland into pasture. He also succeeded in getting a census taken, making 'Confucian household' a census category, instituting a limited form of civil service exams, and gaining the freedom of dozens of Chinese scholars who had been enslaved by the conquering armies.

But there were limits to his influence, as he faced considerable opposition from other factions at court less amenable to Chinese practices, and when he died he had been out of favour for some years.

In 1280, Khubilai had the Chinese court painter Liu Guandao depict him on horseback in a hunting party. In this detail from the silk handscroll, he is clothed in the brightly coloured Chinese brocades underneath the more distinctly Mongol furs.

with the Khanate of the Golden Horde in south Russia. In these other areas the Mongols tended to merge with the Turkic populations already there and, like them, to convert to Islam. Thus, from Khubilai's time on China proper was united with Mongolia, Manchuria, and Tibet, but not with Persia, Iraq, or Russia. Khubilai tried to extend his realm into Japan and Southeast Asia, but those campaigns failed.

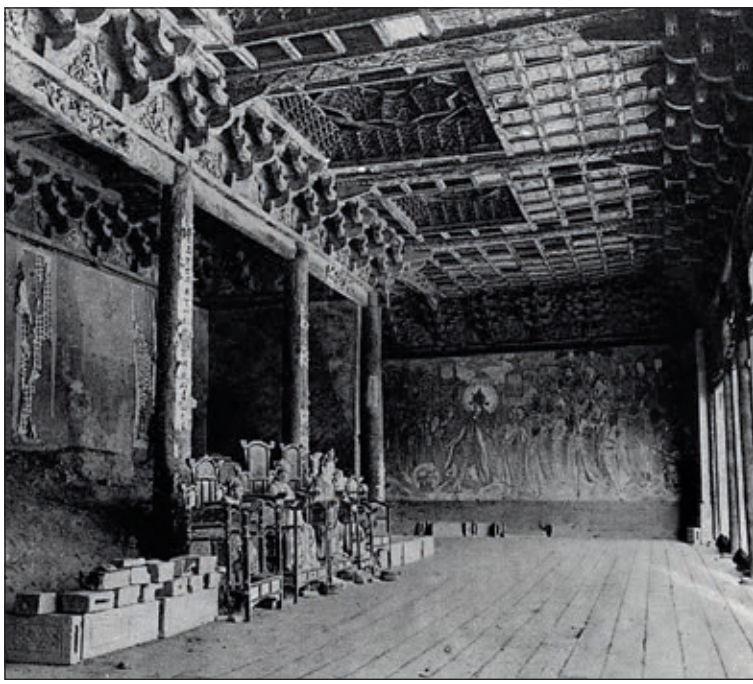
The Mongols had little reason to adopt Chinese ways, even those who lived in primarily Chinese regions. Although the Mongol rulers developed a taste for the material fruits of Chinese civilization, they purposely avoided many Chinese social and political practices. The rulers conducted their business in the Mongol language and spent their summers in Mongolia. Mongol soldiers stationed in China were a privileged group that lived relatively separately from the Chinese in military garrisons. Khubilai discouraged Mongols from marrying Chinese and took only Mongol women into the palace. Some Mongol princes preferred to live in tents erected in the palace grounds rather than in the grand palaces constructed at Beijing. Mongols continued to choose their rulers through competition, often bloody. As recorded in the Chinese history of the Yuan dynasty, succession after Khubilai is a sordid tale of assassinations, *coups d'état*, enthronements of youthful incompetents, fratricide, and domination by nobles.

When widespread rebellion in south China brought the Yuan dynasty to the point of collapse (see Chapter 8), the Mongols living in China did not simply melt into the Chinese population the way the Xianbei had. Many instead fled northward back to the steppe. The post-Yuan Mongols resumed their nomadic, tribal life, looking back on their period of hegemony over China with pride.

Chinese society under Inner Asian rule

Chinese experience of foreign rule was not uniform. Regional differences were huge. All of north China was under foreign rule from the Jurchen conquest in 1127 to the fall of the Yuan in 1368. South China, was controlled by the Mongols for less than a century, and foreign rule brought fewer changes in the social structure or culture there. To the Mongol rulers, the Chinese of the north and the south were so different that they put them in different ethnic categories and administered them differently.

For the most part, Chinese were not forced to adopt the customs of their conquerors. The Jurchen issued an order that Chinese men adopt the Jurchen hairstyle but never enforced it. The Inner Asian rulers rarely tried to get Chinese to adopt marriage practices common among them, such as the levirate (inheriting the widow of a brother or other close patrilineal relative). Song scholar-officials who travelled to Liao and Jin as envoys regularly wrote accounts of their trips. To them, the culture of the Chinese living under the Liao and Jin was rather provincial, but still recognizably Chinese. One envoy to Jin noted seeing a poster advertising instruction in Jurchen, evidence that some Han Chinese saw benefits to learning the language of the rulers.



Built in 1212 in the early Yuan period, the Yongle ('Permanent Joy') Temple in Shanxi province is one of the oldest surviving Daoist temples in China. The walls of its main hall, shown here, are decorated with paintings of gods in the Daoist pantheon.

All of the Inner Asian states made distinctions based on ethnic classifications, favouring their own people as a way to maintain their political dominance. At times the rulers' greatest concern was to prevent their own people from being adopting Chinese culture, at other times, to prevent Chinese from adopting their identity. Intermarriage was usually discouraged but certainly occurred. During the Yuan period, the ethnic hierarchy was particularly complex, with the Mongols the most privileged, then allies of the Mongols from areas outside China (Uyghurs, Turks, Tibetans, Tanguts, Persians, Central Asians, collectively called '*semu*'), then former subjects of the Jin (Chinese, Khitans, and Jurchens, called 'Han'), with the bottom occupied by former subjects of Song (called 'southerners'). This system of classification affected methods of taxation, judicial process, and appointment to office. Chinese in north China, for instance, were taxed by household in ways that reflected Jin practice, whereas Chinese in south China were taxed by land owned, following Song precedents. Each ethnic group was judged and sentenced according to its own legal traditions, so that, for instance, the Chinese, but no other ethnic groups, were tattooed if convicted of theft.

Other ethnic distinctions were clearly based on the fear that the Chinese were the most likely of all the Mongols' subjects to rebel. Chinese, for instance,

were forbidden to congregate in public or to own weapons. Khubilai even prohibited Chinese from dealing in bamboo since it could be used for the manufacture of bows and arrows. Chinese were subject to severe penalties if they fought back when attacked by a Mongol; by contrast, Mongols who murdered Chinese could get off by paying a fine. Probably because Chinese so outnumbered them, the Mongols were particularly vigilant in their efforts to keep the sChinese from trying to pass as Mongols and prohibited the taking of Mongol names.

All of the Inner Asian states maintained the tribal practice of enslaving those defeated in war, treating sedentary populations they conquered as theirs to move about or set to work as they saw fit. The histories of the Liao, Jin, and Yuan all give many examples of large-scale transfers of populations. Many Liao prefectures were created to govern Han Chinese and Bohai who had been captured and moved into Liao territory. Jin, too, enslaved many captives. In 1183, the Jin census recorded 170 imperial family households owning 27,808 slaves. While still a prince, the future emperor Shizong had 10,000 slaves. Slaves were also often donated to Buddhist monasteries in large numbers. By far the largest transfers of people were forced by the Mongols, who took captives by the tens of thousands and sometimes moved them hundreds of miles. Artisans were in high demand and thousands were forced to move very long distances to Karakorum, the new capital built in Mongolia. Quite a few scholars were captured by the Mongols when their cities fell, though we know mostly about those eventually freed after scholars already in the Mongols' employ made pleas on their behalf.

Hereditary rank and station were a normal part of the social structure of these Inner Asian groups, so none of them aimed at as open or mobile a society as the Song. The Mongols went the furthest in this regard, registering the population into hereditary statuses by occupation, such as ordinary farmers, scholars, physicians, astrologers, soldiers, military agricultural workers, artisans, salt producers, and miners. Specialized occupational groups were required to provide unpaid services needed by the state according to rotational quotas and to earn their living during the rest of the year. The rigidity of the system led to widespread absconding by families unable to provide the required services.

The Inner Asian rulers were all active patrons of religion. The Xi Xia was essentially a Buddhist state. Liao rulers and aristocracy were generous patrons of Buddhism as well, and Buddhist temples often owed large tracts of land, giving them considerable local power. During Jin times an important new sect of Daoism, called 'Complete Perfection', spread rapidly in north China. Its founder promoted the harmony of the three teachings of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism and instructed his followers to practise austerity, celibacy, and meditation to gain health, longevity, and inner peace. This sect gained even more influence under the Mongols after a leading figure, Qiu Chuji, travelled to Central Asia in 1220 to meet Chinggis Khan. Qiu not only gained the khan's support, but also exemptions for his followers from taxes and labour service, which naturally attracted even more followers. These

Demons and Demon Quellers

The Chinese religious imagination had room for all sorts of beings, good and bad. Among the dangerous beings were vengeful ghosts, extortionate gods who could be merciless toward those who did not serve them properly, and demons who carried out the orders of gods. More benevolent spiritual beings, such as ancestors and Buddhist and Daoist gods, could protect people from the more baleful beings. There were also human exorcists who could subdue or expel them.

Although there was without doubt a genuinely fearful aspect to Chinese demon lore, there was a more playful dimension as well, as seen in the great popularity of the legend of Zhong Kui, the most famous demon queller. It is even said that in Hangzhou merchants would give their customers pictures of Zhong Kui as New Year's gifts. Such pictures were probably pasted by their doors, a custom common in later periods.

The legend of Zhong Kui goes back to a Tang story of Emperor Xuanzong encountering first a small demon who stole his favourite concubine's embroidered perfume bag and his own jade flute and then a large demon who came to the emperor's aid by not only catching the small demon but also by gouging out his eyes and eating him. When Xuanzong questioned this helpful demon, the demon introduced himself as Zhong Kui, a man who had committed suicide by dashing his head against the palace steps decades earlier on learning that he had failed the palace examination. In gratitude for the posthumous honours the Tang emperor then bestowed on him, Zhong Kui vowed to rid the world of mischievous demons.

As time went on, a variety of other stories grew up around the cult of Zhong Kui, and in paintings Zhong Kui was depicted sometimes as a solitary menacing figure, sometimes in the company of demons he had subjugated, sometimes with his sister, but almost always with a beard and a dark, ugly face, and dressed in a scholar's robe, hat and boots.

Demons whom he had already subjugated carry Zhong Kui and his sister on a new demon hunt in this detail from a painting by Gong Kai (1222–*c.* 1304).

Daoist establishments played a major role in postwar social reconstruction in north China. Their convents offered safety to women who had lost their husbands and natal families in the disorder. The order also co-ordinated relief work and organized rebuilding projects. They even secured the release of many literati who had been captured by the Mongols. Their influence was later curbed by Khubilai, who was on the side of Buddhists who opposed them.

Since all the Inner Asian rulers were interested in maximizing their revenues, they did not purposely damage the economy. All appreciated Chinese material goods and sought ways to keep the flow of such goods ample, whether through setting up workshops or encouraging trade. The Liao and Jin managed extensive officially sanctioned trade with the Song, and the Mongols encouraged trade throughout Eurasia. The Mongols rebuilt the northern section of the Grand Canal, inoperative since Northern Song times, and extended it to the capital they had built at Beijing, enhancing north–south trade. They also promoted trade between north and south China by sea. Both the Jurchen and the Mongols attempted to preserve the established monetary system. The Jurchen allowed the circulation of Khitan and Song money and issued their own currency, including paper money. The Mongols similarly tried to maintain the existing paper currency system and even allowed conversion of Song paper money into Yuan currency. Under their rule, Quanzhou on the coast of Fujian became one of the greatest ports in the world, home to many communities of foreign merchants. Chinese ceramics shipped from the port reached lands all along the Indian Ocean.

The distinctive hairstyle of Khitan men is clearly depicted in the mural from a Liao tomb found in Hebei province.

Still, Jurchen and especially Mongol rule does seem to have led to economic decline, above all in north China. Much land was appropriated to support the conquerors' armies. Levies of food, horses, equipment, cloth, and labour service could be devastating. The iron industry that had been central to the Northern Song economic expansion never regained its former vitality. Through international trade, huge quantities of silver flowed from China to western Eurasia because of high demand for silver there.

Perhaps the best evidence that Mongol rule led to economic setbacks is the decline in population. By 1100, the population of Northern Song was in the vicinity of 100 million. The Jurchen invasion led to population loss in the north, but by 1207, the Jin had 53 million people in the north. Combined with perhaps 65 million in lands held by the Southern Song, this gives a total population of nearly 120 million. In 1290, the registered population of China was down to 60 million, and was still at that level a century later. Indiscriminate slaughter by Mongol armies undoubtedly accounts for some of this drop. Some large areas, like Sichuan and Hebei, were devastated and took several centuries to recover economically and demographically from the Mongol conquest. The increased communications across Asia may also have led to the spread of deadly plagues. Shortly after the lifting of the first siege of Jin Kaifeng in 1232 an epidemic spread, killing nearly a million people over the next three months. The turmoil of the

final decades of the Yuan, when civil war raged and epidemics spread, undoubtedly contributed to population loss.

Some tensions between the conquerors and their subjects persisted even after a couple of generations had passed and military rule had largely yielded to civilian rule. Chinese and Khitan subjects of the Jin readily defected to the Mongols out of resentment for the Jurchen, and after the collapse of the Jin, Chinese common people reportedly massacred large groups of Jurchen. Marco Polo, who spent sixteen years in Mongol-ruled China (1275–1291), found ethnic animosity intense. 'All the Cathaians detested the rule of the great khan because he set over them Tartars [i.e. Mongols], or still more frequently Saracens [i.e. Muslims], whom they could not endure, for they treated them just like slaves.' Even in the fourteenth century, the Mongol rulers and their Chinese subjects had considerable suspicion of each other. Bayan, the Mongol chief minister dominant at court from 1328 to 1340, made efforts to ensure that no Chinese gained leading positions in the central, provincial, or local government. Fearing that he would be assassinated by a Chinese, he reiterated rules against Chinese owning weapons or retaliating if struck by Mongols or Central Asians. The Chinese for their part were just as fearful of him, especially when rumours spread that the government was going to seize all unmarried young people in the country, and that Bayan intended to have everyone with the common surnames Zhang, Wang, Liu, Li, and Zhao slaughtered. Bayan's fears of Chinese conspiracy were thus balanced by Chinese fears of Mongol political brutality.

Elites old and new

All four Inner Asian states thought power should be in the hands of military men and kept command of their armies largely in the hands of their own military aristocracies. Soldiers who surrendered early to the Mongols were often recruited into their armies, so the armies themselves usually had men from a variety of ethnic groups. Membership in military units was often hereditary, with officer positions largely inherited. Even ordinary soldiers had privileges and benefits that distinguished them from the subject population. Talented military men might be recruited to the civil administration.

Naturally, the old elites of the regions conquered by these Inner Asian polities were not able to retain all the benefits of their old positions, but a fair number did find employment under the new rulers. The Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongol rulers all needed men capable of handling the paperwork that made centralized bureaucratic government possible, and for this purpose found those the Chinese literati dismissed as 'clerks' at least as useful as men who had studied the classics. All three Inner Asian governments in time set up a civil service examination system to select men for literary ability in Chinese, though none of them recruited the majority of their officials through it. The Khitans modelled their limited examination system on the Tang system, which the Jurchen perpetuated and then greatly expanded. Many northern Chinese literati entered the government through this route. In fact, without having

to compete against southern scholars, more northerners became degree holders during the Jin than in the Song. Jin also recruited Jurchens, Khitans, Bohais, and other non-Chinese as officials, but through alternative means, especially hereditary privilege and transfer from military service. After 1170, Jurchen commoners could also enter government service through success in the new Jurchen civil service examinations. Jurchens generally were able to rise more quickly through the government hierarchy, but some Han Chinese did rise relatively high. Comparatively speaking, however, Chinese literati serving under the Jin tended to be more subordinated to the state than their ancestors under the Northern Song or their contemporaries under the Southern Song.

The Mongol conquest of the Jin greatly reduced the participation of northern Chinese literati in civil government service. In the north, access to power often required establishing patron-client relations with members of the Mongol ruling group, such as princes of the imperial family, generals, and their principal retainers. Many men in north China took up military service with the Mongols, drawn to the privileges and possibilities of rapid promotion. The north was so devastated that even after order was restored, Confucian education was not widely available in the north. Under the Yuan, while at least 80 per cent of counties in the south had official schools, less than a quarter did in the north. Families classed as 'Confucian households' were about six times as large a share of the population in the south as the north. For all of these reasons, relatively few of the families that were eminent in the Northern Song or Jin maintained elite status into the Ming period.

Former Jin officials who accepted appointments to serve the Mongols reasoned that Mongol rule would be more palatable if Chinese scholars were the administrators and could shield Chinese society from the most brutal effects of Mongol rule.

Much like other paintings by Zhao Mengfu, this shows the influence of Tang dynasty models. Still the Mongols could easily have appreciated this rendering of a horse and groom buffeted by the wind without knowing anything of its art historical background.

Scholars like Xu Heng devoted their lives to teaching the Mongol rulers Chinese principles of the moral basis of governance. Other Chinese who had loyally served the Jurchen declined to serve the Mongols. Yuan Haowen lived through Mongol onslaught of north China and the later siege of Kaifeng. Able to get by with the help of patrons, he declined to serve the Mongols and instead dedicated himself to collecting material for a history of the Jin dynasty.

Former Song officials were also often reluctant to serve the Mongols. The complexity of the decision to take up service under the Mongols can be illustrated by the career of Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), a member of the Song imperial clan best known as a painter and calligrapher. Too young to have served in office under the Song, he had, however, enrolled in the Imperial Academy in Hangzhou. For ten years after the fall of Hangzhou, Zhao kept to himself and his circle of talented friends interested in poetry, paintings, and calligraphy. Several of them had lost their property in the wars and relied on patrons, donations, or teaching to survive. They saw painting in archaic styles as a way to express longing for the past and disapproval of the present. In 1286, in an attempt to win over the southern literati, Khubilai sent a southerner in his employ to recruit eminent scholars in the south. Zhao was among some two dozen who agreed to travel north. After his decision became known, there were friends who refused to speak to him and members of the Song imperial clan who no longer recognized him as a relative. Zhao quickly gained favour with Khubilai, which enabled him to speak up for Confucian values at court. He made bold proposals on currency reform, did all he could to help bring about the downfall of the notoriously corrupt Tibetan chief minister, Sangha, and argued that literati should be exempt from corporal punishment. By 1316 he had risen to the high post of president of the Hanlin Academy. For men like Zhao, getting to see north China – to them the

The scholar who did not find government employment under the Mongols might still hope to lead a comfortable life, attended by elegant maidservants and surrounded by objects that evoked the cultivated life. Using the conceit of paintings within paintings to draw attention to the role of art in such a lifestyle, Liu Guandao (active 1279–1300) depicted a scholar reclining before a painted screen that itself depicts a scholar sitting by his books and antiques in front of a screen painted with a landscape.

'central plains', the heartland of Chinese culture – compensated a little for the humiliation of serving conquerors. During his first decade in office Zhao travelled across much of north China on official business and gathered a large collection of paintings by Tang and Northern Song masters, paintings no one in the south had ever had a chance to see.

In 1314, the Mongols reinstituted the civil service recruitment examinations system, but with quotas to ensure that Mongols and other non-Chinese candidates (the *semu*) would get half the degrees awarded, another quarter going to former subjects of the Jin, and only a quarter to former subjects of the Song (who accounted for well over half the total population). Perhaps most important, only about 2 per cent of the ranked bureaucracy was recruited through the examinations anyway. Instead, the majority entered by promotion through the clerical ranks.

In south China, the presence of a foreign elite controlling the government did not diminish the prestige of the literati within Chinese society, and they continued to be accepted by ordinary Chinese as the natural leaders of local society, active in local defence, kinship organization, and charitable ventures. Especially in the southeast, educated men could also concentrate on their cultural responsibilities, looking on themselves as trustees of the Confucian tradition. In Yuan times, in particular, private academies flourished as alternative centres of cultural life, beyond the scope of state domination. These were places where scholars could attempt to assert the importance of civil as opposed to military values, and to sustain confidence in their own moral and intellectual autonomy.

In both the north and south, literati who could not or would not work for the Mongols often supported themselves as doctors, fortune tellers, Daoist priests, teachers of children, or playwrights. This abundant supply of talented and educated men seems to have proved beneficial to the literary art of drama, which flourished in this period. The dramatic arts, performed with music and in colloquial language, also appealed to Mongols and other non-Chinese, who helped patronize the theatres.

During the Yuan period, besides Mongols and Chinese, there were also Persians, Uyghurs, and others brought to China to serve the Mongols, and many of them gained responsible posts. These *semu* probably lived primarily in their own communities early on, but after a generation or two often seem to have become culturally dual. A literate Uyghur named Eren Temiir, who joined Chinggis' personal bodyguard after his state submitted to the Mongols in 1209, was later given the job of tutoring Chinggis' nephews. His descendant later took the Chinese surname 'Xie' and five of his grandsons passed the *jinshi* examinations and held civil, rather than military posts.

East–West cultural contact

The Mongols did much to encourage the movement of people, ideas, and goods across Eurasia. They had never looked down on merchants the way the elites of many traditional states did, and they welcomed the arrival of merchants from distant

lands. Even when different groups of Mongols were fighting among themselves, they usually allowed caravans to pass.

The Mongol practice of transporting skilled people from the lands they conquered also brought people into contact with each other in new ways. Chinese were moved into Mongolia and even further west. Besides those forced to move, the Mongols recruited administrators from all over. Chinese, Persians, and Arabs served the Mongols, and the Mongols often sent them far from home. Especially prominent were the Uyghurs of Central Asia, whose familiarity with Chinese civilization and fluency in Turkic were of great value in facilitating communication. Literate Uyghurs staffed much of the Mongol administration.

The Mongols were remarkably open to religious experts from all the lands they encountered and even from lands beyond. More Europeans made their way as far as Mongolia and China in the Mongol period than ever before. Popes and kings sent envoys to the Mongol court in the hope of enlisting the Mongols on their side in their long-standing conflict with Muslim forces over the Holy Land. These and other European visitors were especially interested in finding Christians who had been cut off from the West by the spread of Islam, and in fact there were considerable numbers of Nestorian Christians in Central Asia.

In 1253, Flemish friar William of Rubruck set out with the permission of King Louis IX of France as a missionary to convert the Mongols. He made his way to Karakorum, where he found many Europeans. At Easter, Hungarians, Russians, Georgians, Armenians, and Alans all took communion in a Nestorian church. Rubruck also gathered some information about China while in Mongolia, such as the Chinese use of paper money and practice of writing with a brush.

Evidence that European Christians were present in China during the Mongol period is provided by this tombstone found in Yangzhou in 1951. It identifies the deceased as Katarina Vilioni, gives her father's name, and reports that she died in June 1342. The figure at the top represents Mary and the baby Jesus, and below that the martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, showing her being beheaded.

The most famous European visitor to the Mongol lands was the Venetian Marco Polo. In his famous *Description of the World*, Marco Polo described all the places he visited or learned about during his seventeen years away from home. He reported being warmly received by Khubilai, who impressed him enormously, as did Mongol military forces. He was also awed by the wealth and splendour of Chinese cities and spread the notion of Asia as a land of riches where people freely accepted paper money. Even in Marco Polo's lifetime, some skeptics did not believe his tale, and today scholars recognize that he stretched the truth in more than one place to make himself look good. But experts have validated much of what he reported.

The more rapid transfer of people and goods across Central Asia spread more than ideas and inventions. It also spread diseases, the most deadly of which was the bubonic plague. When the Mongols were assaulting the city of Kaffa in the Crimea in 1346, they themselves were infected by the plague and had to withdraw. Soon the disease was carried from port to port throughout the Mediterranean by ship. The

The Mongols regulated travel through passes, like this one made of iron with silver inlay and measuring 7 inches (11 cm) tall. The inscription, in Mongolian, offers imperial protection to the bearer.

confusion of the mid fourteenth century, which led to the loss of Mongol power in China, Iran, and Central Asia, undoubtedly owes something to the effect of the spread of the plague and other diseases.

Among contemporary historians, it is now common to celebrate the genius of the Mongol military machine and treat the spread of ideas and inventions as an obvious good, probably because we tend to see global communication as a positive in our own world. There is no reason to assume, however, that every person or every society benefited equally from the improved communications and the new political institutions of the Mongol era. Merchants involved in long-distance trade prospered, but those enslaved and transported hundreds or thousands of miles from home would have seen themselves not as the beneficiaries of opportunities to encounter different cultures, but rather as the most pitiable of victims.

The places that were ruled by Mongol governments for a century or more – China, Central Asia, Persia, and Russia – do not seem to have advanced at a more rapid rate during that century than they did in earlier ones, either economically or culturally. By Chinese standards, Mongol imposition of hereditary status distinctions was a step backward from a much more mobile and open society, and placing Persians, Arabs, or Tibetans over Chinese did not arouse much interest in foreign cultures. More foreign music and foreign styles in clothing, art, and furnishings were integrated into Chinese civilization in Tang times than in Mongol times.

In terms of the spread of technological and scientific ideas, Europe seems to have been by far the main beneficiary of increased communication, largely because in 1200 it lagged farther behind than the other areas. Chinese inventions such as printing, gunpowder, and the compass spread westward. Persian and Indian expertise in astronomy and mathematics also spread both east and west. In terms of the spread of religions, Islam gained the most. It spread east along the Silk Route through areas that had previously been Buddhist and also into parts of China where Muslims settled.

Inner Asian rule during these centuries contributed to the development of Chinese civilization in several ways. Inner Asian methods of rule contributed to stronger and more autocratic political structures that had enduring influence. The shift in the economic centre to the south was reinforced by the long separation of north and south, and the Mongols' different treatment of the two regions.

Foreign rule called into question some fundamental Confucian beliefs. In the Confucian vision, the Son of Heaven rightly ruled over All-Under-Heaven. True, there were 'barbarians' at the fringes of the civilized world who did not obey the Son of Heaven, but this was the result of their not yet having received the transformative influence of Chinese culture. But the Inner Asian dynasties of the tenth to fourteenth centuries did not fit this pattern. Some Inner Asian rulers used Confucian universalism to claim legitimacy, presenting themselves as the universal emperors and performing the Confucian rituals associated with the imperial institution. But this did not lead them to lose their own identity or privileges. Nor did their efforts win

An early fifteenth-century manuscript copy of Marco Polo's *Description of the World* includes this illustration of Khubilai presenting the Polos with a travel pass.

over all Chinese. Many literati developed a proto-nationalistic conception of loyalty not just to ruler but to nation and culture.

The Chinese may not have welcomed foreign rule but at all social levels they found ways to adapt creatively and flexibly to their new situations. Chinese civilization proved resilient, able to bend enough to ward off the worst blows, and to strengthen those facets of Chinese identity independent of the Son of Heaven. More important to the survival of Chinese culture than Khubilai's gestures of playing patron was what was going on far from the court – in academies where Confucian teachings were being transmitted, in circles of artists and writers who found ways to maintain confidence in their cultural traditions, in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries that protected local communities, and in local lineages where self-defence and distinctly Chinese rituals were both promoted.

Even if Chinese notions of ethnic identity were sharpened by foreign rule, personal loyalty to one's ruler remained a high ideal. Many conscientious Confucian scholars did everything in their power to make the Yuan government work well, at both the central and local level. When the Yuan fell to a native Chinese dynasty, a not inconsiderable number of such scholars remained loyal to the Yuan and refused to serve the Ming.

Drama and the Performing Arts

Chinese performing arts have a long history. Acrobats and dancers entertained in the palaces of the Warring States period. Cities in Song times were enlivened by comedians, puppeteers, singers, and storytellers who drew on a substantial repertory of farces, moral tales, love stories, and historical legends.

Drama as a literary art was established during the Jin and Yuan periods. The titles of more than 600 Jin dramas have been preserved, but only one full script remains. From Yuan times, however, the scripts of about 160 plays have survived. Most plays were in four acts, with the scripts consisting of alternating sung lyrics and spoken passages. The Mongol rulers were patrons of the theatre, which could be appreciated by those unable to read Chinese. But the development of the literary art of drama probably owes as much to the changed career prospects of the literati. Talented writers, unwilling or unable to serve the conquerors, earned money by writing scripts for impresarios, an activity previously looked on as too vulgar for men well-educated in the literary tradition.

One of the most accomplished of these playwrights was Guan Hanqing, author of sixty-odd plays. In *The Injustice to Dou E*, a young widow, Dou E, falsely confesses to a murder to spare her mother-in-law from torture. Before her execution, which takes place on a summer day, she announces that Heaven will prove her innocent by sending a fall of snow and initiating a three-year drought. As it turns out, the judicial intendant who reviews the case is none other than her father, who, years before, had sold her to raise money to travel to take the examinations. He cannot return her to life but he does bring the true miscreants to justice.

Dramas like this one were loved as much for the poetic qualities of the arias as for the plots. On her way to the execution grounds Dou E sang of her plight:

> The virtuous suffer poverty and early deaths
> But the wicked enjoy long lives of wealth and honour.
> Even Heaven and earth now fear the mighty and bully
> the weak,
> Simply letting evil take its course.
> O earth! You have not distinguished between the good
> and the bad!
> O Heaven! You have confused the worthy and the
> unworthy!
> My tears stream down endlessly!

Some see in dramas like *The Injustice to Dou E* subtle protest of Mongol rule, but tales of injustice were common under native dynasties as well.

Even if the Chinese people loved drama and opera, the performers did not command high social status. Singers and actors were classed with prostitutes as a demeaned category of people, forbidden to marry ordinary commoners. Nor could their sons or grandsons take the civil service examinations. Women who performed in public were seen as little better than prostitutes, an attitude that led to the widespread practice of female impersonation by male actors. But men impersonating women were generally assumed to be homosexuals, adding to the association between the theatre and sexual laxity. Some people entered the theatre through birth into families of actors; others were trained from childhood by impresarios who purchased them from their parents for the purpose.

Opposite
Characters in theatrical performances wore elaborate costumes and stereotyped facial makeup, shown here in a large Yuan dynasty mural in a hall of the Guangsheng temple in Hongtong, Shanxi province.

Above
Storytellers and puppeteers entertained city dwellers with much the same stories that playwrights worked into their polished dramatic texts. Detail from a fourteenth-century handscroll in ink and colour on paper.

Right
Theatrical performances were so popular in Jin times that representations of actors and musicians were used to decorate tomb walls. This carved brick from a twelfth-century tomb at Jishan, Shanxi province, depicts actors in stock roles in the front row, with the musicians who accompany their performances behind them. Each figure is 12 to 15 inches (30 to 38 cm) tall.