CHAPTER TWELVE

12

China Under Mongol Rule (1215–1368)

The Mongols conquered China in successive campaigns stretching over seven decades. Even the non-Chinese rulers of north China, the Tanguts and Jurchens, themselves horsemen proud of their reputation as fierce fighters, had to submit to the superior striking force of the Mongols. Although the Mongols brought massive destruction in their early campaigns, by the time of Khubilai (r. 1360–1394), they had become more sophisticated administrators. Because Mongols and people from elsewhere in Asia occupied a large share of administrative posts, the traditional elite of Confucian-educated men generally had to turn to other occupations.

Scholars of this period have devoted much of their energy to working out the political and military history of the age. How did Jin and Song officials organize resistance, and why did it fail? What policies did the Mongols put in place? Why did the Yuan Dynasty in China fail to last even two centuries? Another set of questions revolves around how Chinese coped with the Mongol presence. Did the experience of bitter defeat have any long-term effects on Chinese culture? What was going on in society at local levels, beyond the purview of Mongol rulers?

THE MONGOL CONQUEST OF THE JIN AND XIA DYNASTIES

North China fell to the Mongols early in Chinggis's (Ching-gis) campaigns. Chinggis had raided Jin territory in 1205 and 1209 and launched a major campaign in 1211. He led an army of about 50,000 bowmen, and his three sons led another of similar size. The Jin, with 150,000 cavalry, mostly Jurchen, and more than 300,000 Chinese infantrymen, thought they had the strongest army known to history. Yet Mongol tactics frustrated them. The Mongols would take a city, plunder it, and then withdraw, letting Jin take it back and deal with the food shortages and destruction. Both the Jin Western Capital (modern Datong) and their Central Capital (Beijing, bay-jing) were taken this way more than once.

Jin did not have stable leadership during this crisis. In 1213 a Jurchen general murdered the Jin emperor and put another on the throne, only to be murdered himself two months later. In 1214, Jin negotiated a humiliating peace with Chinggis, who then withdrew his armies from the Central Capital. The new Jin emperor decided that the Central Capital was too vulnerable, so he moved the court to the Southern Capital, Kaifeng, bringing thirty thousand carts of documents and treasures (reversing the journey north of 1126). Because Chinggis thought Jin had agreed to vassal status, he interpreted the transfer of the capital as revolt. When the Central Capital fell in 1215, it was sacked and burned. From then on, Jin controlled little more than a province-sized territory around Kaifeng.

The rump Jin state, hoping to expand to the south, attacked Song from 1216 to 1223. The next Jin emperor concentrated on defending against the Mongols, but in 1229, when the new khan, Ögödei, sent the main Mongol army to destroy Jin, Jin could barely slow their advance and succumbed by 1234.

As the Mongols captured Jin territory, Chinggis recruited more and more Chinese and Khitans into his armies, arguing that they had little reason to be loyal to the Jurchen. Chinese soldiers and generals were incorporated into Mongol armies, and literate Chinese were given clerical jobs. Chinese also were put to work as catapult operators during sieges. In 1218 the Mongol commander leading the north China campaigns recommended to Chinggis a well-educated and highly sinicized Khitan named Yelü Qucai (yeh-lew chyu-tsy). Chinggis is said to have addressed him, "Liao and Jin have been enemies for generations; I have taken revenge for you." Yelü had the courage to disagree: "My father and grandfather have both served Jin respectfully. How can I, as a subject and son, be so insincere in my heart as to consider my sovereign and my father as enemies?"* Chinggis, admiring his forthrightness, took him into his entourage. Yelü served the Mongols for the next twenty-five years, patiently trying to get them to see the benefits of ruling their Chinese subjects in Chinese ways.

The Tangut Xia Dynasty suffered much the same fate as Jin. Early on, in 1209, Xia submitted to Chinggis and agreed to help the Mongols attack Jin, but during the next dozen years also tried to secure alliances with Jin and Song. Chinggis eventually decided that Xia had failed to live up to the terms of its submission to the Mongols and personally led a large force into Xia territory in 1226. It only enraged Chinggis when Xia soldiers fought well; in response, he had his generals systematically destroy Xia, city by city. Chinggis himself led the final siege of the capital, which valiantly held out for five months. Chinggis died during the siege, but his death was kept secret. When the Xia ruler offered to surrender, he was persuaded to walk out of the capital with a small entourage. Perhaps because he was held in some way responsible for Chinggis's death, he was promptly hacked to death, and the Mongol troops, on entering the city, did their best to slaughter every living being in it.

During this period north China suffered enormous destruction. Mongol armies did not try to control territory; they only plundered it. Sometimes they slaughtered the entire population of a town, and even when people were not slaughtered, they were frequently seized like their cattle and enslaved. The Mongols began by giving out large chunks of land as fiefs to generals, both Mongols and allies. This did not lead to orderly government, however, because the fief holders were generals on campaigns elsewhere. With no one maintaining order, farmers suffered the depredations not only of Mongol soldiers but also of bandits, rebels, and local defense forces.

Ögödei's Mongol advisers proposed turning much of north China into pastureland. Yelü Qucai offered the counterargument that the Mongols should leave the Chinese farmers in place because great wealth could be extracted from them through equitably collected taxation. He calculated that the Mongols could raise revenues of 500,000 ounces of silver, 80,000 bolts of silk, and more than 20,000 tons of grain by direct taxation of subjects. He was given authorization to put his tax plan into effect, but before it had much chance to show its benefits, Yelü's rivals convinced Ögödei that an even more lucrative way to raise revenue was to let Central Asian Muslim merchants bid against each other for licenses to collect taxes. To the Chinese, these Central Asian tax farmers were even more oppressive than the Mongol lords.

Some Chinese who had served the Jurchen refused to serve the Mongols out of loyalty to the defeated dynasty. Yuan Haowen (ywan how-won) (1190–1257) passed the examinations in 1221 and served in Kaifeng during Jin's final struggle. When Kaifeng fell, he wrote a letter to Yelü Qucai, asking that

*Igor de Rachelwiltz et al., eds., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period (1200–1300)* (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1993), p. 140.

fifty-four men of letters be spared by the Mongols. He himself was interned for two years; on his release, he devoted himself to collecting materials for a history of the Jin Dynasty. A poet, he also wrote poems on the fall of the Jin. He viewed continuing to write as a way to preserve Chinese civilization. The following poem, "Crossing the Yellow River, June 12," describes what he saw around the time Kaifeng fell:

> White bones scattered
> like tangled hemp,
> how soon before mulberry and catalpa
> turn to dragon-sands?
> I only know north of the river
> there is no life:
> crumbled houses, scattered chimney smoke
> from a few homes.*

Other Chinese subjects of the Jin took a different attitude. From experience with the Jin, they knew that the Chinese would fare better if Chinese were the administrators and could shield Chinese society from the most brutal effects of Mongol rule. Therefore, many Jin officials willingly served the Mongols. Some dedicated Confucian scholars such as Xu Heng (shyu huhng) devoted themselves to the task of teaching Mongol rulers the principles of Confucian government.

THE MONGOL CONQUEST OF THE SOUTHERN SONG

The Song Dynasty had plenty of time to get ready to fight the Mongols. They knew of the Mongols' conquests of both Xia and Jin. In the 1230s, the Mongols had also attacked Sichuan, under Song control, and refugees from Sichuan brought stories of the horror of the Mongol advance. Song knew it had to raise revenues and prepare its armies for a fearsome enemy. In a desperate attempt to raise revenues, an activist chancellor confiscated parts of the lands of the rich, leading to the disaffection of important segments of the population. But the attack did not come when expected in the 1240s or 1250s, a period when the Mongols were busy extending their conquests into Central Asia, Persia, and Russia. Song therefore had more time to prepare and the Mongols more time to learn how to deal with south China.

Khubilai

The man behind the final conquest of the Song was Khubilai (b. 1215), a grandson of Chinggis, son of his youngest son, Tolui. In Khubilai's youth, his uncle Ögödei was Great Khan (r. 1229–1241), and succession went to Ögödei's descendants until 1251, when Khubilai's elder brother Möngke became Great Khan.

In the 1240s, Khubilai spent much of his time in Mongolia. One of the Chinese who came to call on him there was Liu Bingzhong (lyou bing-jung) (1216–1274), a believer in Three Teachings syncretism (which drew from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism). Khubilai appointed Liu as a major adviser, and Liu in turn introduced Khubilai to many other Chinese, both generals and scholars. From them, Khubilai came to understand that the repeated plundering of north China had greatly reduced its worth and that letting Mongol lords make the residents of their lands slaves had impoverished the society and made it practically ungovernable.

In 1251, Khubilai was assigned control of all north China, and he put in place a much more Chinese style of government. Khubilai never learned to read Chinese and did not identify with Chinese culture but he did come to appreciate that China could be exploited most effectively through Chinese methods. In 1254, Möngke sent Khubilai to lead a campaign south from Sichuan into Yunnan, where he defeated the independent country of Dali (dah-lee), incorporating this region into China for the first time. (See **Documents: The Luoluo.**) When Khubilai was enraged at the resistance of the king of Dali, a Chinese adviser convinced him not to slaughter the population for the faults of their ruler by reminding him of a passage in which Mencius asserted that only someone "who takes no pleasure in killing people" would be able to unify the realm (*Mencius* 1A6).

Möngke died in 1259 during a campaign against Song. His death brought the campaign to a close as the Mongols headed north to select a new khan. Before a full assembly met, however, Khubilai declared himself the successor. Elsewhere, his younger brother Arigh Böke did the same thing. It took a four-year civil war to end this dispute in Khubilai's favor. In 1264, Khubilai constructed a new capital at the

*Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo, *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry*. Copyright © 1975, Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission of Indiana University Press.

site of the Liao and Jin capitals. This capital, Dadu (dah-doo) (modern Beijing), became the main capital of the khanate of the Great Khan, which stretched from Mongolia through north China and Korea. In the 1270s, Khubilai began more concerted efforts to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese. In 1271, he adopted the Chinese name Yuan ("primal") for the Mongols' state in China, casting it as a dynasty to the Chinese. He explained the choice of the word *yuan* by reference to a passage from the ancient *Book of Changes*. Although the Yuan retained the traditional Chinese county and prefectural governments, it added a new higher level, the province, which had the authority to handle much of government business on its own, without seeking approval from the central government.

Crossing the Yangzi River

Many non-Chinese groups had gained control of north China in the past, from the Xianbei of the Northern Wei to the recent Khitans and Jurchens. None of them, however, had been able to secure control of any territory south of the Yangzi River, in no small part because cavalry were of little advantage in a land crisscrossed with streams and canals. Moreover, controlling the Yangzi required a navy. When Jin had conquered Shu in the third century and Sui had conquered the last of the Southern Dynasties in the sixth century, the first step to conquest of the south had been the construction of a fleet of ships large enough to contest control of the Yangzi River. By the 1260s, the Mongols had plenty of Chinese advisers to explain this to them. They soon put Chinese shipbuilders to work building a fleet. Khubilai also sent envoys to Song to urge them to surrender (see **Biography: Hao Jing, Imprisoned Envoy**).

In 1268, the Mongols set siege to Xiangyang (shyahng-yahng), a major city on a northern tributary leading into the Yangzi River. Both sides saw this city as the key to control of the river; as a consequence, the siege lasted five years. Each side had thousands of boats and tens of thousands of troops. The Mongols' force was multiethnic, with Chinese, Uighur, Persian, Jurchen, and Korean experts in siege warfare and naval tactics. Muslim engineers demonstrated their superior catapults, which could throw rocks weighing up to a hundred pounds each. To keep the residents of the city from starving, the Chinese fleet regularly ran the blockade to ferry food supplies into the city.

Once Xiangyang fell to the Mongols in 1273, the Mongol general Bayan (1237–1295) was put in charge of the invasion of the south. He led an army of 200,000, mainly Chinese. Victory was often achieved without fighting: generals who had already gone over to the Mongols were sent ahead to persuade Song commanders of the wisdom of surrender. At one point, the Song chancellor, Jia Sidao (jya sih-dow), personally led an army of 130,000 and a navy of twenty-five hundred ships to keep the Mongols from entering the lower Yangzi region. The Mongols, landing their cavalry on both sides of the river and using catapults to destroy Song ships, still prevailed. Jia was dismissed from office and soon killed by angry local officials.

Although by the 1260s many Chinese in the north were working for the Mongols, Song officials and the educated class more generally tended to see in the Mongols the greatest threat Chinese civilization had ever faced. As Song officials readied themselves for the inevitable onslaught, many committed themselves to an all-out effort. That China had survived rule by non-Chinese before did not allay their fears. The Mongols seemed more savage and less likely to protect key features of Chinese culture and tradition than any previous foe.

Although Song had generals willing to resist to the bitter end, it lacked adequate leadership. The emperor at the time was a child, and the advisers to the empress dowager spent much of their energy opposing each other's plans. By the time the Mongol armies crossed the Yangzi in 1275, the empress dowager was reduced to calling on the people to rise up and fight the invading barbarians. Although some two hundred thousand recruits responded to the call, they were no match for the battle-hardened Mongols. The Mongols also had the advantage of scare tactics. To frighten Hangzhou into submitting without a fight, on the way there the Mongols ordered the total slaughter of the city of Changzhou (chahng-joe). The ploy worked. The empress dowager, wanting to spare the people of the capital, surrendered. She, the child emperor, and other members of the Song imperial family were taken north to Beijing as hostages. Song loyalists, however, held out for three more years, placing young children from the Song imperial family on the throne. The final battle occurred off the coast of Guangdong (gwahng-dung) province. Many Chinese fled into Vietnam, which the Mongols soon unsuccessfully attacked with an army of recently defeated Chinese soldiers.

DOCUMENTS

The Luoluo

The region of modern Yunnan province in southwest China became part of China for the first time during the Yuan period, after the Mongols conquered it. During Tang and Song times, this region was ruled by the independent kingdoms of Nanzhao and Dali. In 1301 the Chinese official Li Jing was given the post of deputy pacification commissioner for the northwest corner of Yunnan and neighboring Guizhou (gway-joe). After two years there, he wrote a treatise on the many different ethnic groups of the area, with particular attention to where they stood on a continuum from "raw" to "cooked"— that is, how civilized they were. In this passage, he describes the Luoluo (law-law). Also called the Yi, the Luoluo remain a major ethnic group in the area.

The Luoluo [Yi] are also known as the Wu Man or Black Barbarians.

The men put their hair up in a coil and pluck their facial hair or shave their heads. They carry two knives, one at each side, and enjoy fighting and killing. When a disagreement arises among fathers and sons and among brothers, they are known to attack each other with military weapons. Killing is taken lightly, and they consider it a sign of valor. They prize horses with cropped tails, their saddles have no trappings, and their stirrups are carved from wood in the shape of a fish's mouth to accommodate the toes.

The women wear their hair down and wear cotton clothing, and the wealthy wear jewelry and embroidered clothes; the humble are garbed in sheepskin. They ride horses sidesaddle. Unmarried girls wear large earrings and cut their hair level with their eyebrows, and their skirts do not even cover their knees. Men and women, rich and poor, all wear felt wraps and go barefoot, and they can go as long as one year without washing face or hands.

It is the custom of husbands and wives not to see each other during the day, but only to sleep together at night. Children as old as ten *sui* most likely have never seen their father. Wives and concubines are not jealous of each other. Even the well-to-do do not use padding on their beds, but just spread pine needles on the ground with only a layer of felt and mat. Marriages are arranged with the maternal uncle's family, but if a suitable partner cannot be found, they can look elsewhere for a match. When someone falls ill, they do not use medicine, but instead call in a male shaman, who is known as the *daxipo*. He uses chicken bones

Prominent among the Song loyalists was Wen Tianxiang (won tyen-shyahng), a poet and official who took up arms. Long after there was any real chance of driving the Mongols out, Wen kept fighting, withdrawing farther and farther south. Even after he was captured, he resisted all inducements to serve in the Yuan government, preferring execution to serving the Mongols.

LIFE IN CHINA UNDER THE MONGOLS

Life in China under the Mongols was much like life in China under earlier alien rulers. Once order was restored, people did their best to get on with their lives. Some suffered real hardship. Many farmers had their lands expropriated; others were forced into slavery or serfdom, perhaps transported to a distant city, never to see their family again. Yet people still spoke Chinese, followed Chinese customary practices in arranging their children's marriages or dividing their family property, made offerings at local temples, celebrated New Year and other customary festivals, and turned to local landowners when in need. Teachers still taught students the classics; scholars continued to write books; and books continued to be printed. (See Color Plate 16.)

The Mongols, like the Khitans and Jurchens before them, did not see anything particularly desirable in

to divine good and evil fortunes. The tribal leader always has the shaman at his side, and he must consult the shaman to make a final decision in all matters great and small.

A woman who is about to get married must first have relations with the shaman, and then "dance" with all the groom's brothers. This custom is known as "making harmony." Only after that can she be married to her husband. If any one of the brothers refuses to go along with this custom, he will be regarded as unrighteous and everyone will be disgusted with him.

The first wife is known as the *naide*, and it is only her children who can inherit their father's position. If the *naide* has a son who dies before marrying, she will go ahead and arrange a wife for him anyway. Anyone can then have relations with the deceased son's wife, and any child born is considered the child of the deceased. If the tribal leader does not leave a male heir, his wife's [the *naide*'s] daughter then becomes the leader. However, she then has no female attendants—only ten or more young male attendants, with whom she can have relations.

When the tribal leader dies, they wrap his body in a leopard skin, cremate him, and then bury his bones on a mountain at a location known only to his closest relatives. After the burial they take images of the Seven Precious Things and place them on a high platform. They then go steal the head of a neighboring nobleman and offer it as a sacrifice. If they are not able to obtain one, they cannot make the sacrifice. At the time of the sacrificial ceremony all the relatives arrive, and they sacrifice more than a thousand cattle and sheep, or at least several hundred. Every year when they celebrate the spring festival during the twelfth month, they take a long vertical pole and a horizontal piece of wood, [and arranging a seesaw] with one person on each side, they go up and down together playing.

They support many soldiers, who are called *juke*, and they generously provide for them. When they go off to battle, they view death as "returning home." They expertly craft armor and swords that are worth dozens of horses. On their javelins and crossbow arrow tips they put a poison that kills instantly.

Questions for Analysis

1. Does the author seem an objective observer?
2. Would any of the Luoluo's customs make it difficult for them to assimilate into Chinese society?

---

the openness of Chinese society, with opportunities for people to rise in status through hard work or education. They aimed instead at stability and placed people in hereditary occupational categories: farmer, Confucian scholar, physician, astrologer, soldier, artisan, salt producer, miner, Buddhist monk, and others. Many occupational groups had to provide unpaid services according to a rotational schedule and earn their living the rest of the year. Often the only alternative for those whose obligations threatened to bankrupt them was to abscond.

Besides these occupational categories, the Mongols classified the population into four grades, apparently as a way to keep the Chinese from using their numbers to gain a dominant position. Not surprisingly, the Mongols put themselves in the top grade. Next came various non-Chinese, such as the Uighurs and Central Asians. Below them were the former subjects of Jin, called the Han. And at the bottom were the former subjects of the Song, called southerners. These classifications affected methods of taxation, the judicial process, and appointment to office. The Han, for instance, were taxed by household according to Jin practice, whereas the southerners were taxed by acreage following Song precedent. In legal cases, each group was tried and sentenced according to its own legal tradition, which meant, for instance, that Chinese were the only ones tattooed if convicted of theft.

BIOGRAPHY Hao Jing, Imprisoned Envoy

Hao Jing (how jing) was born in north China in 1223 while his family was fleeing the Mongols and his father was eking out a modest living as a teacher. Because of the chaotic conditions, during his childhood, his family moved ten times. In 1238, when he was fifteen, Hao Jing started taking on tutoring jobs himself. Once he spent five years as the children's tutor in the home of an official who owned a large library, which enabled him not only to continue study himself but also to get to know some prominent literary men.

In 1253, Hao visited the ruins of the former Jin capital (at modern Beijing), largely destroyed by the Mongols in 1215. In 1255 he traveled through Shandong and visited Qufu (chyu-foo), the birthplace of Confucius, and Mount Tai (ty), the sacred mountain. When Hao Jing was thirty-three, he was recommended to Khubilai, then in charge of China proper and gathering around him a group of Chinese advisers. The histories report that Khubilai engaged him in dialogue on how best to govern "from morning to night" for several days. Hao largely argued the Confucian position that virtuous rule is the most effective.

Hao Jing had to return home when his father became very ill, but after his father died, Hao Jing rejoined Khubilai and participated in the assault on Song in 1259. Because Hao Jing gave good advice, Khubilai assigned him a military post. When victory was not immediate, Hao Jing recommended to Khubilai that he send an envoy to Song to propose a peace treaty of the sort Song had had with Liao and Jin, involving yearly tribute.

Before long Khubilai appointed Hao Jing special envoy to the Song emperor. When someone warned Hao Jing that his assignment might be dangerous, he supposedly answered, "I have read about the Way and studied it for thirty years, yet I have not yet accomplished any real good in the world. Now the North and the South are courting disaster, a situation which has reached calamitous proportions. If I can stop the armies from fighting, calm the disturbances, and save the lives of millions of people who are now living under the shadow of war, my learning will finally be of some use."*

Before Hao Jing departed, Khubilai asked him to submit an assessment on his views of the current situation. Hao Jing responded with a long essay begging the khan to take as his model not only the Tang and Song Dynasties but also the Liao and Jin Dynasties, which had drawn on Chinese officials and Chinese institutions.

Hao Jing set off on his mission with a retinue of about forty, all of them Chinese, because Khubilai said this was a mission for properly trained Chinese, not Mongols. After nearly four months on the road, Hao Jing and his party entered Song territory. They were allowed to proceed for another month, then were taken to a fort outside Yangzhou. Because there had been a recent attack by a rebellious warlord, the Song court suspected Hao's mission might be a ruse and kept him there for what turned out to be sixteen years. Hao wrote to the local officials, to Khubilai, and to the Song emperor, but it is unclear which, if any, of his messages got through. For a long time the guards tried to get Hao Jing to defect to Song, but he remained firmly loyal to the Mongol rulers.

Hao Jing did his best to keep the other members of his retinue from going stir-crazy. The better educated he taught about Confucian scholarship; the illiterate he tried to teach to read. To pass his time he wrote poetry and commentaries on the classics. After six years, the soldiers in his retinue got into a brawl, with the result that several were killed. Hao Jing and six others then constructed a separate shelter in the compound to separate themselves. After ten years, Hao was able to borrow some of the dynastic histories and set to compiling books on inconsistencies in them.

Not until 1275, when the Mongols had crossed the Yangzi River and Hao Jing's younger brother was sent as an envoy to Hangzhou, did Song agree to release Hao Jing and his party. On his return to the north, he was treated like a hero, but unfortunately by the time he got to Dadu and his audience with Khubilai, he was quite ill, and he died within a few months.

Questions for Analysis

1. Why did Khubilai send only Chinese on the mission to Song?
2. Why did Hao Jing accept confinement rather than switch sides, as so many others did?

*Igor de Rachewiltz et al., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period (1200–1300)* (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1993), pp. 358–359.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Blue-and-White Porcelain

Porcelain is distinguished from other types of ceramics by its smoothness, whiteness, and translucence. Only certain types of clays can be used to make porcelain, and the wares must be fired at very high temperatures (1280–1400°C, 2336–2552°F). During Song times, Jingdezhen in Jiangxi became a major center for making porcelain.

The development of the highly popular blue-and-white style of porcelain owes much to the circumstances created by the Mongol Empire. The Yuan rulers established an official agency to supervise ceramic production at Jingdezhen. Artists at these kilns invented a new style of decoration, with underglaze-painted decoration using cobalt blue. West Asia was the best source for cobalt, so Chinese production depended on stable trade relations across Asia. Moreover, the designs of this type of porcelain seem to have been stimulated by Arab clients who wanted ceramics that would be more durable and refined than the ones they were used to but with designs of the sort common in their region. Some Yuan-period blue-and-white wares exported to the Middle East are kept today in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. They have dense, busy designs reminiscent of the textiles and carpets of the region.

Blue-and-White Plate. This fourteenth-century plate combines Chinese designs, such as the four cranes in the inner ring, with dense floral patterns highly appreciated in the Islamic world.

The reason for codifying ethnic differences in this way was to preserve the Mongols' privileges as conquerors. Chinese were not allowed to take Mongol names, and great efforts were made to keep them from passing as Mongols. Intermarriage was discouraged, though it did occur. Many of the differences in how Chinese were treated, however, came from Mongol fear that they would rebel or attempt sabotage. Chinese were forbidden to own weapons or congregate in public. Khubilai even prohibited Chinese from dealing in bamboo because it could be used to make bows and arrows. Chinese were subject to severe penalties if they fought back when attacked by a Mongol. Mongols, however, merely had to pay a fine if found guilty of murdering a Chinese.

Because the Mongols wanted to extract wealth from China, they had every incentive to develop the economy. They encouraged trade both within China

and beyond its borders. The Mongols allowed the conversion of Song paper money into Yuan currency and tried to keep paper money in circulation. They repaired the Grand Canal, which had been ruined during the initial conquest of north China. Chinese industries with strong foreign markets, such as porcelain, thrived during the Yuan period. A recently excavated vessel headed from Ningbo (ning-baw) to Japan that was wrecked off the coast of Korea in 1323 contained about seventeen thousand pieces of ceramics, such as bowls and cups. More than half were green celadon from a kiln complex not far from Ningbo; the next largest group came from the Jingdezhen (jing-deh-juhn) kilns in Jiangxi (jyahng-shyee). In Yuan times, these kilns invented a new style of decoration using underglaze blue drawing that was widely exported throughout Asia (see **Material Culture: Blue-and-White Porcelain**).

Despite Mongol desire to see China rich, the economy of north China, in particular, was hard hit by the Mongols and began a downward spiral that took centuries to reverse. First came the devastation of the initial conquest. Restoring production was impeded by widespread scattering of the population, much of it forced by the conquerors. Taxation, once it was in the hands of tax farmers, was often ruinous. The Mongols had difficultly regulating the paper currency, and by the fourteenth century inflation was rampant.

After the death of Khubilai in 1294, Mongol administration began to decline. Cliques of Mongol nobles fought over the place of China within the khanate of the Great Khan. Should traditional steppe strategies of expansion remain central to the Mongol state, or was there too much to be gained from exploiting China that they should give up steppe-based expansion? Unlike the Jurchen, who had largely moved into north China, most of the Mongols remained in Mongolia. Renzong (run-dzung), who came to the throne in 1311, was the first Mongol emperor able to both read and speak Chinese, and he shifted the emphasis toward China. In 1313 he reestablished a limited civil service exam system. His son Yingzong succeeded him in 1320, but when he continued the China-centered policies, he was assassinated by opposing factions. Civil wars and factional violence marred the next several reigns. The last Mongol emperor, who came to the throne in 1333 at age thirteen, was bright and well educated in Chinese but not a strong ruler. By his reign, the central government was failing to keep order in China or even maintain a stable currency. A colder-than-average climate and the spread of deadly diseases added to the hardship. Power devolved to the local level, to anyone who could organize an area well enough to suppress banditry.

The Chinese Educated Elite During the Mongol Era

Government service, which had long been central to the identity and income of the educated elite in China, was not as widely available during the Yuan Dynasty. Because the Mongols employed Mongols, Tibetans, Uighurs, Persians, Jurchens, and others in their government in China, there were fewer positions for the Chinese educated elite than there had been under either Jin or Song. Moreover, the large majority of Chinese who gained government positions came from clerk, not from scholar-official, families. The Mongols had no interest in doing their own paperwork and employed clerks to keep the records that made government possible. Clerks without classical educations had always been looked down on by Chinese scholars. To the Mongols, however, they seemed perfectly suited to doing their bidding.

The Mongols reinstituted the civil service examinations in 1315, but opportunities for scholars were still very limited. There were quotas to ensure that no more than a quarter of those who passed would be southerners, no more than a quarter would be Han, and half would be Mongols and other non-Chinese. In addition, there were regional quotas, which had the effect of limiting opportunities for those from the southeast where educational traditions were strongest. On top of that, only about 2 percent of the positions in the bureaucracy were filled through the examination system.

In the south, the generation that had devoted itself to resisting the Mongols rarely also served them, but that generation's sons, growing up under Mongol rule, frequently did. The Mongols were tolerant of all religions but tended to favor Buddhists over Confucians. Khubilai gave the Tibetan cleric Yang Lianjianjia wide powers in postwar Hangzhou. He not only converted the Song palaces to Buddhist temples but also excavated the Song imperial tombs to extract valuables from them to cover the cost of building more Buddhist temples. Defeated Song loyalists gave meaning to their survival by secretly searching for the bones of the Song emperors and respectfully reburying them.

Palace Museum, Beijing/Cultural Relics Press

Wintry Landscape. Ni Zan (1301–1374) was known for his sketchy monochrome landscapes. In his inscribed poem, he states that he did this painting as a present for a friend who was departing to take up an official post, to remind him of the joys of peaceful retirement.

Zhao Mengfu (jow muhng-foo) (1254–1322) is a good example of a southern literatus who decided to serve the Mongols. Descended from the first Song emperor, Zhao had grown up as a member of the privileged imperial clan. He had enrolled in the imperial academy in Hangzhou before the fall of the Southern Song, but he had not yet held office. For the first five years after the Song surrender, he kept to his circle of friends interested in poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Several of them had lost their property during the wars and were dependent on patrons to survive. This group looked on painting in archaic styles as a way to express longing for the past and dissatisfaction with the present.

When Khubilai in 1286 dispatched a southerner to recruit prominent southern literati to serve the Mongols, Zhao Mengfu decided to accept the call. Not all of his friends and relatives approved; some refused to speak to him after they learned of his decision. Once in the north, Zhao used Khubilai's favor to work for Chinese interests. He pressed for better treatment of officials, arguing that literati should be exempt from corporal punishment. He proposed major currency reforms and did his best to cause the downfall of the notoriously corrupt Tibetan chancellor Sangha. By 1316, he had risen to president of the Hanlin Academy, the prestigious government organ that supplied literary men to assist the emperor.

Southern literati who did not serve the Mongols found other ways to support themselves. Some could live off the income from their lands; others worked as physicians, fortunetellers, children's teachers, Daoist priests, publishers, booksellers, or playwrights. Many took on leadership roles at the local level, such as founding academies for Confucian learning, organizing their kinsmen into lineages, and promoting local charitable ventures. Through such activities, scholars out of office could assert the importance of civil over military values and see themselves as trustees of the Confucian tradition.

One art that benefited from the political frustrations of Chinese literati in the Yuan period was painting. Scholars like Su Shi in the Northern Song period had written of the superiority of paintings done by scholars who imbued their paintings with ideas. Still, through the Southern Song period, court painters and professional painters were at the center of stylistic developments, and even of marrying painting and poetry. During the Yuan period, however, men of letters were in the forefront. Some of these painters, like Zhao Mengfu, held office. Others, like Huang Gongwang (hwahng gung-wahng) and Wu Zhen (woo juhn), supported themselves as clerks or diviners. Ni Can (nee tsahn) had enough family wealth to live comfortably without working. All of them painted for a restricted audience of like-minded individuals and often used the allusive side of paintings to make political statements.

Drama

The literary art of drama was given a boost in Yuan times by literati who wrote for the theater. Performing arts had flourished in earlier eras, with plays and performing styles passed down orally from master to disciple among hereditary groups of singers and actors, who were treated as a demeaned caste. Plays generally alternated prose passages and songs. Because women who performed in public were looked on as little better than prostitutes, female roles were often taken by boys or young men impersonating women. The presence of female impersonators, however, only added to the association of the theater with sexual laxity.

With the diminished career prospects of educated men in Yuan times, some talented writers began writing scripts for impresarios, and their scripts began to circulate as texts. About 160 Yuan plays survive, some of which can be read as covert protest against the Mongols. The best known of the Yuan dramatists is Guan Hanqing (gwahn hahn-ching) (ca. 1240–ca. 1320), author of sixty plays, fifteen of which survive complete. The leading characters of most of his plays were virtuous women who act forcefully in a wide variety of social situations, such as a courtesan who befriends a poor examination candidate, a widow who protects her husband's honor, a daughter-in-law who lets herself be executed to spare her mother-in-law from judicial torture, and a mother who is so strict in her education of her sons that all three place first in the civil service examinations in successive years.

There is even a Yuan play in which writing plays is treated as superior to studying the classics. Set in the Jin period Kaifeng, *Grandee's Son Takes the Wrong Career* has as its protagonist the son of a Jurchen official who has fallen in love with a girl whose parents are itinerant performers. When she chides him for studying too much, he distracts her by reading a recent collection of plays, and the two learn the songs in them. The play ends with the young man giving up his studies and joining the troupe. When her father hears of his proposal, he responds, "The only man I want for my son-in-law is a writer of play books."* Only after the young man has shown that he can write speeches and will carry their costumes does the father consent to the marriage.

SUMMARY

The Mongols were the first non-Chinese group to conquer all of China. North China, then under the Jurchen Jin dynasty, was just south of the region of Mongolia where Chinggis Khan rose to power, and it was one of his first targets. Jin lost territory in stages and by 1234 had been fully destroyed. The Mongols went on to seize Sichuan, but did not strike at the heart of the Song Empire until Khubilai became khan in 1260. Naval warfare was a large part of the final assault on the Song because control of the Yangzi was essential to victory. Many Chinese officials saw the Mongols as the gravest threat to Chinese civilization in history and took up arms to show their loyalty to Song.

*William Dolby, *Eight Chinese Plays from the Thirteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 48.

Living under the Mongols definitely had a harsh side. Ordinary people were sometimes enslaved and moved wherever the Mongols wanted them. Many occupations were made hereditary and carried requirements for unpaid labor. The educated elite found their status made hereditary, but they had many fewer chances to serve in the government because most places were filled by Mongols, Uighurs, Central Asians, and even Persians. Some refused to serve the Mongols as a matter of integrity; others thought they could do more good by teaching the Mongols the principles of good government.

An indirect result of the contraction in the demand for Confucian officials was stimulus to the art of drama. Talented writers took work in drama companies, improving the literary quality of the scripts.

How different was China in the 1360s than it had been before the Mongols took control? The more destructive side of this period helped reinforce in China a preference for things Chinese and a wariness about things from outside. Some innovations can be attributed to this period, most notably the province as a political unit with a full array of administrative functions. The elite were given even more incentives than they had in Song times to find ways to maintain their standing without participation in the government. Population had declined, but population records are not good enough to be certain by how much. The gap between north and south China had been reinforced, though it also had very deep roots, leaving the north farther behind economically.

MAKING COMPARISONS

Food Cultures

The food cultures of East Asia have long been interlinked. Throughout the region, food has been offered to ancestors and gods. For centuries the two most popular sources of carbohydrates have been rice and noodles eaten from individual bowls. In all three countries—China, Korea, and Japan—soybeans have been used to make bean curd, soy sauce, and various bean pastes. Food has been served in small enough pieces so that no cutting needs to be done at the table. Fuel-efficient ways of cooking, such as stir-frying and steaming, have been widely used. Chopsticks have long been a ubiquitous utensil for picking up food. Because water normally had to be boiled before it was drunk, simple soups became a major way to consume fluids. At the same time, in all three countries much farmland had been devoted to tea and a significant share of rice used to make alcoholic drinks.

The explanation for these common features is in most cases diffusion of Chinese foodstuffs and food customs to Korea and Japan, many dating back quite early. These were not customs that elites purposely set out to adopt or teach to commoners but rather ones that spread as a by-product of contact. Rice had spread to Korea by 1000 B.C.E. and to Japan by 900 B.C.E. Chopsticks, found in some Shang tombs in China, spread to Korea and Japan during the early centuries C.E. Soybeans were native to both China and Korea, but the ways they were prepared as sauces and bean curd must have spread from China. Foodstuffs that were introduced to China from farther west, such as wheat, barley, and sesame seeds, in time also spread to Korea and Japan. Tea is thought to have spread via monks who studied in China.

In premodern times, most people ate locally produced foods, so there would be considerable differences from place to place in what people ate, depending on the local climate and terrain. Japan, with its long seacoasts suitable for fishing, made the most use of products of the sea, not only fish and shellfish but also seaweed. Many dishes associated with Japan today—sushi, buckwheat noodles (soba), and tempura—appeared only in the eighteenth century. In China, much of the fish consumed came from rivers and lakes rather than from the ocean. In ancient China, millet was the most common grain in the north, but with the introduction of wheat from the west and improved transport of rice from the south, millet gradually came to play a lesser role in people's diet. Wheat became the basic grain in the north, and meals frequently included steamed rolls, rarely seen in the south.

Beginning in the fifteenth century, New World foods such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, tomatoes, corn, chili peppers, and peanuts spread to the countries of East Asia. In all three countries, sweet potatoes became a common "poor people's food." In China it is believed that New World crops contributed to increased food supply and therefore to rapid population growth because they could be cultivated on steep, rainy slopes or sandy coastal soils that had previously been viewed as worthless.

The twentieth century brought many changes in food culture to all three countries. Railways, hothouses, and refrigeration have added to the variety of foods available all year. Restaurants serve versions of Western and other foreign food, and some originally foreign foods such as bread and ice cream have been fully incorporated into everyday eating habits. Yet for most people their own country's cuisine remains a source of pride and pleasure.