

CHAPTER 13

Mongol Eurasia and Its Aftermath, 1200–1500

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter students should:

1. Be able to account for the magnitude and speed of the Mongol conquests.
2. Be able to describe the benefits that resulted from the integration of Eurasia in the Mongol Empire.
3. Be able to compare and contrast the effects of Mongol rule on Russia and the lands of Islam with the effects on East Asia.
4. Be able to identify points of continuity and discontinuity in the transition from Mongol to Ming rule of China.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. The Rise of the Mongols, 1200–1260
 - A. Nomadism in Central and Inner Asia
 1. Nomadic groups depended on scarce water and pasture resources; in times of scarcity, conflicts occurred, resulting in the extermination of smaller groups and in the formation of alliances and out-migration. Around the year 1000 the lands inhabited by the Mongols experienced unusually dry weather with its attendant effects on the availability of resources and pressures on the nomadic Mongol tribes.
 2. Mongol groups were a strongly hierarchical organization headed by a single leader or khan, but the khans had to ask that their decisions be ratified by a council of the leaders of powerful families. Powerful Mongol groups demanded and received tribute in goods and in slaves from those less powerful. Some groups were able to live almost entirely on tribute.
 3. The various Mongol groups formed complex federations that were often tied together by marriage alliances. Women from prestigious families often played an important role in negotiating these alliances.
 4. The seasonal movements of the Mongol tribes brought them into contact with Manicheism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. The Mongols accepted religious pluralism. Mongol khans were thought to represent the Sky God, who transcended all cultures and religions; khans were thus conceived of as universal rulers who both transcended and used the various religions of their subjects.
 5. Nomads strove for economic self-sufficiency, but they always relied on trade with settled people for certain goods, including iron, wood, cotton, grain, and silk. When normal trade relations were interrupted, nomads tended to make war on settled agriculturalists.
 - B. The Mongol Conquests, 1215–1283
 1. Between 1206 and 1234, under the leadership of Genghis Khan and his successors, the Mongols conquered all of North China and were threatening the Southern Song.

During this period and onward to about 1265 the Mongol realms were united as the khans of the Golden Horde, the Jagadai domains of Central Asia, and the Il-khans all recognized the authority of the Great Khan in Mongolia.

2. When Khubilai declared himself Great Khan in 1265 the other Mongol khans refused to accept him; the Jagadai Khanate harbored a particular animosity toward Khubilai.
3. Khubilai founded the Yuan Empire with its capital at Beijing in 1271; in 1279 he conquered the Southern Song. After 1279, the Yuan attempted to extend its control to Southeast Asia. Annam and Champa were forced to pay tribute to the Yuan, but an expedition to Java ended in failure.
4. Historians have pointed to a number of factors that may have contributed to the Mongols' ability to conquer such vast territories. These factors include superior horsemanship, better bows, and the technique of following a volley of arrows with a deadly cavalry charge. Other reasons for the Mongols' success include their ability to learn new military techniques, adopt new military technology, and incorporate non-Mongol soldiers into their armies; their reputation for slaughtering all those who would not surrender; and their ability to take advantage of rivalries among their enemies.

C. Overland Trade and the Plague

1. The Mongol conquests opened overland trade routes and brought about an unprecedented commercial integration of Eurasia. The growth of long-distance trade under the Mongols led to significant transfer of military and scientific knowledge between Europe, the Middle East, China, Iran, and Japan.
2. Diseases including the bubonic plague also spread over the trade routes of the Mongol Empire. The plague that had lingered in Yunnan (now southwest China) was transferred to central and north China, to Central Asia, to Kaffa, and from there to the Mediterranean world.

II. Mongols and Islam, 1260–1500

A. Mongol Rivalry

1. In the 1260s the Il-khan Mongol Empire controlled parts of Armenia and all of Azerbaijan, Mesopotamia, and Iran. Relations between the Buddhist/shamanist Il-khan Mongols and their Muslim subjects were tense because the Mongols had murdered the last Abbasid caliph and because Mongol religious beliefs and customs were contrary to those of Islam.
2. At the same time, Russia was under the domination of the Golden Horde, led by Genghis Khan's grandson Batu, who had converted to Islam and announced his intention to avenge the last caliph. This led to the first conflict between Mongol domains.
3. During this conflict European leaders attempted to make an alliance with the Il-khans to drive the Muslims out of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, while the Il-khans sought European help in driving the Golden Horde out of the Caucasus. These plans for an alliance never came to fruition because the Il-khan ruler Ghazan became a Muslim in 1295.

B. Islam and the State

1. The goal of the Il-khan State was to collect as much tax revenue as possible, which it did through a tax farming system.
2. In the short term, the tax farming system was able to deliver large amounts of grain, cash and silk. In the long term, over-taxation led to increases in the price of grain, a shrinking tax base, and, by 1295, a severe economic crisis.
3. Attempts to end the economic crisis through tax reduction programs coupled with the introduction of paper money failed to avert a depression that lasted until 1349. Thus the Il-khan domains fragmented as Mongol nobles fought each other for diminishing

resources and Mongols from the Golden Horde attacked and dismembered the Il-khan Empire.

4. As the Il-khan Empire and the Golden Horde declined in the fourteenth century, Timur, the last Central Asian conqueror, built the Jagadai Khanate in central and western Eurasia. Timur's descendants, the Timurids, ruled the Middle East for several generations.

C. Culture and Science in Islamic Eurasia

1. In literature, the historian Juvaini wrote the first comprehensive account of the rise of the Mongols under Genghis Khan. Juvaini's work inspired the work of Rashid al-Din, who produced a history of the world that was published in a number of beautifully illustrated editions. Rashid al-Din, a Jew converted to Islam who served as adviser to the Il-khan ruler, was a good example of the cosmopolitanism of the Mongol world. The Timurids also supported notable historians including the Moroccan Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406).
2. Muslims under Mongol rulership also made great strides in astronomy, calendar-making, and the prediction of eclipses. Their innovations included the use of epicycles to explain the movement of the moon around the earth, the invention of more precise astronomical instruments, and the collection of astronomical data from all parts of the Islamic world and China for predicting eclipses with greater accuracy.
3. In mathematics, Muslim scholars adapted the Indian numerical system, devised the method for indicating decimal fractions, and calculated the value of *pi* more accurately than had been done in classical times. Muslim advances in science, astronomy, and mathematics were passed along to Europe and had a significant effect on the development of European science and mathematics.

III. Regional Responses in Western Eurasia

A. Russia and Rule from Afar

1. After they defeated the Kievan Rus, the Mongols of the Golden Horde made their capital at the mouth of the Volga, which was also the end of the overland caravan route from Central Asia. From their capital the Mongols ruled Russia "from afar," leaving the Orthodox Church in place and using the Russian princes as their agents. As in other Mongol realms, the main goal of the Golden Horde was to extract as much tax revenue as possible from their subjects.
2. Because Prince Alexander of Novgorod had assisted the Mongols in their conquest of Russia, the Mongols favored Novgorod and Moscow (ruled by Prince Alexander's brother). The favor shown to Novgorod and Moscow combined with the Mongol devastation of the Ukrainian countryside caused the Russian population to shift from Kiev toward Novgorod and Moscow, and Moscow emerged as the new center of the Russian civilization.
3. Some historians believe that Mongol domination had a negative effect on Russia, bringing economic depression and cultural isolation. Other historians argue that the Kievan state was already declining when the Mongols came, that the over-taxation of Russians under Mongol rule was the work of the Russian princes, that Russia was isolated by the Orthodox church, and that the structure of Russian government did not change appreciably under Mongol rule.
4. Ivan III, the prince of Moscow, ended Mongol rule in 1480 and adopted the title of tsar.

B. New States in Eastern Europe and Anatolia

1. Europe was divided between the political forces of the papacy and those of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Under these conditions, the states of Eastern Europe—particularly Hungary and Poland—faced the Mongol attacks alone.

2. The Mongol armies that attacked Europe were actually an international force including Mongols, Turks, Chinese, Iranians, and Europeans and led by Mongol generals. The well-led “Mongol” armies drove to the outskirts of Vienna, striking fear into the hearts of the Europeans; but rather than press on, the Mongols withdrew in December 1241 so that the Mongol princes could return to Mongolia to elect a successor to the recently deceased Great Khan Ögödei.
3. After the Mongol withdrawal, Europeans initiated a variety of diplomatic and trade overtures toward the Mongols. Contact between Europeans and Mongols increased through the thirteenth century and brought knowledge of geography, natural resources, commerce, science, technology and mathematics from various parts of the Mongol realms to Europe. At the same time, the Mongol invasions and the bubonic plague caused Europeans to question their accepted customs and religious beliefs.
4. The rise and fall of Mongol domination in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was accompanied by the rise of stronger centralized states including Lithuania and the various Balkan kingdoms. Lithuania in particular was able to capitalize on the decline of Mongol power to assert control over its neighbors, particularly Poland.
5. During the period of Mongol domination Anatolia functioned as a route by which Islamic culture was transferred to Europe via Constantinople. The Ottomans, who established themselves in eastern Anatolia in the 1300s but were kept in check by the Timurids, expanded eastward in the 1400s and conquered Constantinople in 1453.

V. Mongol Domination in China, 1271–1368

A. The Yuan Empire, 1279–1368

1. Kubilai Khan understood and practiced Chinese traditions of government. He constructed a Chinese-style capital at Beijing and a summer capital at Shangdu, where he and his courtiers could practice riding and shooting.
2. When the Mongols came to China, it was politically fragmented, consisting of three states: the Tangut, the Jin, and the Southern Song. The Mongols unified these states and restored or preserved the characteristic features of Chinese government.
3. The Mongols also made some innovations in government. These included tax farming, the use of Western Asian Muslims as officials, and a hierarchical system of legally defined status groups defined in terms of race and function. Under the Yuan hierarchical system Confucians had a relatively weak role, while the status of merchants and doctors was elevated.
4. Under Mongol rule China’s cities and ports prospered, trade recovered, and merchants flourished. Merchants organized corporations in order to pool money and share risks. The flourishing mercantile economy led the Chinese gentry elite to move into the cities, where a lively urban culture of popular entertainment, vernacular literature, and the Mandarin dialect of Chinese developed.
5. In the rural areas, cotton growing, spinning, and weaving were introduced to mainland China from Hainan Island, and the Mongols encouraged the construction of irrigation systems. In general, however, farmers in the Yuan were overtaxed and brutalized while dams and dikes were neglected.
6. During the Yuan period China’s population declined by perhaps as much as 40 percent, with northern China seeing the greatest loss of population, while the Yangzi Valley actually saw a significant increase. Possible reasons for this pattern include warfare, the flooding of the Yellow River, north-south migration, and the spread of diseases, including the bubonic plague in the 1300s.

B. Cultural and Scientific Exchange

1. Exchange of scientific, technological, and mathematical knowledge was especially common between Iran and China, as the Yuan and the Il-khan regimes enjoyed good relations and had similar economic policies and a similar interest in sponsoring

- intellectual pursuits. China imported Il-khan science and technology; the Il-khans imported Chinese scholars and texts.
2. During this period Iranian astronomical knowledge, algebra, and trigonometry, and Islamic and Persian medical texts, seeds, and formulas were brought to China.
- C. The Fall of the Yuan Empire
1. In 1368 the Chinese leader Zhu Yuanzhang brought an end to years of chaos and rebellion when he overthrew the Mongols and established the Ming Empire. The Mongols continued to hold power in Mongolia, Turkestan, and Central Asia, from which they were able to disrupt the overland Eurasian trade and threaten the Ming dynasty.
 2. The Ming Empire was also threatened on its northeastern borders by the Jurchens of Manchuria. The Jurchens, who had been influenced by Mongolian culture, posed a significant threat to the Ming by the late 1400s.
- V. The Early Ming Empire, 1368–1500
- A. Ming China on a Mongol Foundation
1. Former monk, soldier, and bandit Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming Empire in 1368. Zhu's regime established its capital in Nanjing and made great efforts to reject the culture of the Mongols, close off trade relations with Central Asia and the Middle East, and to reassert the primacy of Confucian ideology.
 2. At a deeper level, the Ming actually continued many institutions and practices that had been introduced during the Yuan. Areas of continuity include the Yuan provincial structure, the use of hereditary professional categories, the Mongol calendar and, starting with the reign of the Yongle emperor, the use of Beijing as capital.
 3. Between 1405 and 1433 the Ming dispatched a series of expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean under the Muslim eunuch admiral Zheng He. The goals of these missions were to reestablish trade links with the Middle East and bring Southeast Asian countries and their overseas Chinese populations under Chinese control, or at least under its influence.
 4. Zheng He's expeditions retraced routes that were largely known to the Chinese already. The voyages imported some luxury goods (including two giraffes) to China and added as many as fifty countries to China's list of tributaries. However, there was not significant increase in long-distance trade and the voyages were, overall, not profitable.
 5. Many historians wonder why the voyages ceased and whether or not China could have gone on to become a great mercantile power or acquire an overseas empire. In answering this question it is useful to remember that the Zheng He voyages did not use new technology, were not profitable, were undertaken as the personal project of the Yongle Emperor, and may have been inspired partly by his need to prove his worth.
 6. The end of the Zheng He voyages may also be related to the need to use limited resources for other projects, including coastal defense against Japanese pirates and defense of the northern borders against the Mongols. The end of the Zheng He voyages was not the end of Chinese seafaring: it was only the end of the state's organization and funding of such large-scale expeditions.
- B. Technology and Population
1. The Ming saw less technological innovation than the Song; in the area of metallurgy the Chinese lost the knowledge of how to make high-quality bronze and steel. Reasons for the slowdown in technological innovation include the high cost of metals and wood, the revival of a civil service examination system that rewarded scholarship and administration, a labor glut, lack of pressure from technologically sophisticated enemies, and a fear of technology transfer.

2. Korea and Japan moved ahead of China in technological innovation. Korea excelled in firearms, shipbuilding, meteorology, and calendar making, while Japan surpassed China in mining, metallurgy, and novel household goods.
- C. The Ming Achievement
1. The Ming was a period of great wealth, consumerism, and cultural brilliance.
 2. One aspect of Ming popular culture was the development of vernacular novels like *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The Ming was also known for its porcelain-making and for other goods including furniture, lacquered screens, and silk.
- VI. Centralization and Militarism in East Asia, 1200–1500
- A. Korea from the Mongols to the Yi, 1231–1500
1. Korea's leaders initially resisted the Mongol invasions but gave up in 1258 when the king of Koryo surrendered and joined his family to the Mongols by marriage. The Koryo kings then fell under the influence of the Mongols, and Korea profited from exchange with the Yuan in which new technologies including cotton, gunpowder, astronomy, calendar making, and celestial clocks were introduced.
 2. Koryo collapsed shortly after the fall of the Yuan and was replaced by the Yi dynasty. Like the Ming, the Yi reestablished local identity and restored the status of Confucian scholarship while maintaining Mongol administrative practices and institutions.
 3. Technological innovations of the Yi period include the use of moveable type in copper frames, meteorological science, a local calendar, the use of fertilizer, and the engineering of reservoirs. The growing of cash crops, particularly cotton, became common during the Yi period.
 4. The Koreans were innovators in military technology. Among their innovations were patrol ships with cannon mounted on them, gunpowder arrow-launchers, and armored ships.
- B. Political Transformation in Japan, 1274–1500
1. The first (unsuccessful) Mongol invasion of Japan in 1274 made the decentralized local lords of Kamakura Japan develop a greater sense of unity as the shogun took steps to centralize planning and preparation for the expected second assault.
 2. The second Mongol invasion (1281) was defeated by a combination of Japanese defensive preparations and a typhoon. The Kamakura regime continued to prepare for further invasions. As a result, the warrior elite consolidated their position in Japanese society, and trade and communication within Japan increased, but the Kamakura government found its resources strained by the expense of defense preparations.
 3. The Kamakura shogunate was destroyed in a civil war and the Ashikaga shogunate was established in 1338. The Ashikaga period was characterized by a relatively weak shogunal state and strong provincial lords who sponsored the development of markets, religious institutions, schools, increased agricultural production, and artistic creativity.
 4. After the Onin war of 1477, the shogunate exercised no power and the provinces were controlled by independent regional lords who fought with each other. The regional lords also carried out trade with continental Asia.
- C. The Emergence of Vietnam, 1200–1500
1. The area of Vietnam was divided between two states: the Chinese-influenced Annam in the north and the Indian-influenced Champa in the south. The Mongols extracted tribute from both states, but with the fall of the Yuan Empire, they began to fight with each other.
 2. The Ming ruled Annam through a puppet government for almost thirty years in the early fifteenth century until the Annamese threw off Ming control in 1428. By 1500 Annam had completely conquered Champa and established a Chinese-style government over all of Vietnam.