Yuan Dynasty

Great Yuan

Dai Ön Ulus

1271–1368

Yuan Dynasty in 1294

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Dadu (modern Beijing)</th>
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<td>Languages</td>
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<td>Confucianism</td>
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<td>Government</td>
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<td>Emperor</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 1260–1294</td>
<td>Kublai Khan</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 1333–1370 (Cont.)</td>
<td>Ukhaatu Khan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical era</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Genghis Khan founds Mongol Empire</td>
<td>Spring, 1206</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Formal establishment</td>
<td>December 18, 1271</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Battle of Xiangyang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conquest of Southern Song</td>
<td>February 4, 1276</td>
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<tr>
<td>Battle of Yamen</td>
<td>March 19, 1279</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall of Dadu</td>
<td>September 14, 1368</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formation of Northern Yuan Dynasty</td>
<td>1368-1388</td>
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**Population**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1290</td>
<td>75,306,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1293</td>
<td>79,816,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1330</td>
<td>84,873,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1351</td>
<td>87,587,000</td>
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**Currency**

- Predominantly Paper Currency (Chao), with a small amount of Chinese cash in use

**Today part of**

- Burma
- China
- India
- North Korea
- Laos
- Mongolia
- Russia
- Hong Kong
- Macao
- Vietnam

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**History of China**

### ANCIENT

- 3 Sovereigns and 5 Emperors
- Xia Dynasty 2100–1600 BCE
- Shang Dynasty 1600–1046 BCE
- Zhou Dynasty 1045–256 BCE
- Western Zhou
- Eastern Zhou
  - Spring and Autumn period
  - Warring States period

### IMPERIAL

- Qin Dynasty 221 BCE–206 BCE
- Han Dynasty 206 BCE–220 CE
- Western Han
- Xin Dynasty
- Eastern Han
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<th>Start-Year</th>
<th>End-Year</th>
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<td>Wei, Shu, and Wu</td>
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<td>Southern and Northern Dynasties</td>
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<td>Sui Dynasty</td>
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<td>Tang Dynasty</td>
<td>618–907</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Second Zhou)</td>
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<td>5 Dynasties and 10 Kingdoms</td>
<td>907–960</td>
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<td>Song Dynasty</td>
<td>960–1279</td>
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<td>Northern Song</td>
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<td>Southern Song</td>
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<td>W. Xia</td>
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<td>Jin</td>
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<td>Yuan Dynasty</td>
<td>1271–1368</td>
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<td>Ming Dynasty</td>
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<td>MODERN</td>
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Part of a series on the

History of Mongolia

Ancient period
The Yuan Dynasty (Chinese: 元朝, p. Yuán Cháo, j. jyun⁴ ciu⁴; Classical Mongolian: Дай Öн Yeke Mongghul Ulus; Modern Mongolian: Их Юань улс¹) was the empire established by Kublai Khan, leader of the Mongolian Borjigin clan, after he conquered Southern Song dynasties in China. Although the Mongols had ruled territories, which included today's northern China for decades, it was not until 1271 that Kublai Khan officially proclaimed the dynasty in the traditional Chinese style.¹ His realm – the Great Yuan Empire (大元帝国, s 大元帝国, p Dà Yuán Dìguó) – was by this point isolated from the other khanates and controlled only most of present-day China and its surrounding areas including modern Mongolia.² It was the first foreign dynasty to rule all
of China and lasted until 1368, after which its remnants in Mongolia were known as the Northern Yuan.

The Yuan is considered both a successor to the Mongol Empire and as an imperial Chinese dynasty. In official Chinese histories, the Yuan Dynasty bore the Mandate of Heaven, following the Song Dynasty and preceding the Ming Dynasty. Although the dynasty was established by Kublai Khan, he placed his grandfather Genghis Khan on the imperial records as the official founder of the dynasty as Taizu.

In addition to Emperor of China, Kublai Khan also claimed the title of Great Khan, supreme over the other successor khanates: the Chagatai, the Golden Horde, and the Ilkhanate. As such, the Great Yuan Empire was also sometimes referred to as the **Empire of the Great Khan**. However, although this claim of the emperors of the Yuan Dynasty was at times recognized by the western khans, their subservience was merely nominal and they each continued their own separate development.[4][5][6]

**History**

**Kublai Khan and Ariq Böke**

In 1259 Great Khan Möngke died while Kublai Khan, his brother, was campaigning against the Song Dynasty in South China and Ariq Böke, his other brother, commanded the Mongol homelands. A khuraldai, or the great assembly of higher nobility took place in Karakorum, then the capital of the Mongol Empire, which proclaimed Ariq Böke as the Great Khan in the traditional Mongolian style. Hearing of this, Kublai aborted his Chinese expedition and gathered another great assembly at his headquarters in the city of Kaiping (Shangdu in present-day Inner Mongolia) and, in 1260, he was proclaimed the Great Khan. However, this assembly convened by Kublai was deemed illegitimate from the perspective of the Mongolian tradition of throne inheritance: the empire already had Ariq Böke as legitimate Great Khan, who was in the capital.[7] In addition, it was said that that Kublai made extensive use of bribery of princes. Ariq Böke sent an ambassador to his brother: "By the state's law, the Great Khan is proclaimed by the great assembly, but you have ignored the supreme doctrine; sitting in China and, following Chinese laws, you are acting autocratically."[8]

Kublai declared Ariq Böke to be a usurper, and, following the traditional Chinese custom, proclaimed the era name to be "Zhong-tong". According to Chinese history, Kublai Khan gained the title of Emperor (huang di), although the Chinese Song Dynasty at that time still resisted him in South China. In 1261–1264, he fought against his brother, and eventually Ariq Böke was defeated and surrendered to Kublai. As the winning Great Khan, Kublai Khan now expected the allegiance of other khanates.

However, at this time the khans of the Golden Horde and of the Chagatai Khanate did not recognize Kublai Khan as the Great Khan. The conflicts between Kublai Khan and the khanates in Central Asia led by Kaidu had lasted for a few decades, until the beginning of the 14th century, when both of them had died. Hülegü, another brother of Kublai Khan, ruled his Ilkhanate and paid homage to the Great Khan but actually established an autonomous khanate, and after Ilkhan Ghazan's enthronement in 1295, Kublai's successor Emperor Chengzong sent him a seal reading "王府定國理民之寶" in Chinese script to symbolize this.[9] The four major successor khanates never came again under true one rule, and border clashes also frequently occurred among them, although Yuan Dynasty's nominal supremacy was recognized by the other three after the death of Kaidu.[10]
Founding of the Dynasty

From the beginning of his reign (1260), Kublai Khan had adopted many customs from earlier Chinese dynasties, such as era names and bureaucracy. He had several Chinese teachers attached to him since his early years. Not only did they teach him Chinese history and ideology, but permanently gave advice on governance.[11]

After winning the war against Ariq Böke, Kublai Khan began his reign over his empire with greater aspirations and self-confidence. In 1264, he transferred his headquarters to be near the capital of the former Jurchen Jin Dynasty. In 1266 he ordered the construction of his new capital at that site, in what is now the modern city of Beijing. The city had been called Zhongdu (Chinese: 中都, lit. "Central Capital") during the Jin Dynasty, and in 1272 it came to be known as Dadu (Chinese: 大都; Wade–Giles: Ta-tu, "Great Capital") in Chinese, Daidu to the Mongols, and Khanbalykh ("City of the Khans") to the Turks.[12] As early as 1264, Kublai decided to change the era name from Zhong-tong (中統) to Zhi-yuan (至元). With the desire to rule all of China, Kublai Khan formally claimed the Mandate of Heaven by proclaiming the new Yuan Dynasty in 1271 in the traditional Chinese style.[2] This would become the first non-Han dynasty to rule all of China.

The official title of the Dynasty, Da Yuan (Chinese: 大元, "Great Yuan"), originates from a Chinese classic text called I Ching, "大哉乾元" (dà zāi qián yuán), literally translating to 'Great is the Heavenly and Primal', with "qián" being the symbol of the Heaven, and the Emperor. Therefore, Yuan was the first dynasty in China to use Da (Chinese: 大, "Great") in its official title, as well as being the first dynasty to use a title that did not correspond to an ancient region in China.[13] In 1271, Dadu officially became the capital of the Yuan Dynasty.

In the early 1270s, Kublai began his massive drive against Southern Song Dynasty in South China. By 1273, Kublai had blockaded the Yangzi River with his navy and besieged Xiangyang, the last obstacle in his way to capture the rich Yangzi River basin. In 1275, a Song force of 130,000 troops under Chancellor Jia Sidao was defeated by the Yuan force. By 1276, most of the Southern Song territory had been captured by Yuan forces. In 1279, the Yuan army led by the Chinese general Zhang Hongfan had crushed the last Song resistance at the Battle of Yamen, which marked the end of the Southern Song and the onset of a united China under the Yuan. The Yuan Dynasty is traditionally given credit for reuniting China after several hundred years of fragmentation following the fall of the Tang Dynasty.

After the founding of the dynasty, Kublai Khan was put under pressure by many of his advisers to further expand the sphere of influence of the Yuan through the traditional Sinocentric tributary system. However, the attempts to establish such tributary relationships were rebuffed and expeditions to Japan (twice), Dai Viet (twice during Kublai’s rule[14]), and Java, would later meet with less success. Kublai established a puppet state in Myanmar, which caused anarchy in the area, and the Pagan Kingdom was broken up into many regions warring with each another. In order to avoid more bloodshed and conflicts with the Mongols, Annam and Champa later established nominal tributary relations with the Yuan Dynasty.
Yuan Dynasty

Rule of Kublai Khan

Unlike his predecessors, Kublai established a government with institutions resembling the ones in earlier Chinese dynasties and made reforms to maintain his centralized rule.[15]

Kublai Khan was seen as a martial emperor, reforming much of China and its institutions, a process that would have taken decades to complete. For example, he consolidated his rule by centralizing[16] the government of China — making himself (unlike his predecessors) an absolute monarch. He divided his empire into Xing Zhongshusheng (行中書省), usually translated as "branch Secretariat" or "province", each governing the areas of approximately two or three modern-day Chinese provinces, and this provincial-level government structure became the model for later Ming and Qing dynasties. Kublai Khan also reformed many other governmental and economic institutions, especially the tax system. Kublai Khan sought to govern China through traditional institutions,[17] and also recognized that in order to rule China he needed to employ Han Chinese advisers and officials, though he never relied totally on Chinese advisers.[18] Yet, the Hans were discriminated against politically. Almost all important central posts were monopolized by Mongols, who also preferred employing non-Hans from other parts of the Mongol domain in those positions for which no Mongol could be found. Hans were more often employed in non-Chinese regions of the empire[citation needed]. In essence, society was divided into four classes in order of privilege: Mongols, Semu ("Various sorts", for example: Central Asians), Northerners, and Southerners.[19] During his lifetime, Kublai Khan built the capital of the Yuan, Dadu, which is present-day Beijing, and made Shangdu (Chinese: 上都, "Upper Capital", known to Marco Polo as Xanadu) the summer capital. He also improved the agriculture of China, extending the Grand Canal, highways and public granaries. Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant who served under Kublai Khan as an official, described his rule as benevolent: relieving the populace of taxes in times of hardship; building hospitals and orphanages; distributing food among the abjectly poor. [citation needed]

He also promoted science and religion, and strongly supported the Silk Road trade network, allowing the contacts between Chinese technologies and the western ones. It is worth mentioning that prior to meeting Marco Polo, Kublai Khan had met Nicolo Polo, Marco Polo's father and Matteo Polo. Through conversation with the two merchants, Kublai Khan developed a keen interest in the Latin world especially Christianity and sought to invite a hundred of missionaries through a letter written in Latin to the Pope so that they may convince the masses of idolators the errors of their belief. Thus Niccolo and Maffeo Polo served as ambassadors for Kublai Khan to the West. After having completed their mission of accompanying a young Mongol princess to marry the Mongol ruler Arghun, their perilous journey would end with them returning to Venice and meeting young Marco Polo of seventeen in 1271. The three returned to the East and once again met with Kublai Khan, and it was said that Marco Polo served as an emissary of Kublai Khan throughout his domain for seventeen years. Although Nicolo and Maffeo failed to bring back any missionaries with them or a letter from the Pope due to the Great Schism, they were successful in returning with oil from the lamp of God in Jerusalem.[16] Marco Polo's travels would later inspire many others like Christopher Columbus to chart the passage to the "Middle Kingdom" the realm of the East, present day China in search of wealth and splendor.

He issued paper banknotes known as Chao (鈔) in 1273. Paper currency had been issued and used in China before Yuan time; by 960, the Song Dynasty, short of copper for striking coins, issued the first generally circulating notes. However, during the Song Dynasty, paper money was used alongside the coins. On the other hand, Yuan was the first dynasty in China to use paper currency as the predominant circulating medium. The Yuan bureaucrats made paper bills from the mulberry bark paper.
While he had claimed nominal supremacy over the rest of the Mongol Empire, his interest was clearly in China, along with the areas in its traditional Sinocentric tributary system. From the beginning of his reign, the other three khanates of the Mongol Empire became de facto independent and only one recognized him as Khagan. By the time of Kublai Khan’s death in 1294, this separation has deepened, although later Yuan emperors had nominal supremacy in the west til the end of their rule in China. The temple name given for Kublai Khan is Shizu (Chinese: 世祖).

**Early rulers after Kublai**

Following the conquest of Dali in AD 1253, the former ruling Duan dynasty were appointed as governors-general, recognized as imperial officials by the Yuan, Ming, and Qing-era governments, principally in the province of Yunnan. Succession for the Yuan Dynasty, however, was an intractable problem, later causing much strife and internal struggle. This emerged as early as the end of Kublai’s reign. Kublai originally named his eldest son, Zhenjin (Chinese: 真金) as the Crown Prince (Chinese: 皇太子) — but he died before Kublai in 1285. Thus, Zhenjin's third son, with the support of his mother Kökejin and the minister Bayan, succeeded the throne and ruled as Temür Khan or Emperor Chengzong for approximately 10 years following Kublai's death (between 1294 and 1307). Temür Khan decided to maintain and continue much of the work begun by his grandfather. He also made peace with the western Mongol khanates as well as the neighboring countries such as Vietnam, which recognized his nominal suzerainty and paid tributes for a few decades. However, the corruption in the Yuan Dynasty began during the reign of Temür Khan.

Külüg Khan (Emperor Wuzong) came to the throne after the death of Temür Khan. Unlike his predecessor, he did not continue Kublai's work, but largely rejected it. Most significantly he introduced a policy called "New Deals", and the central of this policy were monetary reforms. During his short reign (1307 to 1311), the government fell into financial difficulties, partly due to bad decisions made by Külüg. By the time he died, China was in severe debt and the Yuan court faced popular discontent.

The fourth Yuan emperor, Buyantu Khan (Ayurbarwada) was a competent emperor. He was the first among the Yuan emperors who actively supported and adopted the mainstream Chinese culture after the reign of Kublai, to the discontent of some Mongol elite. He had been mentored by Li Meng, a Confucian academic. He made many reforms, including the liquidation of the Department of State Affairs (Chinese: 尚書省), which resulted in the execution of 5 of the highest-ranking officials. Starting in 1313 the traditional imperial examinations were reintroduced for prospective officials, testing their knowledge on significant historical works. Also, he codified much of the law, as well as publishing or translating a number of Chinese books and works.

The next emperor, Gegeen Khan, Ayurbarwada's son and successor, continued his father's policies to reform the government based on the Confucian principles, with the help of his newly appointed grand chancellor Baiju. During his reign, the Da Yuan Tong Zhi (Chinese: 大元通制, "the comprehensive institutions of the Great Yuan"), a huge collection of codes and regulations of the Yuan Dynasty began by his father, was formally promulgated.
The last years of the Yuan Dynasty were marked by struggle, famine, and bitterness among the populace. In time, Kublai Khan's successors lost all influence on other Mongol lands across Asia, while the Mongols beyond the Middle Kingdom saw them as too Chinese. Gradually, they lost influence in China as well. The reigns of the later Yuan emperors were short and were marked by intrigues and rivalries. Uninterested in administration, they were separated from both the army and the populace. China was torn by dissension and unrest; outlaws ravaged the country without interference from the weakening Yuan armies.

Regardless of the merits of his reign, Shidebala (Emperor Yingzong) ruled for only two years (1321 to 1323); his rule ended in a coup at the hands of five princes. They placed Yesün Temür (or Taidingdi) on the throne, and, after an unsuccessful attempt to calm the princes, he also succumbed to regicide. Before Yesün Temür's reign, China had been relatively free from popular rebellions after the reign of Kublai. Yuan control, however, began to break down in those regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. The occurrence of these revolts and the subsequent suppression aggravated the financial difficulties of the Yuan government. The government had to adopt some measure to increase revenue such as selling offices, as well as curtailing its spending on some items.[20]

When Yesün Temür died in Shangdu in 1328, Tugh Temür was recalled to Dadu by the Qipchaq commander El Temür. He was installed as the emperor (Emperor Wenzong) in Dadu while Yesün Temür's son Ragibagh succeeded to the throne in Shangdu with the support of Yesün Temür's favorite retainer Dawlat Shah. Gaining support from princes and officers in Northern China and some other parts of the dynasty, Dadu-based Tugh Temür eventually won the civil war against Ragibagh in 1329. Afterwards, Tugh Temür abdicated in favour of his brother Kusala who was backed by Chagatai Khan Eljigidey and announced Dadu's intent to welcome him. However, Kusala suddenly died only 4 days after a banquet with Tugh Temür. He was supposedly killed with poison by El Temür, and Tugh Temür then remounted the throne. Tugh Temür also managed to send delegates to the western Mongol khanates such as Golden Horde and Ilkhanate to be accepted as the suzerain of Mongol world.[21] However, he was mainly a puppet of the powerful official El Temür during his latter three-year reign. El Temür purged pro-Kusala officials and brought power to warlords, whose despotic rule clearly marked the decline of the dynasty.

Due to the fact that the bureaucracy was dominated by El Temür, Tugh Temür is known for his cultural contribution instead. He adopted many measures honoring Confucianism and promoting Chinese cultural values. His most concrete effort to patronize Chinese learning was his founding of the Academy of the Pavilion of the Star of Literature (Chinese: 奎章閣學士院), first established in the spring of 1329, and was designed to undertake "a number of tasks relating to the transmission of Confucian high culture to the Mongolian imperial establishment". The academy was responsible for compiling and publishing a number of books, but its most important achievement was its compilation of a vast institutional compendium named Jingshi Dadian (Chinese: 經世大典). He supported Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism and also devoted himself in Buddhism.

After the death of Tugh Temür in 1332 and subsequently the death of Rinchinbal (Emperor Ningzong) in the end of the same year, the 13-year-old Toghun Temür (Emperor Huizong), the last of the nine successors of Kublai Khan,
was summoned back from Guangxi and succeeded to the throne after El Temür's death. Nevertheless, Bayan became another powerful official as El Temür was in the beginning of his long reign. As Toghun Temür grew, he came to disapprove of Bayan's autocratic rule. In 1340 he allied himself with Bayan's nephew Toghtogha, who was in discord with Bayan, and banished Bayan by coup. With the dismissal of Bayan, Toghtogha seized the power of the court. His first administration clearly exhibited fresh new spirit. He also gave a few early signs of a new and positive direction in central government. One of his successful projects was to finish the long-stalled official histories of the Liao, Jin and Song dynasties, which were eventually completed in 1345. Yet, Toghtogha resigned his office with the approval of Toghun Temür, which marked the end of his first administration, and he was not called back until 1349.

From the late 1340s onwards, people in the countryside suffered from frequent natural disasters such as droughts, floods and the resulting famines, and the government's lack of effective policy led to a loss of popular support. In 1351, the Red Turban Rebellion started and grew into a nationwide uprising. In 1354, when Toghtogha led a large army to crush the Red Turban rebels, Toghun Temür suddenly dismissed him for fear of betrayal. This resulted in Toghun Temür's restoration of power on the one hand and a rapid weakening of the central government on the other. He had no choice but to rely on local warlords' military power, and gradually lost his interest in politics and ceased to intervene in political struggles. He fled north to Shangdu from Dadu (present-day Beijing) in 1368 after the approach of the forces of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), founded by Zhu Yuanzhang in the south. He had tried to regain Dadu, which eventually failed; he died in Yingchang (located in present-day Inner Mongolia) two years later (1370). Yingchang was seized by the Ming shortly after his death. Some royal family members still lived in Henan today.\[22\]

The Prince of Liang, Basalawarmi established a separate pocket of resistance to the Ming in Yunnan and Guizhou, but his forces were decisively defeated by the Ming in 1381. By 1388 the remaining Yuan forces in Manchuria under Nahacu had also surrendered to the Ming Dynasty.

**Northern Yuan**

The Yuan remnants retreated to Mongolia after the fall of Yingchang to the Ming in 1370, where the name Great Yuan (大元) was formally carried on, and is known as the **Northern Yuan** (北元). According to Chinese political orthodoxy, there could be only one legitimate dynasty whose rulers were blessed by Heaven to rule as Emperor of China (see Mandate of Heaven), and so the Ming and the Northern Yuan denied each other's legitimacy as emperors of China, although the Ming did consider the previous Yuan which it had succeeded to be a legitimate dynasty. Historians generally regard Ming Dynasty rulers as the legitimate emperors of China after the Yuan Dynasty, though Northern Yuan rulers also claimed to rule over China, and continued to resist the Ming under the name "Yuan" or "Northern Yuan."\[23\]

The Ming army pursued the Northern Yuan forces into Mongolia in 1372, but were defeated by the latter under Ayushridar and his general Köke Temür. They tried again in 1380, ultimately winning a decisive victory over Northern Yuan in 1388. About 70,000 Mongols were taken prisoner, and Karakorum (the Northern Yuan capital) was sacked.\[24\] Eight years later, the Northern Yuan throne was taken over by Yesüder, a descendant of Ariq Böke, instead of the descendants of KUBLAI KHAN. The following centuries saw a succession of Genghisid rulers, many of whom were mere figureheads put on the throne by those warlords who happened to be the most powerful. Periods of conflict with the Ming Dynasty intermingled with periods of peaceful relations with border trade. In 1402, Örüg Temür Khan (Guilichi) abolished the name Great Yuan; he was however defeated by Öljei Temür Khan (Bunyashiri), protege of Tamerlane (Timur Barulas) in 1403. A few decades later the new khan Batumongke (1464–1517/43) took the title Dayan meaning "Da Yuan" or "Great Yuan."\[25\] and reunited the Mongols. His successors continued to rule until the submission to the Qing Dynasty, ending the Northern Yuan in 1635.
Impact

A rich cultural diversity developed during the Yuan Dynasty. The major cultural achievements were the development of drama and the novel and the increased use of the written vernacular. The political unity of China and much of central Asia promoted trade between East and West. The Mongols’ extensive West Asian and European contacts produced a fair amount of cultural exchange. The other cultures and peoples in the Mongol World Empire also very much influenced China. It had significantly eased trade and commerce across Asia until its decline; the communications between Yuan Dynasty and its ally and subordinate in Persia, the Ilkhanate, encouraged this development.[26][27] Buddhism had a great influence in the Yuan government, and the Tibetan-rite Tantric Buddhism had significantly influenced China during this period. The Muslims of the Yuan Dynasty introduced Middle Eastern cartography, astronomy, medicine, clothing, and diet in East Asia. Eastern crops such as carrots, turnips, new varieties of lemons, eggplants, and melons, high-quality granulated sugar, and cotton were all either introduced or successfully popularized during the Yuan Dynasty.[28]
Western musical instruments were introduced to enrich Chinese performing arts. From this period dates the conversion to Islam, by Muslims of Central Asia, of growing numbers of Chinese in the northwest and southwest. Nestorianism and Roman Catholicism also enjoyed a period of toleration. Buddhism (especially Tibetan Buddhism) flourished, although Taoism endured certain persecutions in favor of Buddhism from the Yuan government. Confucian governmental practices and examinations based on the Classics, which had fallen into disuse in north China during the period of disunity, were reinstated by the Yuan court, probably in the hope of maintaining order over Han society. Advances were realized in the fields of travel literature, cartography, geography, and scientific education.

Certain Chinese innovations and products, such as purified saltpetre, printing techniques, porcelain, playing cards and medical literature, were exported to Europe and Western Asia, while the production of thin glass and cloisonné became popular in China. The Yuan exercised a profound influence on the Chinese Ming Dynasty. The Ming Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (1368–97) admired the Mongols’ unification of China and adopted its garrison system.[28]

The first recorded travels by Europeans to China and back date from this time. The most famous traveler of the period was the Venetian
Marco Polo, whose account of his trip to "Cambaluc," the capital of the Great Khan, and of life there astounded the people of Europe. The account of his travels, *Il milione* (or, *The Million*, known in English as the *Travels of Marco Polo*), appeared about the year 1299. Some argue the accuracy of Marco Polo's accounts due to the lack of mentioning the Great Wall of China, tea houses, which would have been a prominent sight since Europeans had yet to adopt a tea culture, as well the practice of foot binding by the women in capital of the Great Khan. Some suggest that Marco Polo acquired much of his knowledge through contact with Persian traders since many of the places he named were in Persian.\[^{30}\]

The Yuan undertook extensive public works. Road and water communications were reorganized and improved. To provide against possible famines, granaries were ordered built throughout the empire. The city of Beijing was rebuilt with new palace grounds that included artificial lakes, hills and mountains, and parks. During the Yuan period, Beijing became the terminus of the Grand Canal of China, which was completely renovated. These commercially oriented improvements encouraged overland and maritime commerce throughout Asia and facilitated direct Chinese contacts with Europe. Chinese travelers to the West were able to provide assistance in such areas as hydraulic engineering. Contacts with the West also brought the introduction to China of a major food crop, sorghum, along with other foreign food products and methods of preparation.

The Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) was the first time that non-native Chinese people ruled all of China. In historiography of Mongolia, it is generally considered to be the continuation of the Mongol Empire.\[^{31}\] Mongols are widely known to worship the Eternal Heaven, and according to the traditional Mongolian ideology Yuan is considered to be "the beginning of an infinite number of beings, the foundation of peace and happiness, state power, the dream of many peoples, besides it there is nothing great or precious" which conquered the whole China.\[^{32}\] In traditional historiography of China on the other hand, the Yuan Dynasty is usually considered to be the legitimate dynasty between the Song Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty. Note, however, Yuan Dynasty is traditionally often extended to cover the Mongol Empire before Kublai Khan's formal establishment of the Yuan in 1271, partly because Kublai had his grandfather Genghis Khan placed on the official record as the founder of the dynasty or Taizu (Chinese: 太祖). Despite the traditional historiography as well as the official views (including the government of the Ming Dynasty which overthrew the Yuan Dynasty), there also exist Chinese people who did not consider Yuan Dynasty as a legitimate dynasty of China, but a period of foreign domination. The latter believe that Han Chinese were treated as second-class citizens, and China stagnated economically and scientifically. But there are also other views.

**Government**

The structure of the Yuan government took shape during the reign of Kublai Khan (1260–1294). While some changes took place such as the functions of certain institutions, the essential components of the government bureaucracy remained intact from the beginning to the end of the dynasty in 1368.

The bureaucracy system created by Kublai Khan reflected various cultures in the empire, including that of the Han Chinese, Khitans, Jurchens, Mongols and Tibetan Buddhists. While the official terminology of the institutions may indicate the government structure was almost purely that of native Chinese dynasties, the Yuan bureaucracy actually consisted of a mix of elements from different cultures. The Chinese-style elements of the bureaucracy mainly came from the native Tang, Song, as well as Khitan Liao and Jurchen Jin dynasties. Chinese advisers such as Liu Bingzhong and Yao Shu gave strong influence to Kublai's early court, and the central government administration was established within the first decade of Kublai's reign. This government adopted the traditional Chinese tripartite division of authority among civil, military, and censorial offices, including the Central Secretariat (Chinese: 中书省) to manage civil affairs, the Privy Council (Chinese: 翰密院) to manage military affairs, and the Censorate (Chinese: 御史台) to conduct internal surveillance and inspection. The actual functions of both central and local government institutions however showed a major overlap between the civil and military jurisdictions, due to the Mongol traditional reliance on military institutions and offices as the core of governance. Nevertheless, such a
civilian bureaucracy, with the Central Secretariat as the top institution that was (directly or indirectly) responsible for most other governmental agencies (such as the traditional Chinese-style Six Ministries), was created in China. At various times another central government institution called the Department of State Affairs (Chinese: 尚書省) mainly dealt with finance was established (such as during the reign of Külüg Khan or Emperor Wuzong), but usually became abandoned shortly afterwards.

While the existence of these central government departments and the Six Ministries (which had been introduced since the Sui and Tang dynasties) gave a sinicized image in the Yuan administration, the actual functions of these ministries also reflected how Mongolian priorities and policies reshape and redirect those institutions. For example, the authority of the Yuan legal system, the Ministry of Justice did not extend to legal cases involving Mongols and Semuren, where there were separate courts of justice for them. Cases involving members of more than one ethnic group were decided by a mixed board consisting of Chinese and Mongols. Another example was the insignificance of the Ministry of War compared with native Chinese dynasties, as the real military authority in Yuan times resided in the Privy Council.

**Society**

**Imperial lifestyle**

Since its invention in 1269, the ‘Phags-pa script, a unified script for spelling Mongolian’ Tibetan, and Chinese languages, was preserved in the court until the end of the Dynasty. Most of the Emperors could not master written Chinese, but they could generally converse well in the language. The Mongol custom of long standing quaða/marriage alliance with Mongol clans, the Onggirat and the Ikeres, kept the imperial blood purely Mongol until the reign of Tugh Temur whose mother was a Tangut concubine. The Mongol Emperors had built large palaces and pavilions, but some still continued to live as nomads at times. Nevertheless, a few other Yuan emperors actively sponsored cultural activities; an example is Tugh Temur (Emperor Wenzong), who wrote poetry, painted, read Chinese classical texts, and ordered compilation of books.[33]

Kublai and his successors kept a Tibetan lama of the Sakya order at court. Mongol patronage of Buddhism resulted in a number of monuments of Buddhist art. Mongolian Buddhist translations, almost all from Tibetan originals, began on a large scale after 1300. Many Mongols of the upper class such as the Jalayir and the Oronar nobels delighted in patronizing Confucian scholars and institutions. A considerable number of Confucian and Chinese historical works were translated into Mongolian language.

The average Mongol garrison family of the Yuan Dynasty seems to have lived a life of decaying rural leisure, with income from the harvests of their Chinese tenants eaten up by costs of equipping and dispatching men for their tours of duty. The Mongols practiced debt slavery and by 1290 in all parts of the Mongol Empire Mongol commoners were selling their children into slavery. Seeing this as damaging the Mongol nation, Kublai forbade the sale abroad of the Mongols in 1291, and likewise Ilkhan Ghazan (1295–1304) in Persia budgeted funds to redeem Mongol slaves.
**Culture**

In the China of the Yuan, or Mongol era, various important developments in the arts occurred or continued in their development. These developments included the areas of painting, mathematics, calligraphy, poetry, and theater, with many great artists and writers being famous today. Due to the coming together of painting, poetry, and calligraphy at this time many of the artists practicing these different pursuits were the same individuals, though perhaps more famed for one area of their achievements than others. Often in terms of the development of landscape painting as well as the classical joining together of the arts of painting, poetry, and calligraphy, the Song Dynasty and the Yuan Dynasty are linked together. In the area of Chinese painting during the Yuan Dynasty there were many famous painters. In the area of calligraphy many of the great calligraphers were from the Yuan Dynasty era. In Yuan poetry, the main development was the *qu*, which was used among other poetic forms by most of the famous Yuan poets. Many of the poets were also involved in the major developments in the theater during this time, and the other way around, with people important in the theater becoming famous through the development of the *sangqu* type of *qu*. One of the key factors in the mix of the *zaju variety show* was the incorporation of poetry both classical and of the newer *qu* form. One of the important cultural developments during the Yuan era was the consolidation of poetry, painting, and calligraphy into a unified piece of the type which tends to come to mind when people think of classical Chinese art. Another important aspect of Yuan times is the increasing incorporation of the then current, vernacular Chinese into both the *qu* form of poetry and the *zaju* variety show. Another important consideration regarding Yuan Dynasty arts and culture is that so much of it has survived in China, relatively to works from the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, which have often been better preserved in places such as the Shōsōin, in Japan.

**Social classes**

Politically, the system of government created by Kublai Khan was the product of a compromise between Mongolian patrimonial feudalism and the traditional Chinese autocratic-bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, socially the educated Chinese elite were in general not given the degree of esteem that they had been accorded previously under native Chinese dynasties. Although the traditional Chinese elite were not given their share of power, the Mongols and the Semuren (various allied groups from Central Asia and the western end of the empire) largely remained strangers to the mainstream Chinese culture, and this dichotomy gave the Yuan regime a somewhat strong "colonial" coloration. The unequal treatment is possibly due to the fear of transferring power to the ethnic Chinese under their rule. The Mongols and Semuren were given certain advantages in the dynasty, and this would last even after the restoration of the imperial examination in the early 14th century. In general there were very few North Chinese or Southerners reaching the highest-post in the government compared with the possibility that Persians did so in the Ilkhanate. Later the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty had also mentioned about the discrimination existed during the Yuan Dynasty.

The Mongols had employed foreigners long before the reign of Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuan Dynasty. But during Kublai's reign a hierarchy of reliability was introduced in China. The population was divided into the following classes:

- Mongols
- Semuren, including Uyghurs, immigrants from the west and some clans of Central Asia
• North Chinese, Khitans, Jurchens and Koreans
• Southerners, or all subjects of the former Southern Song Dynasty

Partner merchants and non-Mongol overseers were usually either immigrants or local ethnic groups. Thus, in China they were Uighurs, Turkestani and Persian Muslims, and Christians. Foreigners from outside the Mongol Empire entirely, such as the Polo family, were everywhere welcomed.

Despite the high position given to Muslims, some policies of the Yuan Emperors severely discriminated against them, restricting Halal slaughter and other Islamic practices like circumcision, as well as Kosher butchering for Jews, forcing them to eat food the Mongol way. Toward the end, corruption and the persecution became so severe that Muslim Generals joined Han Chinese in rebelling against the Mongols. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang had Muslim Generals like Lan Yu who rebelled against the Mongols and defeated them in battle. Some Muslim communities had the name in Chinese which meant "baracks" and also mean "thanks", many Hui Muslims claim it is because that they played an important role in overthrowing the Mongols and it was named in thanks by the Han Chinese for assisting them. The Muslims in the semu class also revolted against the Yuan dynasty in the Ispah Rebellion but the rebellion was crushed and the Muslims were massacred by the Yuan loyalist commander Chen Youding.

Administrative divisions

The territory of the Yuan Dynasty was divided into the Central Region (腹里) and places under control of various Xing Zhongshusheng (行中書省 or 行省) or the Xuanzheng Yuan (宣政院).

The Central Region, consisting of present-day Hebei, Shandong, Shanxi, the south-eastern part of present-day Inner Mongolia and the Henan areas to the north of the Yellow River, was considered the most important region of the dynasty and directly governed by Zhongshusheng (中書省, "Secretariat") at Dadu; similarly, another top-level administrative department called the Xuanzheng Yuan governed the whole of modern-day Tibet and a part of Kashmir.

Xing Zhongshusheng (行中書省, "branch Secretariat" or "en-route Secretariat"), or simply Xingsheng (行省), were provincial-level administrative organizations or institutions, sometimes roughly translated as "Province", though they were not exactly provinces in modern sense. There were 11 Xing Zhongshusheng or Xingsheng in Yuan Dynasty.

1. Gansu Xingsheng (甘肅行省) with Zhangye District as its seat of government. Under this came most of present-day Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (originally the Tangut territory), south-eastern Gansu Province, and part of north-eastern Amdo.
2. Henan Jiangbei Xingsheng (河南江北行省) with Kaifeng District as its seat of government. Under this came the Henan areas to the north of the Yellow River, north-east Hubei, Jiangsu, the north-eastern part of Jiangxi Province.
3. Huguang Xingsheng (湖廣行省) with Wuhan of the present-day Hubei Province as its seat of government. Under this came a part of south-east Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi, most of Guizhou, and parts of south-western Guangdong Province.
4. Jiangxi Xingsheng (江西行省) with Nanchang as its seat of government. Under this came part of present-day Jiangxi and Guangdong Province.
5. Jiangzhe Xingsheng (江浙行省) with Hangzhou as its seat of government. Under this came Jiangsu and Anhui areas to the south of the Yangtze River, Zhejiang, Fujian, and a small area in the north-east of Jiangxi Province.

6. Liaoyang Xingsheng (遼陽行省) with present-day Liaoyang District in Liaoning Province as its seat of government. Under this came north-east China and the northern part of Korea.

7. Lingbei Xingsheng (嶺北行省) with Karakorum as its seat of government. Under this province came the present-day Mongolia, northern Inner Mongolia and parts of Siberia.

8. Shaanxi Xingsheng (陝西行省) with Xi’an as its seat of government. Under this came the majority of present-day Shaanxi Province, the south-western part of Inner Mongolia, south-eastern Gansu, north-western Sichuan, and a small part of Qinghai.

9. Sichuan Xingsheng (四川行省) with Chengdu at its seat of government. Under this came most of present-day Sichuan Province and parts of south-western Shaanxi.

10. Yunnan Xingsheng (雲南行省) with Kunming as its seat of government. Under this came present-day Yunnan Province, parts of western Guizhou and north-eastern part of Burma.

11. Zhendong Xingsheng (征東行省) with Kaesong of present-day Korea as its seat. It was a special institution set up when Kublai Khan attempted to invade Japan in 1281, with the king of Goryeo as its head. The setting of this Xingsheng was considerably different from all other Xingsheng, and unlike other Xingsheng, Zhendong (征東), literally "Conquer East" or "Eastern Expedition", was not a geographic name, and this institution was also referred to as "Japanese Expedition Xingsheng" (征日本行省) or just "Japan Xingsheng" (日本行省). It was abolished when the invasion of Japan had failed, though set up again later.

Below the level of Xing Zhongshusheng or Xingsheng, the largest political division was the circuit (道), followed by prefectures (府) operating under a prefect and subprefectures (州) under a subprefect. The lowest political division was the county (縣) overseen by a magistrate. This government structure at the provincial level was later copied by the Ming and Qing dynasties.

References

[1] Also the Yekhe Yuan Ulus. According to some sources such as Volker Rybatzki & Igor de Rachewiltz's The Early Mongols: Language, Culture and History (p. 116), the full Mongolian name was Dai Ön Yeke Mongghul Ulus.


[3] Christopher P.Atwood – Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire


[9] Seal of the Ilkhan Ghazan in a 1302 letter to Pope Boniface VIII.

The seal, in Chinese script, reads "Seal certifying the authority of his Royal Highness to establish a country and govern its people". Vatican Archives.


[17] Rossabi, M. Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times, p56

[18] Rossabi, M. Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times, p115


The Northern Yuan rulers had also buttressed their claim on China at least up to the 15th century, who held tenaciously to the title of Emperor (or Great Khan) of the Great Yuan (Dai Yuwan Khaan, or 大元可汗). For more information regarding the use of the name Yuan among Mongols and the memory of it in later ages, see (https://qir.kyushu-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2324/9498/1/scs14p065.pdf).


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