

文 THE YUAN DYNASTY

Kublai Khan, c. 1270



I am Kublai Khan, grandson of the "Universal Ruler" Genghis Khan, the most skilled general of all times and places. In striving to fulfill a "Mandate from Heaven" to control all of the earth and by my grandfather's able hand, my people came to unite most of the world under Mongol rule. Now that Genghis Khan is gone from us, our vast empire is governed as four Khanates under different successors: one Khan rules Russia; one has authority over Persia and the Middle East; and a third controls western Asia. I am ruler of the Great Khanate of Mongolia and now all of China since my own conquests.

After defeating the Song Dynasty to take control of southern China, I established a new dynasty, the Yuan, which I am certain will rule for many generations to come. I am called the Great Khan of China and govern from our capital city at Beijing. I am proud to say that since I have taken power, I have brought many changes and improvements to this land.

One great triumph was the construction of a magnificent palace complex which I call the Forbidden City, since it is my refuge and place of peace. Its beautiful architecture combines elements of Muslim, Mongolian, western Asian, and Chinese styles. You could say the Forbidden City reflects China's new openness to foreigners and foreign ideas.

China now welcomes merchants from near and far. Throughout our history as nomadic herders, Mongols have always understood the importance of trade. While we were able to fill many needs with our animals and by our own toil, we have always depended upon trade with others for some goods. Trade also has benefits for China and its Mongol rulers.

To attract foreign merchants to China we have built many new roads, expanded and improved waterways including the Grand Canal, and have increased the use of paper money backed by the wealth of the empire to make trade easier. We have also established postal stations along trade routes to improve communication and make caravan travel safer. More and more merchants have been coming to China for our silk, jade, porcelain, and other products for which there is growing demand, especially in Europe.

Some foreigners have even chosen to stay in our wonderful land. Unlike the Chinese with their love of Confucianism, Mongols do not look down their noses at merchants and craftsmen. Indeed we have great respect for sound business sense and artistic skill, so merchants and craftsmen now have high positions in society. Craftsmen, in particular, are sought after to work on public buildings and other projects.

To make life easier for all in the empire, we have formed aid agencies to help the poor and have established religious freedom. Scholars of all beliefs are treated with kindness, and temples to all manner of gods are open to worshippers. We respect and appreciate other people's cultures and seek to make all feel welcome in our land. It is my hope that people from places throughout the world will come to China to trade and perhaps to live.

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Wang Qi, c. 1285



I am Wang Qi, a Chinese citizen and member of the gentry in our society. Long before the rise of the Yuan Dynasty to power, my family enjoyed a good life and many individuals held valued government positions. Now that is no longer the case. After I spent many years of study to earn a good education, I am now unable to work in this government.

The Mongol barbarians do not value education as the Chinese people do. Rather than filling government jobs with those who are most capable, Kublai Khan sees that only Mongols and foreigners serve him. Since I cannot now work as I had planned, I am putting my education to use by creating works of literature. I enjoy writing both plays and poetry which are appreciated by the Chinese who love beauty and the arts.

Our Mongol rulers say that they respect all cultures, but they show no respect for the advanced culture of the Chinese people they conquered. Few Mongols have shown any effort to learn our languages, they do not dress as we do, honor celebrations we hold, or attend our operas. Instead they entertain foreigners in their "Forbidden City," a place which Chinese are forbidden to enter.

Even the increased trade benefits only a few of the Chinese people. To attract more merchants from faraway lands the Mongols have reduced the taxes on trade goods. Yet they still spend much money on building projects and aid, which should be good for us but is not. Though the poor may receive some help, the rest of the Chinese people are taxed to pay for such "improvements," and this makes our lives more difficult.

And then there are the wars. Though the Mongols have established their "Chinese" dynasty in a land of intelligence and beauty, they have not changed their barbarian ways. They may live in beautiful palaces and eat rich meals, but they cannot seem to overcome their thirst for blood and conquest.

In the years since Kublai Khan has been in power he has fought wars to extend his empire southward and launched two failed attacks on Japan. The cost of such wars is high, and the Chinese people have shouldered the burden for this spending. This burden is difficult to bear. Citizens expect to pay taxes to the government, but the Chinese are merely paying tributes to foreign invaders.

Even though the Mongol raiders have established themselves as "Chinese" rulers, and even though they have established their dynasty's rule over our land, they are not Chinese. They do not think like Chinese; they do not speak like Chinese; and they do not appreciate the long and wonderful history of the Chinese people and their accomplishments. It is no matter by what name they call themselves; Mongols are illiterate, crude, barbarians who love to shed the blood of others and rob from those they conquer. Many dynasties have ruled before the Mongols and others will rule when they are defeated.