

Chapter 1. Historical Setting



Archer and hunting dog

MODERN MONGOLIA—the Mongolian People's Republic—comprises only about half of the vast Inner Asian region known throughout history as Mongolia. Furthermore, it is only a fraction of the great Mongol empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that stretched from Korea to Hungary and encompassed nearly all of Asia except the Indian subcontinent and parts of Southeast Asia. Because the Mongol empire was so vast—the largest contiguous land empire in the history of the world—the Mongols were written about in many languages by numerous chroniclers of divergent conquered societies, who provided a wide range of perspectives, myths, and legends. In addition, because many foreign accounts are about the Mongol invasions and were written by the conquered, the Mongols often are described in unfavorable terms, as bloodthirsty barbarians who kept their subjects under a harsh yoke. Mongol sources emphasize the demigod-like military genius of Chinggis Khan, providing a perspective in the opposite extreme. The term Mongol itself is often a misnomer. Although the leaders and core forces of the conquerors of Eurasia were ethnic Mongols, most of the main army was made up of Uralo-Altaiic people, many of them Turkic. Militarily, the Mongols were stopped only by the Mamluks of Egypt and by the Japanese, or by their own volition, as happened in Europe. In their increasingly sophisticated administrative systems, they employed Chinese, Iranians, Russians, and others. Mongolia and its people thus have had a significant and lasting impact on the historical development of major nations, such as China and Russia, and, periodically, they have influenced the entire Eurasian continent.

Until the twentieth century, most of the peoples who inhabited Mongolia were nomads, and even in the 1980s a substantial proportion of the rural population was essentially nomadic. Originally there were many warlike nomadic tribes living in Mongolia, and apparently most of these belonged to one or the other of two racially distinct and linguistically very different groupings. One of these groupings, the Yuezhi, was related linguistically to the ancient nomadic Scythian peoples—who inhabited the steppes north and northeast of the Black Sea and the region east of the Aral Sea—and was therefore Indo-European. The other grouping was the Xiongnu, a nomadic people of uncertain origins.

Although in the course of history other peoples displaced, or became intermingled with, the Yuezhi and the Xiongnu, their activities,

conflicts, and internal and external relations established a pattern, with four principal themes, that continued almost unchanged—except for the conquest of Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—until the eighteenth century. First, among these four themes, there were constant fierce struggles involving neighboring tribes, engaged in frequently shifting alliances that did not always follow ethnic, racial, or linguistic lines. Second, during periods when China was united and strong, trade with Inner Asian peoples was allowed, and nomadic states either became vassals of the Chinese emperor, or they retreated beyond his reach into the northern steppes; conversely, when China appeared weak, raids were made into rich Chinese lands, sometimes resulting in retaliatory expeditions into Mongolia. Third, occasional, transitory consolidation—of all or of large portions of the region under the control of a conqueror or a coalition of similar tribes—took place; such temporary consolidations could result in a life-or-death struggle between major tribal groupings until one or the other was exterminated or was expelled from the region, or until they joined forces. Fourth, on several occasions, raids into northern China were so vast and successful that the victorious nomads settled in the conquered land, established dynasties, and eventually became absorbed—sinicized—by the more numerous Chinese.

Within this pattern, the Xiongnu eventually expelled the Yuezhi, who were driven to the southwest to become the Kushans of Iranian, Afghan, and Indian history. In turn, the Xiongnu themselves later were driven west. Their descendants, or possibly another group, continued this westward migration, establishing the Hun empire, in Central and Eastern Europe, that reached its zenith under Attila.

The pattern was interrupted abruptly and dramatically late in the twelfth century and throughout the thirteenth century by Chinggis and his descendants. During the consolidation of Mongolia and some of the invasions of northern China, Chinggis created sophisticated military and political organizations, exceeding in skill, efficiency, and vigor the institutions of the most civilized nations of the time. Under him and his immediate successors, the Mongols conquered most of Eurasia.

After a century of Mongol dominance in Eurasia, the traditional patterns reasserted themselves. Mongols living outside Mongolia were absorbed by the conquered populations; Mongolia itself again became a land of incessantly warring nomadic tribes. True to the fourth pattern, a similar people, the Manchus, conquered China in the seventeenth century, and ultimately became sinicized.

Here the pattern ended. The Manchu conquest of China came at a time when the West was beginning to have a significant impact

on East Asia. Russian colonial expansionism was sweeping rapidly across Asia—at first passing north of Mongolia but bringing incessant pressure, from the west and the north, against Mongol tribes—and was beginning to establish firm footholds in Mongolian territory by conquest and the establishment of protectorates. At the same time, the dynamic Manchus also applied pressure from the east and the south. This pressure was partly the traditional attempt at control over nomadic threats from Mongolia, but it also was a response to the now clearly apparent threat of Russian expansionism.

From the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, Mongolia was a major focus of Russian and Manchu-Chinese rivalry for predominant influence in all of Northeast Asia. In the process, Russia absorbed those portions of historical Mongolia to the west and north of the present Mongolian People's Republic. The heart of Mongolia, which became known as Outer Mongolia (see Glossary), was claimed by the Chinese. The area was distinct from Inner Mongolia, along the southern rim of the Gobi, which China absorbed—those regions to the southwest, south, and east that now are included in the People's Republic of China. Continuing Russian interest in Mongolia was discouraged by the Manchus.

As Chinese power waned in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, however, Russian influence in Mongolia grew. Thus Russia supported Outer Mongolian declarations of independence in the period immediately after the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Russian interest in the area did not diminish, even after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Russian civil war spilled over into Mongolia in the period 1919 to 1921. Chinese efforts to take advantage of internal Russian disorders by trying to reestablish their claims over Outer Mongolia were thwarted in part by China's instability and in part by the vigor of the Russian reaction once the Bolshevik Revolution had succeeded. Russian predominance in Outer Mongolia was unquestioned after 1921, and when the Mongolian People's Republic was established in 1924, it was as a communist-controlled satellite of Moscow.

Early Development, ca. 220 B.C.–A.D. 1206

Origins of the Mongols

Archaeological evidence places early Stone Age human habitation in the southern Gobi between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago. By the first millennium B.C., bronze-working peoples lived in Mongolia. With the appearance of iron weapons by the third century B.C., the inhabitants of Mongolia had begun to form tribal alliances

and to threaten China. The origins of more modern inhabitants are found among the forest hunters and nomadic tribes of Inner Asia. They inhabited a great arc of land extending generally from the Korean Peninsula in the east, across the northern tier of China to the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and to the Pamir Mountains and Lake Balkash in the west (see fig. 1). During most of recorded history, this has been an area of constant ferment from which emerged numerous migrations and invasions to the southeast (into China), to the southwest (into Transoxiana—modern Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Iran, and India), and to the west (across Scythia toward Europe). By the eighth century B.C., the inhabitants of much of this region evidently were nomadic Indo-European speakers, either Scythians or their kin. Also scattered throughout the area were many other tribes that were primarily Mongol in their ethnologic characteristics.

Xiongnu and Yuezhi

The first significant recorded appearance of nomads came late in the third century B.C., when the Chinese repelled an invasion of the Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu in Wade-Giles romanization) across the Huang He (Yellow River) from the Gobi. The Xiongnu were a nomadic people of uncertain origins. Their language is not known to modern scholars, but the people were probably similar in appearance and characteristics to the later Mongols. A Chinese army, which had adopted Xiongnu military technology—wearing trousers and using mounted archers with stirrups—pursued the Xiongnu across the Gobi in a ruthless punitive expedition. Fortification walls built by various Chinese warring states were connected to make a 2,300-kilometer Great Wall along the northern border, as a barrier to further nomadic inroads.

The Xiongnu temporarily abandoned their interest in China and turned their attention westward to the region of the Altai Mountains and Lake Balkash, inhabited by the Yuezhi (Yüeh-chih in Wade-Giles), an Indo-European-speaking nomadic people who had relocated from China's present-day Gansu Province as a result of their earlier defeat by the Xiongnu. Endemic warfare between these two nomadic peoples reached a climax in the latter part of the third century and the early decades of the second century B.C.; the Xiongnu were triumphant. The Yuezhi then migrated to the southwest where, early in the second century, they began to appear in the Oxus (the modern Amu Darya) Valley, to change the course of history in Bactria, Iran, and eventually India.

Meanwhile, the Xiongnu again raided northern China about 200 B.C., finding that the inadequately defended Great Wall was

not a serious obstacle. By the middle of the second century B.C., they controlled all of northern and western China north of the Huang He. This renewed threat led the Chinese to improve their defenses in the north, while building up and improving the army, particularly the cavalry, and while preparing long-range plans for an invasion of Mongolia.

Between 130 and 121 B.C., Chinese armies drove the Xiongnu back across the Great Wall, weakened their hold on Gansu Province as well as on what is now Nei Monggol Autonomous Region (Inner Mongolia—see Glossary), and finally pushed them north of the Gobi into central Mongolia. Following these victories, the Chinese expanded into the areas later known as Manchuria (see Glossary), the Korean Peninsula, and Inner Asia. The Xiongnu, once more turning their attention to the west and the southwest, raided deep into the Oxus Valley between 73 and 44 B.C. The descendants of the Yuezhi and their Chinese rulers, however, formed a common front against the Xiongnu and repelled them.

During the next century, as Chinese strength waned, border warfare between the Chinese and the Xiongnu was almost incessant. Gradually the nomads forced their way back into Gansu and the northern part of what is now China's Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region. In about the middle of the first century A.D., a revitalized Eastern Han Dynasty (A.D. 25–220) slowly recovered these territories, driving the Xiongnu back into the Altai Mountains and the steppes north of the Gobi. During the late first century A.D., having reestablished the administrative control over southern China and northern Vietnam that had been lost briefly at beginning of this same century, the Eastern Han made a concerted effort to reassert dominance over Inner Asia. A Chinese army crossed the Pamir Mountains, conquered territories as far west as the Caspian Sea, defeated the Yuezhi Kushan Empire, and even sent an emissary in search of the eastern provinces of Rome.

Donghu, Toba, and Ruruan

Although the Xiongnu finally had been driven back into their homeland by the Chinese in A.D. 48, within ten years the Xianbei (or Hsien-pei in Wade-Giles) had moved (apparently from the north or northwest) into the region vacated by the Xiongnu. The Xianbei were the northern branch of the Donghu (or Tung Hu, the Eastern Hu), a proto-Tunguz group mentioned in Chinese histories as existing as early as the fourth century B.C. The language of the Donghu, like that of the Xiongnu, is unknown to modern scholars. The Donghu were among the first peoples conquered by the Xiongnu. Once the Xiongnu state weakened, however, the Donghu rebelled.

By the first century, two major subdivisions of the Donghu had developed: the Xianbei in the north and the Wuhuan in the south. The Xianbei, who by the second century A.D. were attacking Chinese farms south of the Great Wall, established an empire, which, although short-lived, gave rise to numerous tribal states along the Chinese frontier. Among these states was that of the Toba (T'o-pa in Wade-Giles), a subgroup of the Xianbei, in modern China's Shanxi Province. The Wuhuan also were prominent in the second century, but they disappeared thereafter; possibly they were absorbed in the Xianbei western expansion. The Xianbei and the Wuhuan used mounted archers in warfare, and they had only temporary war leaders instead of hereditary chiefs. Agriculture, rather than full-scale nomadism, was the basis of their economy. In the sixth century A.D., the Wuhuan were driven out of Inner Asia into the Russian steppe.

Chinese control of parts of Inner Asia did not last beyond the opening years of the second century, and, as the Eastern Han Dynasty ended early in the third century A.D., suzerainty was limited primarily to the Gansu corridor. The Xianbei were able to make forays into a China beset with internal unrest and political disintegration. By 317 all of China north of the Chang Jiang (Yangtze River) had been overrun by nomadic peoples: the Xianbei from the north; some remnants of the Xiongnu from the northwest; and the Chiang people of Gansu and Tibet (present-day China's Xizang Autonomous Region) from the west and the southwest. Chaos prevailed as these groups warred with each other and repulsed the vain efforts of the fragmented Chinese kingdoms south of the Chang Jiang to reconquer the region.

By the end of the fourth century, the region between the Chang Jiang and the Gobi, including much of modern Xinjiang, was dominated by the Toba. Emerging as the partially sinicized state of Dai between A.D. 338 and 376 in the Shanxi area, the Toba established control over the region as the Northern Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386-533). Northern Wei armies drove back the Ruruan (referred to as Ruanruan or Juan-Juan by Chinese chroniclers), a newly arising nomadic Mongol people in the steppes north of the Altai Mountains, and reconstructed the Great Wall. During the fourth century also, the Huns left the steppes north of the Aral Sea to invade Europe. By the middle of the fifth century, Northern Wei had penetrated into the Tarim Basin in Inner Asia, as had the Chinese in the second century. As the empire grew, however, Toba tribal customs were supplanted by those of the Chinese, an evolution not accepted by all Toba.



*Chinggis Khan, detail from a sixteenth-century
Iranian genealogical manuscript
Courtesy The Granger Collection*

The Ruruan, only temporarily repelled by Northern Wei, had driven the Xiongnu toward the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea and were making raids into China. In the late fifth century, the Ruruan established a powerful nomadic empire spreading generally north of Northern Wei. It was probably the Ruruan who first used the title khan (see Glossary).

Rise of the Türk

Northern Wei was disintegrating rapidly because of revolts of semi-tribal Toba military forces that were opposed to being sinicized, when disaster struck the flourishing Ruruan empire. The Türk, a vassal people, known as Tujue to Chinese chroniclers, revolted against their Ruruan rulers. The uprising began in the Altai Mountains, where many of the Türk were serfs working the iron mines. Thus, from the outset of their revolt, they had the advantage of controlling what had been one of the major bases of Ruruan power. Between 546 and 553, the Türk overthrew the Ruruan and established themselves as the most powerful force in North Asia and Inner Asia. This was the beginning of a pattern of conquest that was to have a significant effect upon Eurasian history for more than 1,000 years. The Türk were the first people to use this later widespread name. They are also the earliest Inner Asian people whose language is known, because they left behind Orkhon inscriptions in a runic-like script, which was deciphered in 1896.

It was not long before the tribes in the region north of the Gobi—the Eastern Türk—were following invasion routes into China used in previous centuries by Xiongnu, Xianbei, Toba, and Ruruan. Like their predecessors who had inhabited the mountains and the steppes, the attention of the Türk quickly was attracted by the wealth of China. At first these new raiders encountered little resistance, but toward the end of the sixth century, as China slowly began to recover from centuries of disunity, border defenses stiffened. The original Türk state split into eastern and western parts, with some of the Eastern Türk acknowledging Chinese overlordship.

For a brief period at the beginning of the seventh century, a new consolidation of the Türk, under the Western Türk ruler Tardu, again threatened China. In 601 Tardu's army besieged Chang'an (modern Xi'an), then the capital of China. Tardu was turned back, however, and, upon his death two years later, the Türk state again fragmented. The Eastern Türk nonetheless continued their depredations, occasionally threatening Chang'an.

Influence of Tang China

From 629 to 648, a reunited China—under the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–906)—destroyed the power of the Eastern Türk north

of the Gobi; established suzerainty over the Kitan, a semi-nomadic Mongol people who lived in areas that became the modern Chinese provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin; and formed an alliance with the Uighurs (see Glossary), who inhabited the region between the Altai Mountains and Lake Balkash. Between 641 and 648, the Tang conquered the Western Türk, reestablishing Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang and exacting tribute from west of the Pamir Mountains. The Türk empire finally ended in 744.

For more than a century, the Tang retained control of central and eastern Mongolia and parts of Inner Asia. During this century, the Tang expanded Chinese control into the Oxus Valley. At the same time, their allies and nominal vassals, the Uighurs, conquered much of western and northern Mongolia until, by the middle of the eighth century, the Uighur seminomadic empire extended from Lake Balkash to Lake Baykal.

It was at about this time that the Arab-led tide of Islam reached Inner Asia. After a bitter struggle, the Chinese were ejected from the Oxus Valley, but with Uighur assistance they defeated Muslim efforts to penetrate into Xinjiang. The earliest Mongol links with Tibetan Buddhism, or Lamaism (see Glossary), also may have been established in this period (see Religion, ch. 2). During this time, the Kitan of western Manchuria took advantage of the situation to throw off Chinese control, and they began to raid northern China.

Despite these crippling losses, the Tang recovered and, with considerable Uighur assistance, held their frontiers. Tang dependence upon their northern allies was apparently a source of embarrassment to the Chinese, who surreptitiously encouraged the Kirghiz and the Karluks to attack the Uighurs, driving them south into the Tarim Basin. As a result of the Kirghiz action, the Uighur empire collapsed in 846. Some of the Uighurs emigrated to Chinese Turkestan (the Turpan region), where they established a flourishing kingdom that freely submitted to Chinggis Khan several centuries later (see Early Wars in China, this ch.). Ironically, this weakening of the Uighurs undoubtedly hastened the decline and fall of the Tang Dynasty over the next fifty years.

Kitan and Jurchen

Free of Uighur restraint, the Kitan expanded in all directions in the latter half of the ninth century and the early years of the tenth century. By 925 the Kitan ruled eastern Mongolia, most of Manchuria, and much of China north of the Huang He. In the recurrent process of sinicization, by the middle of the tenth century Kitan chieftains had established themselves as emperors of

northern China; their rule was known as the Liao Dynasty (916–1125).

The period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was one of consolidation, preceding the most momentous era in Mongol history, the era of Chinggis Khan. During those centuries, the vast region of deserts, mountains, and grazing land was inhabited by people resembling each other in racial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics; ethnologically they were essentially Mongol. The similarities among the Mongols, Türk, Tangut, and Tatars (see Glossary) who inhabited this region causes considerable ethnic and historical confusion. Generally, the Mongols and the closely related Tatars inhabited the northern and the eastern areas; the Türk (who already had begun to spread over western Asia and southeastern Europe) were in the west and the southwest; the Tangut, who were more closely related to the Tibetans than were the other nomads and who were not a Turkic people, were in eastern Xinjiang, Gansu, and western Inner Mongolia (see fig. 2). The Liao state was homogeneous, and the Kitan had begun to lose their nomadic characteristics. The Kitan built cities and exerted dominion over their agricultural subjects as a means of consolidating their empire. To the west and the northwest of Liao were many other Mongol tribes, linked together in various tenuous alliances and groupings, but with little national cohesiveness. In Gansu and eastern Xinjiang, the Tangut—who had taken advantage of the Tang decline—had formed a state, Western Xia or Xixia (1038–1227), nominally under Chinese suzerainty. Xinjiang was dominated by the Uighurs, who were loosely allied with the Chinese.

The people of Mongolia at this time were predominantly spirit worshipers, with shamans providing spiritual and religious guidance to the people and tribal leaders. There had been some infusion of Buddhism, which had spread from Xinjiang, but it did not yet have a strong influence (see *The Yuan Dynasty; Return to Nomadic Patterns*, this ch.). Nestorian Christianity also had penetrated Inner Asia.

In the eleventh century, the Kitan completed the conquest of China north of the Huang He. Despite close cultural ties between the Kitan and Western Xia that led the latter to become increasingly sinicized, during the remainder of that century and the early years of the twelfth century, the two Mongol groups were frequently at war with each other and with the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960–1279) of China. The Uighurs of the Turpan region often were involved in these wars, usually aiding the Chinese against Western Xia.

A Tungusic people, the Jurchen, ancestors of the Manchu, formed an alliance with the Song and reduced the Kitan empire

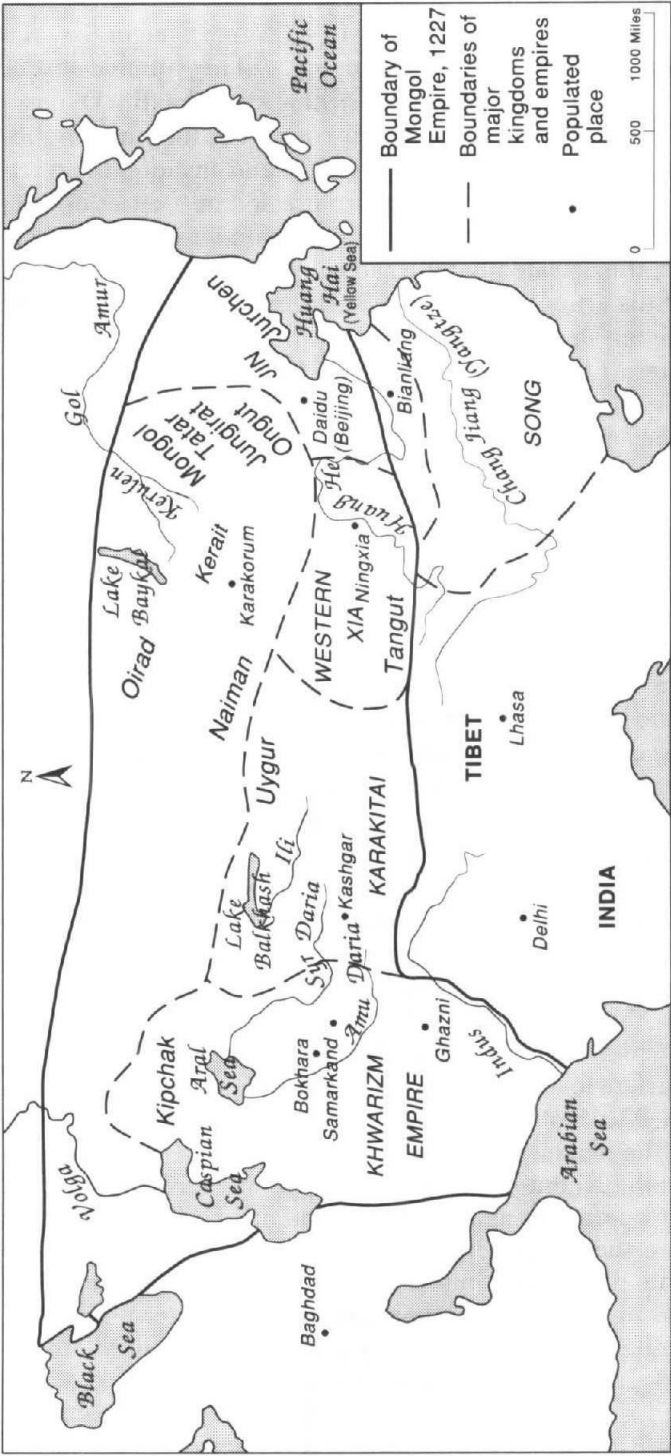
to vassal status in a seven-year war (1115–1122; see Caught Between the Russians and the Manchus, this ch.). The Jurchen leader proclaimed himself the founder of a new era, the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234). Scarcely pausing in their conquests, the Jurchen subdued neighboring Koryŏ (Korea) in 1226 and invaded the territory of their former allies, the Song, to precipitate a series of wars with China that continued through the remainder of the century. Meanwhile, the defeated Kitan Liao ruler had fled with the small remnant of his army to the Tarim Basin, where he allied himself with the Uighurs and established the Karakitai state (known also as the Western Liao Dynasty, 1124–1234), which soon controlled both sides of the Pamir Mountains. The Jurchen turned their attention to the Mongols who, in 1139 and in 1147, warded them off.

The Era of Chinggis Khan, 1206–27

Rise of Chinggis Khan

After the migration of the Jurchen, the Borjigin Mongols had emerged in central Mongolia as the leading clan of a loose federation. The principal Borjigin Mongol leader, Kabul Khan, began a series of raids into Jin in 1135. In 1162 (some historians say 1167), Temujin, the first son of Mongol chieftain Yesugei, and grandson of Kabul, was born. Yesugei, who was chief of the Kiyat subclan of the Borjigin Mongols, was killed by neighboring Tatars in 1175, when Temujin was only twelve years old. The Kiyat rejected the boy as their leader and chose one of his kin instead. Temujin and his immediate family were abandoned and apparently left to die in a semidesert, mountainous region.

Temujin did not die, however. In a dramatic struggle described in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Temujin, by the age of twenty, had become the leader of the Kiyat subclan and by 1196, the unquestioned chief of the Borjigin Mongols. Sixteen years of nearly constant warfare followed as Temujin consolidated his power north of the Gobi. Much of his early success was because of his first alliance, with the neighboring Kereit clan, and because of subsidies that he and the Kereit received from the Jin emperor in payment for punitive operations against Tatars and other tribes that threatened the northern frontiers of Jin. Jin by this time had become absorbed into the Chinese cultural system and was politically weak and increasingly subject to harassment by Western Xia, the Chinese, and finally the Mongols. Later Temujin broke with the Kereit, and, in a series of major campaigns, he defeated all the Mongol and Tatar tribes in the region from the Altai Mountains to Manchuria. In time Temujin emerged as the strongest chieftain



Source: Based on information from John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, Boston, 1978, 165.

Figure 2. Tribes, Nations, and Boundaries of Mongolia and Inner Asia, ca. A.D. 1150-1227

among a number of contending leaders in a confederation of clan lineages. His principal opponents in this struggle had been the Naiman Mongols, and he selected Karakorum (west-southwest of modern Ulaanbaatar, near modern Har Horin), their capital, as the seat of his new empire.

In 1206 Temujin's leadership of all Mongols and other peoples they had conquered between the Altai Mountains and the Da Hinggan (Greater Khingan) Range was acknowledged formally by a *kuriltai* (council—see Glossary) of chieftains as their khan. Temujin took the honorific *chinggis*, meaning supreme or great (also romanized as *genghis* or *jenghiz*), creating the title Chinggis Khan, in an effort to signify the unprecedented scope of his power. In latter hagiography, Chinggis was said even to have had divine ancestry.

The contributions of Chinggis to Mongol organizational development had lasting impact. He took personal control of the old clan lineages, ending the tradition of noninterference by the khan. He unified the Mongol tribes through a logistical nexus involving food supplies, sheep and horse herds, intelligence and security, and transportation. A census system was developed to organize the decimal-based political jurisdictions and to recruit soldiers more easily. As the great khan, Chinggis was able to consolidate his organization and to institutionalize his leadership over a Eurasian empire. Critical ingredients were his new and unprecedented military system and politico-military organization. His exceptionally flexible mounted army and the cadre of Chinese and Muslim siege-warfare experts who facilitated his conquest of cities comprised one of the most formidable instruments of warfare that the world had ever seen (see Historical Traditions, ch. 5).

At the time of his first *kuriltai* at Karakorum, Chinggis already was engaged in a dispute with Western Xia, the first of his wars of conquest. In 1205 the Mongol military organization, based on the *tumen* (see Glossary), had defeated the much larger Tangut forces easily. Despite problems in conquering the well-fortified Western Xia cities, the results were the same in the campaigns of 1207 and 1209. When peace was concluded in 1209, the Western Xia emperor, with substantially reduced dominion, acknowledged Chinggis as overlord.

Early Wars in China

A major goal of Chinggis was the conquest of Jin, both to avenge earlier defeats and to gain the riches of northern China. He declared war in 1211, and at first the pattern of operations against Jin was the same as it had been against Western Xia. The Mongols were victorious in the field, but they were frustrated in their efforts to

take major cities. In his typically logical and determined fashion, Chinggis and his highly developed staff studied the problems of the assault of fortifications. With the help of Chinese engineers, they gradually developed the techniques that eventually would make them the most accomplished and most successful besiegers in the history of warfare.

As a result of a number of overwhelming victories in the field and a few successes in the capture of fortifications deep within China, Chinggis had conquered and had consolidated Jin territory as far south as the Great Wall by 1213. He then advanced with three armies into the heart of Jin territory, between the Great Wall and the Huang He. He defeated the Jin forces, devastated northern China, captured numerous cities, and in 1215 besieged, captured, and sacked the Jin capital of Yanjing (later known as Beijing). The Jin emperor did not surrender, however, but removed his capital to Kaifeng. There his successors finally were defeated, but not until 1234. Meanwhile, Kuchlug, the deposed khan of the Naiman Mongols, had fled west and had conquered the state of Karakitai, the western allies that had decided to side with Chinggis.

By this time, the Mongol army was exhausted by ten years of continuous campaigning against Western Xia and Jin. Therefore, Chinggis sent only two *tumen* under a brilliant young general, Jebe, against Kuchlug. An internal revolt was incited by Mongol agents; then Jebe overran the country. Kuchlug's forces were defeated west of Kashgar; he was captured and executed, and Karakitai was annexed. By 1218 the Mongol state extended as far west as Lake Balkash and adjoined Khwarizm, a Muslim state that reached to the Caspian Sea in the west and to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea in the south.

Conquest of Khwarizm and Reconnaissance into Europe

In 1218 the governor of an eastern province of Khwarizm mistreated several Mongol emissaries. Chinggis retaliated with a force of more than 200,000 troops, and Khwarizm was eradicated by 1220. A detachment of about 25,000 Mongol cavalry, as part of the Khwarizmian campaign, had crossed the Caucasus Mountains, had skirted the Caspian Sea, and had briefly invaded Europe.

After defeating the Georgians and the Cumans of the Caucasus, the small Mongol expedition advanced in 1222 into the steppes of the Kuban. Combining rapid movement with guile, the Mongols again defeated the Cumans, captured Astrakhan, then crossed the Don River into Russia. Penetrating the Crimea, they stormed



*Stone turtle marking the reputed site of
Chinggis Khan's capital at Karakorum
Courtesy Steve Mann*

the Genoese fortress of Sudak on the southeastern coast, then turned north into what later became known as the Ukraine.

The Mongol leaders now thought they had accomplished their mission. Before returning to Mongolia, however, they decided to rest their troops and to gain more information about the lands to the north and the west. They camped near the mouth of the Dnieper River, and their spies soon were scattered throughout eastern and central Europe.

Meanwhile, a mixed Russian-Cuman army of 80,000 under the leadership of Mstislav, prince of Kiev, marched against the Mongol encampment. Jebe and Subetei, another great Mongol general, sought peace; however, when their envoys were murdered, they attacked and routed Mstislav's force on the banks of the Kalka River. Historian Charles Halperin estimated that by this time the "destructive power of the Mongol war machine eclipsed anything the Russians had seen before," and the Kievan Russians found themselves faced no longer with a renewal of the sporadic raids of the past but with the threat of subjugation and foreign domination. In compliance with a courier message from Chinggis, the expedition then marched eastward. As the Mongols were marching north of the Caspian Sea, Jebe died of illness. In 1224 Subetei led

the expedition back, after a trek of more than 6,400 kilometers, to a rendezvous with the main Mongol armies, that were returning from their victories over the Khwarizm.

The Last Campaign of Chinggis Khan

The vassal emperor of Western Xia had refused to take part in the war against the Khwarizm, and Chinggis had vowed punishment. While he was in Iran, Western Xia and Jin had formed an alliance against the Mongols. After rest and a reorganization of his armies, Chinggis prepared for war against his foes.

By this time, advancing years had led Chinggis to prepare for the future and to assure an orderly succession among his descendants. He selected his son Ogedei as his successor and established the method of selection of subsequent khans, specifying that they should come from his direct descendants. Meanwhile, he studied intelligence reports from Western Xia and Jin and readied a force of 180,000 troops for a new campaign.

Late in 1226, when the rivers were frozen, the Mongols struck southward with their customary speed and vigor. The Tangut, well acquainted with Mongol methods, were ready, and the two armies met by the banks of the frozen Huang He. Despite a Western Xia army of more than 300,000 troops, the Mongols virtually annihilated the Tangut host.

Pursuing energetically, the Mongols killed the Western Xia emperor in a mountain fortress. His son took refuge in the great walled city of Ningxia, which the Mongols had failed to conquer in earlier wars. Leaving one-third of his army to take Ningxia, Chinggis sent Ogedei eastward, across the great bend of the Huang He, to drive the Jin forces from their last footholds north of the river. With the remainder of his troops, he marched southeast, evidently to eastern Sichuan Province, where the Western Xia, the Jin, and the Song empires met, to prevent Song reinforcements from reaching Ningxia. Here he accepted the surrender of the new Western Xia emperor but rejected peace overtures from Jin.

A premonition of death caused Chinggis to head back to Mongolia, but he died en route. On his deathbed in 1227, he outlined to his youngest son, Tului, the plans that later would be used by his successors to complete the destruction of the Jin empire.

Successors of Chinggis, 1228–59

Ogedei and Continuing Conquests

In compliance with the will of the dead khan, a *kuriltai* at Karakorum in 1228 selected Ogedei as khan. The *kuriltai* also decided to