

READING 1

Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, "Trade, Transport, Temples, and Tribute: The Economics of Power," in *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 231–45.

Abstract: This essay explores the material conditions that gave rise to increasingly centralized, hierarchical social organizations between the 13th and 15th centuries. In particular, it focuses on two empires in very different parts of the world: the Mali Empire in West Africa, and the Mongol Empire in Eurasia. Of central importance are the ways in which military conquest, trade, and technology aided the development of these empires.

Trade, Technology, and Culture: The Mali Empire in West Africa

Of the numerous empires that developed and disappeared on the African continent, Mali was one of the first south of the Sahara to capture the attention of both the Islamic and European worlds. Mali also illustrates the range and diversity of historical sources, written and nonwritten, that may be brought to bear on the reconstruction of empires. Mali is an example of an empire that used culture, ideology, and language (Mande) to dominate an expanding territory. The grassland and semiarid region included virtually all of what was known as the savanna, or "Sudan," and the Sahel, from the Sahara's edge to the forest's edge in West Africa. The empire's manipulation of technology (iron and horses) and ecology (beneficial climatic shifts) emphasizes two of the possible means by which smaller polities may be integrated into the structure of a larger empire. At its height in the fourteenth century C.E. the Mali Empire covered an area greater than 24,000 square kilometers (9000 square miles), and it influenced, through trade connections, an even larger portion of West Africa for several centuries.

Early West African States and the Caravan Trade

Mali was not the first empire to occupy the large grasslands region of West Africa that straddled the Sahara, the semiarid edge of the desert known as the "Sahel" (literally the "shore" of the great ocean of sand, in Arabic) and the inland delta of the Niger River. According to oral traditions, the first state in that area was known as Ghana by the sixth century C.E. These traditions suggest that the political unity of ancient Ghana was based on its control of the very lucrative gold trade of the western Sudan and Sahara. Two of the three major sources of gold, Bambuk and Bure, were situated within reach of the Senegambia region, between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers and the inland Niger delta.

Caravans, small parties of merchants, carried goods from one town or settlement to the next, exchanging southern forest products such as kola nuts (chewed for their stimulant properties and everywhere offered as a symbol of hospitality), gold, ivory, wood, smoked and salted fish, cloth, and copper. These caravans had plied the desert sands for centuries before the rise of the West African states. The introduction of the camel in the second century C.E. allowed greater regularity of contact than the merchants traveling on foot in the earliest centuries of Saharan trade had achieved. By the twelfth century, West African gold and other products, such as so-called Moroccan leather, which actually came from the Hausa area of northern Nigeria, were supplied to Mediterranean markets and found their way to the fairs and markets of such places as Normandy and Britain. A prolonged series of droughts, diminishment of the alluvial sources of gold, and repeated attacks by North African peoples trying to control the lucrative caravan trade combined to bring about the disintegration of Ghana and the disruption of trade at the end of the eleventh century.

In the place of Ghana, the even greater empire of Mali developed from the conquest and union of several smaller states. It has been estimated that during the time of the Mali Empire, West Africa produced and supplied almost two-thirds of the world's gold. At its height, the Mali Empire covered much of West Africa and incorporated into one polity hunters, herders, nomads, merchants and farmers from many different language groups. Written historical sources, especially the writings of Arab scholars, have been too preoccupied with the wealth of Mali. The full historical understanding of the empire also relies on archaeological and oral sources.

Sunjata and Mali Oral Tradition

Oral traditions credit a single legendary and heroic figure with the final act of unification: Sunjata, the most powerful of the Mali rulers, finally subjected the Soso people to the authority of Mande languages and culture, with the ascendancy of the Keita clan. The praises of Sunjata today are sung by every *griot*, or Mande oral historian. The performance of the *griot* within Mande society and on behalf of the royal clan is an example of how history is used to legitimize the formation of an empire.

The epic of Sunjata devotes a major portion of its tale to sorcery and its relationship to political power. All great exploits, including the founding of empires, require control of the supernatural, or *nyama*, which the Mande view as both natural and mystical energy. Access to sorcery is a component of political leadership and as such is needed to wage successful military campaigns, to subdue enemies, and even to protect one's personal fortune. One of the central battles in the history of the Mali Empire is a sorcery war between Sunjata and a rival. Calling on great powers, Sunjata obtained the

formula for a substance called *nasi*, “power of darkness, a thing used to harm someone.” His *griot* poured it over the personal objects and sources of his rival’s power, which were duly neutralized, and Sunjata triumphed.

Like many African divine rulers, Sunjata overcame obstacles, exile, and a physical handicap (the inability to walk from birth) in order to demonstrate his power (*nyama*). The *griots* generally attribute most of the empire’s administrative structures and innovations to the reign of Sunjata, who was probably responsible for the division of the empire into two military regions and for the codification of hereditary craft clans. During and after his reign, blacksmithing, leatherworking, and other specialist activities became associated with statecraft. The products of such activities supported the expansion of trade and empire.

Sunjata’s Capital, Niani

Sunjata rebuilt his capital at Niani, where he ruled for about twenty-five years, until his death. The location of Niani was forgotten for many generations. Archaeologists recently located the probable site of the Malian capital of Niani on the Sankarani River, an area rich in iron and gold. It was well situated on the forest edge to become the intersection of extensive trade routes that linked the different ecological zones of the empire. Excavations have revealed an Arab quarter and a royal villa, as well as stone house foundations and a mosque. Not unlike other well-known West African trading centers, such as Jenne on the Niger, Niani’s royal quarter was surrounded by dispersed quarters or villages organized for various trades: smithing, weaving, fishing, leatherworking. Such concentration of specialist activities and the consequent exchange of goods and services controlled by the centralized authority are classic features of most world empires. Their formation having resulted from conquest, their continued control of material wealth not only cements the incorporation of new territories into a single unity but also pays the costs of government.

According to oral tradition, the unification of Mali occurred during the time of Sunjata. A popular epic poem records the struggles of Sunjata, the first Malian king, in a war between Sunjata’s polity and several smaller states about 1220 and 1235 C.E. From the time of Sunjata’s victory, the Mali Empire was cemented by the idea of Mande cultural superiority. While praise singers, oral historians who sang and performed the past, helped to spread the ideology, blacksmiths and others provided the tools of empire. Without iron weapons and leather and iron trappings for horses, military success would not have been possible.

Contemporary Descriptions of Mali

The travels of Mansa Musa (King Musa), a fourteenth-century ruler of Mali, however, brought attention to the golden wealth of the African empire. Like many of his predecessors, Mansa Musa had eagerly embraced Islam, in large part because of the international commercial world the religion opened up. As the Islamic faith gradually spread across North Africa and south across the Sahara (between about 750 and 1400 C.E.), it brought merchants and clerics, goods and ideas. Mali, with its capital at Niani not far from the Niger, became the trading partner of merchants with connections to West Asia and beyond. Like any devout Muslim, Mansa Musa was required to attempt the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, which he did in 1325. According to contemporary accounts, Mansa Musa traveled with thousands of porters and servants bedecked with gold. In Cairo, his generosity and wealth were legendary. It was Mansa Musa who gave away so much gold that he caused the market to crash and depressed world prices. From this time forward, European and Arab cartographers depicted the Sudan with portraits of the African ruler holding a large gold nugget. Yet Mansa Musa is rarely mentioned in the oral tradition. He is remembered for having been unfaithful to Mande traditions and having wasted the imperial treasury.

The caravans of gold made the Mali Empire a celebrated name far beyond West Africa. The caravan routes met at Niani and other staging posts, and their protection was a major function of the empire. Gold, salt, copper, and kola nuts were central to Mali's economy. Following the reign of Sunjata, Mali became the world's largest producer of gold. Along with the movement of material goods went the dissemination of Mande language, technology, and culture. Even later, the empire would serve as the major promoter of Islamic ideology and culture across the West African savanna.

Ibn Battuta

While the vast majority of written historical sources on the Mali Empire were compiled by non-Africans who rarely set foot in Africa and never ventured south of the Sahara, an important exception is the eyewitness account by the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta. Its wealth of detail and observation makes his memoirs, *Rihla*, an unprecedented portrait of life in fourteenth-century Mali. Ibn Battuta was born in Tangier, Morocco, in 1304. Although he studied law, he began his celebrated travels as a young man in 1326 with the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the course of his lifetime he journeyed more than 70,000 miles to China, Southeast Asia, India, East Africa, the Niger, and the Byzantine Empire. Ibn Battuta considered himself a citizen of the Dar al-Islam, the entire "abode," or world, of Islamic civilization. It was through this lens that Ibn Battuta viewed Mali in 1352–1353.

After two months of traveling across the Sahara from Sijilmasa in Morocco, Ibn Battuta's caravan reached Walata. The oldest city of Mali, Walata was a trading center where Sudanese and Berber merchants and scholars interacted. It was here that Ibn Battuta had his first taste of the inroads Islam had made into the integrity of Mali's indigenous ceremonial and cultural life. A meeting with the provincial governor shocked the visitor, not only because of the meagerness of his host's offering to him of a calabash of millet, honey, and yogurt, but because the man, according to West African custom, never addressed his visitor directly but spoke only through an interpreter.

The route between Walata and Niani, the Mali ruler's capital, was safe and well secured by the administrative and military controls of the Mali Empire. But here, too, Ibn Battuta was shocked by the lack of adherence to orthodox Islamic custom and practice. He wrote of partially clothed women, subjects who prostrated themselves before the *mansa* (king), and royal poets who danced in feathers and masks, all of which were spectacles outlawed by the orthodox Islam Ibn Battuta knew. From Ibn Battuta's account we learn that although Mali officially belonged to the Islamic world and thereby had expanded the trading opportunities available to the empire and its ruling elite, it was clear that Islam was to be found only in the veneer of Mali's material life; the underlying substance of Mali's culture was a belief in Mande superiority.

Growing Inequalities in the Mali Empire

Another important feature of the Mali Empire that we learn from Ibn Battuta is how much social inequality existed. One of the consequences of the expansion of empire through trade and military means was the capture of prisoners of war, who then became sources of male soldiers and female slaves. The Sahelian and Saharan towns of the Mali Empire were organized as both staging posts in the long-distance caravan trade and trading centers for the various West African products. At Taghaza, for example, salt was exchanged; at Takedda, copper. Ibn Battuta observed the employment of slave labor in both towns. During most of his journey, Ibn Battuta traveled with a retinue that included slaves, most of whom carried goods for trade but would also be traded as slaves. On the return from Takedda to Morocco, his caravan transported 600 female slaves, suggesting that slavery was a substantial part of the commercial activity of the empire's fringes.

Gender Divisions

There were many more female slaves than male slaves traded in the empire, a fact that points out the inequality that existed between the genders. The variation in women's social positions increased with the growth of the empire's towns. Women, usually slaves, were valued porters in the trans-

Saharan caravan trade. They sometimes served as concubines. Additionally, female labor produced salt, cloth for export, and most of the local foodstuffs essential to the provisions required by urban centers. Men were hunters, farmers, merchants, and specialists, in addition to frequently being conscripted as soldiers.

A general feature of empires is the increased exploitation of social inequality. Imperial growth everywhere depended in part on women, the appropriation of female labor as well as the mechanisms for the exclusion of women from the sources of political and economic power. An empire's expansion ultimately relied on its increasing the supplies of food for its armies and other sources of wealth for trade. In addition to their reproductive role, women produced goods. Not surprisingly, women had not played a prominent role in the preimperial male-dominated elite authority of West African society, either. Women are rarely mentioned in the oral historical record, which was controlled by male *griots* and their male descendants. In the epic of Sunjata they do appear as potential power sources – mothers, sisters, and sorceresses – despite their unequal access to true political power.

Ecotone, Ecology, and Change

Management of the trans-Saharan trade was a central feature of the Mali Empire, as well as of its predecessor (Ghana) and successor (Songhai); our discussion of this management would be incomplete without an explanation of the ecological control required by the imperial expansion. The geographical boundaries of the empire straddled three distinct ecological zones. That is to say, Mali was situated on an ecotone, an area that straddled the borders of desert, Sahel, and savanna. The exchange between these regions, which supplied quite different products, also created a lucrative source of income. Internal trade and occasional tributary relations, with outlying regions being tapped for support, proved necessary to the functioning of the empire. Centers of trade such as Jenne, Gao, and Timbuktu were similarly situated on ecotones. However, this incorporation of the products of several different ecological zones was not the only way in which ecology played a role in the fortunes of the Mali Empire: much of the expansion of the Mali Empire was made possible by the Mande's military use of the horse, which made them dependent on certain ecological conditions for its breeding and survival, and these conditions existed in the savanna grasslands of Mali.

Horses and Ecological Change

Traders from Mali carefully controlled the breeding and use of horses in West Africa. Reportedly, they rarely traded mares south of the Sahara; therefore, despite their obvious value, horses remained rare items, connoting prestige

and status outside the empire. The cavalry was extremely important in gaining a military advantage, particularly in the savanna grasslands. Although many towns in the Sahel had been walled before the introduction of the horse, probably to help control the influx of trade as early as the second-century C.E. introduction of camels, the number of settlements and villages surrounded by protective mud walls increased during the era of the Mali cavalry. The walls were necessary to stop sudden attacks by warriors on horseback. Here, as in other parts of the world where the horse was successfully exploited, the element of surprise was significant.

Ecological factors played a paramount role in defining and limiting the extent of the spread of Mande culture and society. In tropical Africa, the humidity and presence of the tsetse fly limited the use of the horse. The tsetse fly thrived in damp and swampy conditions and spread diseases that were deadly to horses. Thus, the occurrence of a particularly dry climatic period in West Africa between 1100 and 1500 takes on a certain significance. Horse breeders, warriors, and traders alike derived great advantage from that progressive dessication, which inhibited the spread of the tsetse fly. With the onset of a drier climate, expansion on horseback was favored over a much wider area. Sunjata's military success over his rival was closely associated with cavalry warfare. Also, the regions occupied by Sahelian and savanna vegetation pushed southward at the expense of the southern forests, increasing the territory in which horses could survive. The elliptical lines of the Mandes' expansion with the aid of their cavalry could then extend east and west. Only the rain-forest zone, where other ethnic groups lived, remained inhospitable to the empire's warriors and their horses. Conversely, changing ecological conditions during the wet period between about 1500 and 1630 also influenced the fortunes of the empire, which had begun to collapse toward the end of the fifteenth century. Wetter conditions limited the use of cavalry and put the Mali military at a disadvantage.

Mande Culture and the Power of Blacksmiths

The era of the Mali Empire was a classical period for Mande language and culture. The military, economic, and commercial relations that bound together the far-flung reaches of the empire were crucially cemented by the power of Mande cultural imperialism. How notions of Mande superiority were extended also helps explain the fluidity of the empire's internal relations. Central to the effective spread of the Mande cultural system and its worldview were power associations controlled by the empire's blacksmiths. The metallurgical skills of smiths were critically important to military success and agricultural operations. But Mande metalworkers were more than essential occupational specialists who followed behind the warriors. They constituted a caste that held *nyama*, the "energy of action" and supernatural

power. Together with *griots* and leatherworkers (who supplied saddles, bridles, sword sheaths, garments, pouches for amulets, and so on), the blacksmiths provided necessary services of both a practical and a spiritual nature.

According to tradition, it was blacksmiths who were responsible for the founding of lodges, or centers for the transmission of Mande culture inside host communities, and they occupied the principal leadership roles within the lodges they established wherever they settled. The lodges were secret associations, that is, membership was limited to those initiated into the secrets of the craft. Like the later mosques of the Islamic era, they offered spiritual protection and moral leadership to the members of their community. They were where Mande speakers gathered. Lodges also maintained control over the physical roads and bridges that linked the empire's commercial realms, by repairing them and ensuring their safety. They protected trade and the trader, who enjoyed the professional affiliations and sense of common community provided to lodge members. While they were dependent on clients both inside the Mande associations and in the larger community, blacksmiths also maintained their separateness and control over the knowledge of smelting, metalworking, ritual, and healing powers that constituted the source of their power. Within the association and against the backdrop of host communities, the *griots* functioned as amplifiers of Mande superiority, articulating the claims of a heroic age.

The dessication of the first half of the millennium limited the extent of regions that could support iron-smelting activities. Both smelting and smithing required large quantities of wood to make charcoal for fuel. It is also likely, however, that the smiths helped extend the boundaries of their empire by moving further and further afield in search of wood to sustain their industry. The deforestation that resulted from extensive smelting and concentrated smithing opened up savanna woodland to their comrades on horseback. Thus, for many West African peoples the era of the Mali Empire meant their first encounter with the economic, cultural, and ecological forces of imperialism.

The Impact of Mali

The Mali Empire's fortuitous combination of technological skills, cultural control, and ecological circumstances came to an end in the late fifteenth century, but the legacy of the Mali Empire would be felt far and wide for centuries. Mande words that survive in the languages of forest regions are evidence of the empire's widespread linguistic influence and of the probable prestige associated with using the language of the elite trading culture. In Hausa, the language spoken in northern Nigeria, for example, the word for "Muslim" is *Imale*, which suggests that the Mali Empire may also be credited with the diffusion of Islam after the mid-fourteenth century. Through contact

with Mande traders, items of technology were dispersed throughout the empire and southward into the West African forest towns and states. The evidence comes from the material culture of places distant from the empire: the use of the horizontal loom for weaving cloth spread from North Africa to the Niger and then southward, as evidenced by the spindle whorls excavated at sites along the Niger and south in the trading town of Begho in what is today modern Ghana; the introduction of the horse-mounted cavalry in the Yoruba state of Oyo, in Nigeria, spread from the savanna through a gap in the forest; Arabic-inscribed brass vessels appear in the towns of the Akan (Ghana) forest. Long after the fall of Mali, the institutions of lodges remained in societies from the west Atlantic to the Niger, albeit reduced in power and influence. There remained as well the voices of the *griots*, whose ancestors had created the heroes of the Mande world and who continued to sing the praises of Sunjata, recalling the events of past centuries. In so doing, they breathed life into the history of the Mali Empire long after the walls of its palaces had crumbled.

Nomads and Empire in Eurasia

By the early first millennium C.E., a regular pattern of relationships developed in many places between nomadic or pastoral economies and agrarian ones. Different economic systems emerged from different environments and gave rise to various forms of social organization and political order. For example, the needs of water control on the north China plain contributed to the early creation of a highly centralized bureaucratic government, which taxed the agricultural economy. In contrast, the nomadic pastoralists who inhabited the lands beyond the Great Wall were highly mobile, dependent on herding and pasturage, conditions not conducive to the development of a centralized political order. Across the frontiers that divided these two different ways of life, trading relationships and warfare were both common. This frontier in East Asia was marked by the incorporation of defensive walls built by earlier northern states into the Great Wall during the third century B.C.E., at the time of the first unification of China and the creation of the first empire.

Across the Great Wall: Nomadic States and the Chinese Empire

For nearly 2000 years, the Great Wall symbolized the barrier between the peoples, cultures, and ecologies of the steppe and those of the sown land. Beginning in the third century B.C.E., much of the history of China was dominated by its relations with the nomads and pastoral peoples beyond the Great Wall. The two major dynasties of the Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) and Tang (618–907 C.E.) were separated in time by four centuries of foreign invasion and conquest by northern nomads; during the Song dynasty (960–1279),

pastoral peoples founded states on the northern frontiers of China; and in the thirteenth century, the full conquest of China was achieved by the Mongols.

The growth of states among China's neighbors to the north, northeast, and northwest was in part the result of the long-term evolution of Chinese-style political institutions among the non-Han peoples beyond the Great Wall. The assimilation of Chinese political ideas enabled their leaders to unite various groups into confederations and in some cases to create a centralized bureaucratic state.

Qidan Liao

The Qidan Liao (990–1126) was the earliest such state, bringing other ethnic groups to the northeast of China together under its leadership. The Chinese-style dynastic name "Liao" was adopted by the Qidan, a Mongolic people, who laid claim to territory within the Great Wall and stabilized their relationship with Song China through diplomacy. The Liao was later destroyed by an alliance between the Chinese and the Jurchen people from Manchuria, former vassals of the Qidan Liao. The Jurchen established their own Chinese-style state, with the dynastic name of Jin, in 1115. They soon overcame their Chinese allies, and in 1127 all of north China fell under the control of the Jurchen Jin state.

Jin Rule in North China

The Jin ruled north China through a combination of native Chinese and Jurchen institutions and personnel, unifying their tribal background in the forested river valleys of Manchuria with centralized bureaucratic rule modeled on the Chinese government. Both native Chinese and Jurchen, along with other non-Chinese peoples, served in the Jin government. The fusion of political orders representing two distinct ways of life rooted in different economies is vividly illustrated by the Jurchen rule of north China.

The Rise of the Mongols

Sometime around the close of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth centuries, Mongol clans began to organize into tribal collectives under the leadership of chieftains whose power was based on personal loyalty. Dwelling in the steppes of Mongolia, they had a pastoral economy based on sheep, goats, and yaks for sustenance (food, clothing, and shelter), camels for trade-related transportation, and horses for hunting, herding, communication, and warfare. Because their economy was subject to the vagaries of drought and cold, as well as other potentially devastating problems such as animal diseases, the Mongols were dependent on trade in grain, textiles, tea, and other goods with their sedentary agricultural neighbors, particularly the Chinese. The Chinese likewise had need of goods

from their nomadic neighbors, especially horses. The trade relations between the neighboring states periodically disintegrated into warfare, with Chinese raids on Mongol camps or Mongol raids on Chinese communities.

The Technology and Environment of Mongol Success

The success of the Mongols in their expansion across Eurasia relied heavily on the adaptation of the traditional technology of horsebreeding to environment. Mongol horsebreeders had preserved an early form of domesticated horse, one that resembled the prehistoric horse depicted in Paleolithic cave art. Its stocky body and thick, coarse mane helped it to survive in the extremely cold and dry temperatures of Mongolia. Furthermore, Mongols did not shelter or feed their animals, instead breeding qualities of independent foraging in a semiwild state. The Mongol technology of warfare also differed from the rest of Asia's, forcing the abandonment of chariots and the use of well-armed warriors on horseback. Almost all men and women rode horseback with great agility and endurance, and the elite militarism of other cultures was unknown in nomadic Mongol society. Indeed, other cultures borrowed heavily from their Mongol enemies. From the Abbasids of West Asia to the Chinese Tang dynasty in East Asia, men began to wear trousers for horseback riding through their influence.

Chinggis Khan

By 1200, the Mongol tribes had joined together in a large confederation. Under the leadership of Chinggis (ca. 1162–1227), who was elected khan (chief) in 1206 by an assembly of tribal chieftains, they began to bring other tribes, such as the Turkic Uighurs, under their control. With this step, the Mongol conquest of Asia began. Chinggis was a charismatic political leader who organized the Mongol tribes and a brilliant military strategist who led the Mongol armies to victory. Along with the military strength that made conquest possible, the Mongols were driven to conquest by the uncertain nature of their economic base, which depended in part on the fluctuating fortunes of trade and made more precarious by a climatic change that produced colder weather and consequently poorer pasturage for their animals.

Religion and Mongol Rule

Religious sanction for the authority of Chinggis Khan and the conquest of the world came from the sky god, the principal deity of the steppe. Under Chinggis's leadership a written script, adapted from Uighur Turkic, was created for the Mongol language, and a law code was issued to provide guidance first for the administration of the Mongol tribes and later, as it was modified, for the governing of conquered lands and peoples. Succession to the position of khan, however, was not institutionalized, and at Chinggis's death, despite his stated will that he be succeeded by his third son, Ögödei

(1186–1241), there was no clear successor. In 1229, two years after Chinggis's death, the territories under Mongol control were divided among Chinggis's grandson Batu (d. 1255), who became the khan of the Golden Hordes (the western lands, eventually including Russia); Chinggis's son Chaghadai (ca. 1185–1242), who assumed control of central Asia; and another son, who was assigned responsibility for the Mongolian homeland and north China. In a gesture of compliance with Chinggis's will, Ögödei became the *khaghan*, or Khan of Khans, ruler over all Mongol domains.

The Expansion of the Mongol Empire

During the next generation, the Mongol Empire expanded into China, Russia, and Islamic lands in West Asia, confronting vastly different political, religious, and social conditions in each region. Despite continuing conflicts among themselves over leadership, Mongol rulers in each khanate (territory ruled by a *khan*) of the empire were able to implement an efficient administrative system that integrated Chinese, Muslim, Turkic, and native elements. The Chinese empire under Chinggis's grandson Khubilai Khan (1215–1294) may be taken as one example of Mongol administration of a conquered territory. With a population sixty times that of the entire Mongol population of Asia, an agricultural economic base, a complex and sophisticated political and cultural tradition, and the rule of a highly educated elite, China presented a formidable challenge to its Mongol rulers.

Mongol Rule in China

Before the Mongol conquest of the Jurchen Jin state in north China, an official of the Jin government had convinced Ögödei (r. 1229–1241), against the advice of other Mongol leaders, not to turn north China into pasturage for the Mongols' herds but to utilize its agricultural productivity to enrich the Mongol rulers. When the Jin state was absorbed by the Mongols, the advanced iron technology and the skilled labor force of north Chinese ironworkers, developed during the Northern Song dynasty, also came under Mongol control. The Mongols' ability to make use of such resources, in addition to the agricultural output of north China and eventually that of the fertile Yangzi delta, was a crucial factor in the continued expansion of the Mongol Empire in the decades after Chinggis's death. With the conquest of Jin, the Mongols were also able to make use of Jin institutions that had been adapted from Chinese models. The Mongol experience made the transition to ruling over the entire population of China relatively smooth.

The Mongols and the Mandate of Heaven

Chinese political ideology favored the adaptation of Mongol rule, in that the Mandate of Heaven in theory could be conferred on any ruler, and non-Chinese peoples, including most recently the Jurchen rulers of the Jin state in

north China, had a long history of establishing states and kingdoms within China's borders. But many Confucian scholars nevertheless scorned serving their Mongol lords, regarding them as "barbarian" conquerors. While some members of the Chinese scholar-official elite served the Mongols as administrators, others withdrew from public life and refused to become officials in Khubilai Khan's administration. Khubilai and his successors did adopt Chinese institutions and practices to a considerable degree, including the renewal of the civil service examination system in 1315, although the Mongols instituted ethnic quotas for examination degrees that seriously disadvantaged Chinese in favor of Mongols and other non-Chinese peoples, such as the Uighurs. Khubilai built a new capital, site of the modern capital of Beijing and imperial capital without interruption from 1421 until the twentieth century.

Beginning in the 1350s, rebellions led by the Chinese against their Mongol conquerors gradually brought an end to Mongol rule. The effects of these rebellions were exacerbated by power struggles among the Mongol leaders that seriously weakened their authority and control. When the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty fell in 1368 and the restoration of native Chinese rule under the Ming was declared, other khanates of the Mongol Empire similarly began to crumble. Chinggis and his successors in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries had succeeded in creating a huge empire by their military prowess, discipline, and strength, and by their strategic and logistical skill at maneuvering large numbers of troops over long distances. Their military abilities were grounded in their superior horsemanship, honed in the course of Mongol life as nomadic herders and hunters. Their efficient communication network in the form of a courier system operated by riders on horseback was an essential part of their military operations. But their expansion and conquest of the Eurasian world would have stopped short of creating an empire had they not been able to successfully make use of the human and material resources of the lands they conquered to fuel the machinery of expansion and to provide the tools of empire.

Mongol rule had to be adapted to vastly different circumstances across the Eurasian continent. China was only one khanate among four, and the Mongol penetration of Europe left a profound legacy in European history as well. The Mongols moved westward out of Asia into Europe in a series of invading waves followed by settlement among and control of the indigenous peoples among whom they appeared.

The Mongols in Russia and Europe

The earliest Europeans among whom the Mongols appeared were the peoples of the southern Russian steppe. As they advanced during the winter of 1237–1238, the conquerors were preceded by envoys demanding that the

inhabitants of the steppe accept Mongol supremacy. Resistance led to the forceful taking of fortresses and occupation of territories, including the north Russian forest lands as well as the southern steppe. The invaders were determined to break the power of the Russian princes and to leave them no escape. By early 1238, the north Russian principalities had ceased to exist, and the Mongols turned south into the steppes to recuperate before undertaking new advances westward.

Their strategy was effective, their harsh policy deliberate, and they moved over great distances at incredible speeds unmatched by their European opponents. In their panic, thirteenth-century Europeans justified their failure to halt the Mongol invasion with legendary excuses, many of which have persisted. The Mongols' savagery was much commented upon, and their success was explained by their having made an alliance with Satan. They were accused of cutting an ear off every Christian they killed. Following the initial fury and success of their invasion, the Mongols settled down on the Hungarian plain in the Danube Valley, where they established a government administration. They appointed judges and officials, placed Mongols in charge of towns, and proclaimed amnesty for any who would recognize Mongol authority. Then, just as the Mongol leaders were making plans to resume their assault on western Europe, news came that Ögödei, the Khan of Khans, was dead. Mongol law required that, after the death of a ruler, all offspring of the dynasty, wherever they might be, must return to Mongolia for the election of a new *khan*. This law had greater weight than the opportunity of conquering the Western world, and accordingly Europe was saved.

Following the death of Ögödei Khan in 1241, the Mongols vanished from central Europe unexpectedly, as suddenly as they had come. They remained on the eastern edge of Europe, in Russia, until they were defeated by a Russian army in 1380, the beginning of a process that was to drive them back into Asia. The princes of Muscovy (the region of modern Moscow) assumed leadership of this effort and accordingly gained control of the emerging Russian state. One of them, Ivan the Great (r. 1462–1505), who proclaimed himself czar (ruler) of all the Russias, succeeded in pushing the Mongols out of north Russia and drove them eastward beyond the Ural mountains.

The Mongols in South Asia

The Mongols also moved into South Asia, where they established themselves in India. An enormous peninsula jutting out from the Eurasian landmass, divided from other lands by sea and by the mighty Himalayan mountains along its northern border, India is penetrable by only two corridors. The northeast one, through Burma, is long and difficult and not easily used. There are also a number of usable passes in the northwest corridor that links India, through Afghanistan, with Central Asia. These geographical features are

significant to the movement of peoples into the relatively isolated subcontinent. Several different Central Asian peoples, who had come under the sway of Chinggis Khan and his descendants, subsequently invaded India via the northwest corridor.

The Mongol Empire in World History

In the early thirteenth century, the foundations were laid of what has been called “the largest contiguous land-based empire in human history.” The Mongol Empire endured for only a century, but it had a profound impact on world history. Mongol armies linked vast areas of the Eurasian continent, bringing about an era known ironically as the *pax Mongolica*, the “Mongolian peace.” What is remarkable about the Mongol Empire is not that it was relatively short-lived but that an empire of such scale and complexity existed at all at a time when communication and transportation were largely dependent on the horse and camel. The Mongol courier system was known for its speed and efficiency, and the effectiveness of this communication network, along with military skill and administrative ability, accounts in large part for the rise of the Mongols from a tribal confederation to one of the most powerful empires in world history.