

## *Introduction*

Who really ran the Mongol empire? The common stereotype of “leadership” during that period of world history most likely consists of a band of savage horse-mounted nomads, led by the fearless and powerful Chinggis Qan, sweeping down from the steppe to conquer and rule with brutal force over the most powerful Eurasian empires of the time. But while the Mongol tribesmen were certainly effective in conquest and empire building, they could not have succeeded alone. In fact, the rapid conquests of Chinggis and his heirs, and the empire that they constructed across Eurasia, were achieved through the skills and efforts of many different peoples who collaborated (willingly or unwillingly) with the Mongol lords. Not only were the nomadic Mongol tribesmen few in number (especially relative to the large agrarian states they would ultimately conquer, China and Persia), but they also lacked the skills and experience needed to hold power over the long term.

Thus, the Mongols depended on personnel recruited in the wake of their conquests to maintain control of the subjugated territories. These were usually foreigners who had no ties to the locality and who ruled alongside or on behalf of their Mongol masters. The polyglot Mongol empire that resulted was of enormous interest to travelers and statesmen across Eurasia, not least because of the potential threat it posed to the known world. The detailed accounts left by Chinese, Persian, Russian and Western European writers of the time provide a vivid picture of that regime’s complexity.<sup>1</sup> However, the stories of these inter-

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas T. Allsen, “Ever Closer Encounters: The Appropriation of Culture and the Apportionment of Peoples in the Mongol Empire,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1.1 (1997): 2-23, for a good sense of the multi-ethnic nature of the Mongol empire.

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mediary agents are generally less well known than those of their masters, perhaps because their status as subjects renders them less visible than either the flamboyant Mongols or the people they conquered, or perhaps because of the liminal space in which they existed, somewhere between conqueror and conquered.

This was certainly the case in China, where the Mongols brought with them large numbers of men from Central and Western Asia to serve as administrators over the conquered population (in addition to the many disaffected Jurchen and Chinese who also helped the Mongols conquer and retain power in north China). Those men constituted an important group of political elites in Mongol China, second only to the Mongols themselves. Their status was made clear to everyone when the Mongols categorized all of them as members of a single social status group known by the Chinese term “*Semuren*.”<sup>2</sup> The roles of these *Semuren* personnel as members of the conquering political elite in China have been the subject of several important studies. Less well understood are the ways in which many of these same people produced and reproduced their status as social and cultural elites. How did these men who had been dispersed to a foreign land to serve their Mongol masters in military and political roles also guarantee their social survival in that alien land, where the locals would surely look on them as merely one of the conquering political elite? This is the question that this book tries to answer.

It is an important question since any answers we may provide will help to illustrate the complex nature of society in China during the period of Mongol rule. Focusing on the

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<sup>2</sup> The term *Semuren*, the second of four categories in Mongol China, was an administrative term that meant “people of various categories,” and not the literal “people with colored eyes.” The error of understanding this term as the latter has long been repeated, as I discuss below.

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*Semuren* personnel as full fledged political and social elites in their own right enables us to see the multiple networks of social power that operated in Mongol China, rather than viewing China as essentially bipolar and static, divided between conquerors and conquered. The question also impinges on several larger issues of interest to historians of late imperial China and the Mongol empire, including the structure of power relations in Mongol China, the impact of the Mongol conquest on the Chinese social order, and the ways in which the Mongols, the other foreign expatriates who worked for the Mongols, and the Chinese themselves were changed by the Mongol conquest of China.

The story of elites in Mongol China is quite complex, not least because it involved so many different groups and modes of production, and because the consolidation of Mongol rule took such a long time (over sixty years from the time of the first Mongol campaigns against the Jurchen Jin in north China to their final conquest of the Southern Song in 1278). In the north, the Mongols drafted Jurchen and Chinese personnel into their administration as well as *Semuren* of various ethnicities, all of whom were then categorized according to Mongol taxonomies. Traditional Mongol nomadic socio-political systems were put in place in the north, for example the large land grants (appanages) given to members of the Mongol royal clan, and a loosely defined administrative system that realized little real distinction between civilian and military spheres of authority. Elites in this context were defined first and foremost by their proximity to the qan and his near relatives, and the major avenues of social mobility consisted of inheritance of duties and office and membership in the qan's personal bodyguard.

When the Mongols completed the conquest of south China a generation later, some of the traditional Mongol social and administrative taxonomies – such as inheritance of office and the structure of the qan's bodyguard – were

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retained, and even codified into law. These continued to be the main points of access to power for Mongols and *Semuren*. But the system also looked quite different than it did in the north. For example, the power of the Mongol princes had been diminished by that time, especially with regard to their landholding since the old appanage system was not continued in the south. Moreover, some parts of the pre-existing Chinese administrative system, and attendant routes of social mobility, had been retained in the south, and expanded over time. Thus, for example, the Chinese civil service exam system was restarted in 1315, and became an important, albeit limited, point of access to bureaucratic service for Chinese personnel. So the ways that hierarchies of power operated, and the very definition of those hierarchies, changed over time and depending on location.

One of the issues often overlooked in studies of Mongol China's social history is the liminal nature of the *Semuren*.<sup>3</sup> While it is generally acknowledged that these men were at one and the same time subjects as well as members of the conquering elite, the focus has mainly been on their careers and actions as political elite who enforced Mongol rule, while their roles as actors on a complex social landscape are often overlooked. It is natural to understand the *Semuren* as part of the conquering political elite – as generals and administrators – since they owed their very lives and livelihoods in China to their Mongol masters and most of the primary sources that document their lives reflect that reality. But it is easy to lose sight of the more nebulous forms of power that this group, and individuals within the group, assumed as social actors as much at home

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<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere I have described this liminal existence as the experience of alterity. See Michael C. Brose, "Central Asians in Mongol China: Experiencing the 'Other' from Two Perspectives," *Medieval History Journal* 5.2 (2002): 267-89.

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among the powerful Chinese *shidafu* elite as they were among the Mongol nobility.

In fact, *Semuren* moved through at least three different networks of social interaction and power in Mongol China: they were members of a political elite dominated by the Mongol nobility; they were part of a social elite usually dominated at the local level by prominent Chinese; and they were progeny of a specific diaspora community defined by place of origin. The Mongol conquest, bringing with it all of these foreign ethnic and tribal groups allied to the Mongol nobility, created an entirely new social space in China that rearranged the traditional infrastructures of power that Mongols, Chinese, and *Semuren* had inhabited and understood before the conquest.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the conquest changed the ways in which each of these groups imagined and constructed community, and determined which of these groups were able to create and interpret culture, and in which realms of human intercourse.<sup>5</sup>

To maintain their hold on power, the Mongols had to recognize and integrate different views and traditions. Their rule of China also brought together for the first time a host of tribal and ethnic groups, some of which had had uneasy

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<sup>4</sup> I draw heavily from Michael Mann's discussion of the infrastructure of power here and throughout the book. See his *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). His claim that societies should be seen as a series of networks of social interaction and power, rather than as a series of unitary entities, is especially useful in understanding and describing how these three groups interacted in Mongol China.

<sup>5</sup> See Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), for an insightful example of how conquest affected cultural production and elite strategies, especially their competing claims to cultural authority. Even though his subject is late-nineteenth century Uzbekistan, the parallels to Mongol China are striking.

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relations at best before the Mongol conquest. These groups were now forced to coexist and get along as *Semuren* equals.<sup>6</sup> Chinese networks of power were likewise disturbed, especially once the south was conquered and all of traditional China reintegrated under one rule for the first time since the Tang Dynasty. Focusing our study on the *Semuren* in Mongol China highlights their interstitial or liminal existence, in which they lived in several overlapping and intersecting networks. At a higher level, this focus allows us to develop an understanding of these various networks, and how social power was really distributed and operated in Mongol China. To borrow Michael Mann's terminology, Mongol China is rightly seen as a "confederal" rather than a unitary society.<sup>7</sup>

In order to understand the role of the *Semuren* in Mongol China we first have to comprehend Mongolian notions of social, political and ethnic identity. The steppe social landscape was populated by a range of nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled groups, and every tribe or state that ruled the steppe developed their own taxonomies of identity. Certainly, as we shall see, the Mongols developed their own categories that served mainly as mechanisms of mobilization and control. Some of these categories were inherited from earlier nomadic peoples (who had themselves drawn on a wide array of models taken from various societies with which they maintained contacts), while others were taken by the Mongols from societies they conquered as their imperial project emerged. In fact, the

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<sup>6</sup> A useful distinction between "tribe," as a group with some political coherence or organization, and "ethnic group" as a group defined by a perceived cultural distinctiveness, is provided by R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, "The Violent Edge of Empire," in *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, ed. R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1992), 1-30. I shall have more to say on this issue below.

<sup>7</sup> Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 16.

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evidence suggests that the Mongols developed an elaborate, interlocking set of classifications that included tribal, ethnic, occupational and religious identities and origins. One of the larger goals of this book will be to set the *Semuren* within this network of categories. The fact that these categories continued to be important throughout the period of Mongol rule in China points to another issue addressed by this book: Why the Mongols used so many foreigners in China.

Central to this issue is the division of labor in nomadic societies, and the fact that the Mongols, like all nomads, depended on personnel from sedentary societies for specialized skills required to administer the large settled societies that they conquered.<sup>8</sup> In addition to their skills, these foreigners also brought significant prestige and majesty to the Mongols. As Mary Helms so eloquently points out, people with special manual and intellectual skills were associated with spiritual power. Estimation of their power increased in proportion to the distance they lived from the king who was able to summon them to his court. Any nomadic qan who could attract these powerful individuals to his court thus obtained for himself important spiritual power and real prestige, not to mention their work product.<sup>9</sup>

But bringing so many subjects into the qan's tent also held risks for the Mongol ruling elite. One of the most efficient ways of maintaining power over these subjects while also enabling them to wield power on the Mongols' behalf was to create a social hierarchy that reified the

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<sup>8</sup> This dependency relationship is examined by Anatoly Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), and will be discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> See Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade and Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). I am indebted to Thomas Allsen for introducing this concept and Mary Helms's work to me.

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Mongols' dominant position in terms of real power and prestige. Thus, the Mongols drew on categories already familiar to them to create in China a hierarchical system comprised of four separate social status groups where the *Semuren* ranked below – but just below – the Mongols in terms of status and power.

Some of the specific issues that this book addresses include the mechanisms of social power utilized by the Mongols in the early years of their imperial project, the ways the first *Semuren* were integrated into Mongol networks of power as political elites, how their descendants reproduced that identity as political elites, and how they made the transition to social elites. We can easily understand how the first generation of *Semuren* subjects to be drawn into the Mongol empire collaborated with their new masters, but what about their descendants? The descendants did not have the advantage of association with immediate conquest, and had been fit into the typical nomadic administrative machinery where they were expected to perform equally well in military and civil matters. How did those men become political elites and perpetuate their family's status in a foreign land? Moreover, how was it that many of these same descendants of Central Asian military/political elites also came to exemplify the Chinese literati lifestyle and associate themselves with traditional Chinese cultural elites?

This book seeks to answer these questions by examining examples from one constituent group of *Semuren* personnel, the Uyghurs. The Uyghurs were among the very first Central Asian kingdoms to submit to Chinggis Qan. Because of that early submission, and because of the skills and manpower they brought to the Mongol imperial project, they eventually became the most prominent part of the larger *Semuren* status group in China. They were certainly not the only important immigrant group in Mongol China, nor should they be seen as representative of



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the *Semuren* group as a whole. Nonetheless, because of the relatively abundant primary sources that document their lives and activities (especially vis-à-vis other *Semuren* constituents), and because they did figure so prominently within the *Semuren* status group, they make an inviting subject through which to study the question of non-Chinese elite reproduction in Mongol China.

### *Theories of Social Mobility*

One of the basic questions this book seeks to address is how social mobility and the production and “reproduction” of social structures worked in the Mongol Empire, especially among the array of foreigners who were brought into a given area by the Mongol conquering elite. Specifically, what kinds of strategies did those foreigners employ to make sense of and survive in their new world? The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on social reproduction of culture provides a good approach to this question, since his interest has long been to understand the strategies and resources of social actors, and to bring our focus back onto the person, rather than focus mainly on social structures (a traditional approach of many sociologists, which views the person as secondary, acting according to a set of predetermined social rules).<sup>10</sup> Since one of the goals of this book is to recover the agency of these liminal *Semuren* individuals and families in Mongol China as social actors, and to recognize them as social and

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu’s emphasis on social actors and their agency is seen especially in his: *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); and *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). For useful summaries of Bourdieu’s work, see Derek Robbins, *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu: Recognizing Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); and David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

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political elites, Bourdieu's focus on the practices of people to acquire and assert power, and his expansion of the concept of capital are both useful devices that we can employ in our study of this group of individuals.

Thus, my focus will be on the practices of Uyghur *Semuren* personnel in Mongol China that produced and reproduced their elite status (as political, social, and cultural elites), and specifically, the strategies they adopted to become members of the Mongol political elite and members of the Chinese social elite. Understanding these practices may illuminate not only the roles of these individuals in Mongol China's society, but may provide us with a new vantage point from which to view Mongols and the Chinese elites as well. Several questions come immediately to mind. For example, how did their roles and powers as political elites influence their social survival and eventual status as social elites? Did the Uyghur *Semuren* employ local or national strategies? What was the nature of their relationship to the Chinese population, and especially to the Chinese *shidafu* elite? This last question points to the continuing cultural power of Chinese in their own communities and throughout Mongol China, in spite of their loss of political suasion (at least in the south).

The Mongol conquest also displaced Chinese people from their native places, and those cases provide interesting parallels to the *Semuren* in China. Paul Smith has studied Chinese elites who were dispersed from Sichuan by the Mongol conquest.<sup>11</sup> He examines the strategies that group of displaced elites used to retain their social status and power in Yuan China, and his approach provides another useful model for my study of the Uyghur *Semuren*.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul J. Smith, "Family, *Landsmann*, and Status-Group Affinity in Refugee Mobility Strategies: The Mongol Invasions and the Diaspora of Sichuanese Elites, 1230-1300," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.2 (1992): 665-708.

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Because of their situation, these displaced Sichuanese elites did not have recourse to the kind of resources they would normally have utilized to maintain their identity and status, especially a local power base. Smith identifies three kinds of resources, in the form of critical relationships, that those individuals were able to tap for the strategies they employed as they sought to retain identity and status as elites: relationships to family, native place, and status-group affinity. Their flight from Sichuan to southeast China put them in a precarious position as elites for two reasons; as immigrants they had no property, wealth or local connections on which to rely, and they were forced to compete with an enormous number of Chinese from the southeast for the small number of official positions open to Chinese under Mongol rule. In other words, poverty and rootlessness put this group of refugee diaspora elites from Sichuan at a double disadvantage in the typical localist strategy of elite production that prevailed in the Southern Song and Yuan periods. Their primary form of “capital” thus consisted of their ties to family, native place, and status-group affinity, which Smith shows they mobilized to good effect. The Sichuanese diaspora could also be described as a type of “mobilized” diaspora group, a convention that will be useful in describing the Yuan Uyghurs.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, these Sichuanese elites provide a model for comparison with the *Semuren* who migrated to China at the behest of and in service to their Mongol masters.

Since this book focuses on the production of elites in Mongol China, I need to say a word about the scholarship on Chinese elites in general, upon which I base my discussion of social and political elites here. We know a great deal about the ways that elites were produced in

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<sup>12</sup> John A. Armstrong, “Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas,” *The American Political Science Review* 70.2 (1976): 393-408.

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imperial China, especially during the preceding Song period. Those studies have set a pattern for studies of subsequent eras. Unfortunately, relatively little attention has been paid to the production of *Semuren* as full-fledged elites in Mongol China.<sup>13</sup> There are undoubtedly several reasons for this lacuna, not least of which is the usual pattern of studying either the Mongols or the Chinese segment of the population. The liminal space that they occupied between Mongol and Chinese populations has also obscured the roles of the *Semuren*. Furthermore, in this complex age, nomadic and traditional Chinese institutions of power overlapped and intersected, causing considerable confusion in understanding the boundaries and definitions of administrative power.

The Yuan has also been neglected because it was the first time in the long history of China that non-Chinese conquered and ruled all of traditional China. This dynastic era has frequently been portrayed as an irruption between periods of Chinese rule. According to this view, not only did the Mongols succeed in legitimizing two earlier alien states as Chinese dynasties (Liao and Jin), but the Mongol conquest also disrupted the most important Chinese social and political institutions and practices.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The work of Chen Yuan, Thomas Allsen, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, and Shang Yanbin stand out as notable exceptions, and are discussed in more detail below.

<sup>14</sup> This traditional view has not been universally shared among historians. Scholars such as Herbert Franke, Francis Cleaves, Denis Sinor, Igor de Rachewiltz and Wang Gungwu have fought against this grain in their path breaking work for several decades. The volume of essays edited by Morris Rossabi, *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), was a milestone in scholarship because it questioned the received view of a static, monolithic Chinese world order that dominated all of East Asia for centuries. But the fact that this is still a minority view may be reflected in the fact that scholars still find it necessary to dethrone the old dynastic cycle model and attendant assumptions about the place of non-Chinese dynasties in China's

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One of the examples frequently pointed to as evidence of this irruption is the new methods of production of social and political elites; the Mongol conquest dislocated the usual ways in which power was distributed throughout Chinese society by imposing their own social class structure on China and by distributing real power through often-informal mechanisms that were based on nomadic patrimonialism instead of learning and culture.

It is by now well known that a large transformation in the production of elites took place in China between the Northern and Southern Song periods, moving from a national “professional elite” who focused mainly on holding office at the national level in the Tang through Northern Song period to an elite that was more focused on local power, emphasizing local connections, the building up of wealth and a variety of careers for one’s sons, including but not limited to holding office and taking the imperial civil service examinations.<sup>15</sup> This later pattern of elite production came to characterize the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties, at least among the Chinese elites, with

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imperial past. One example is the collection of fine essays edited by Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Hartwell called the Northern Song elite a “professional elite,” in part to distinguish them from their southern counterparts who turned to a more localist strategy of upward social mobility. See Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (1982): 365-442. On the Song elite, see also Edward A. Kracke, “Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations under the Empire,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 105-23; and his *Civil Service in Early Sung China, 960-1067* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953). For a review of the history of the study of elites in imperial China through the Yuan, see Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially the introduction.

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a return to a more nationally oriented professional elite in the Ming and Qing periods.<sup>16</sup>

But did elites in Mongol China all follow this localist pattern? And just who constituted the “elite” at that time? Everyone would agree that the Mongols defined and dominated the political elite, sharing some but certainly not all power with their *Semuren* subjects. As most scholars also know, the Chinese were, for the most part, excluded from the highest stratum of political elites, and it is usually assumed that they continued to follow their localist strategies of elite production in the social and cultural realms. Embedded in this view of China during the Mongol period is the assumption that there was a clear division between political elites (Mongols and *Semuren*) and social and cultural elites (Chinese).

In this book I will try to paint a more complex picture of Mongol China, a society in which the supposedly impermeable barriers between these two groups was in fact much more porous than generally assumed. In fact, the sources from the period reveal a good deal of crossover; Mongols and *Semuren* played the role of gentleman in the social and cultural realms, while many Chinese held important roles in the political realm. Moreover, the notion that elites employed the same purely localist strategies in the Mongol period that they did in Song seems dubious. In fact, there appears to be a trend towards a more nationalist strategy of elite production and reproduction, both among the *Semuren* and the Chinese. This is not to deny the fact that many Chinese still followed localist strategies, but

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962). For a general review of the scholarship on elite production in Ming and Qing periods, see the editors’ “Introduction,” in *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1-24.

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simply to point out that nationalist strategies are found among these various elites in Mongol China. Finally, the book argues that the power that Uyghur *Semuren* derived from political networks and the power they derived from social networks actually reinforced each other, and resulted in the survival of those Uyghurs well beyond the period of Mongol rule.

### ***Structure of the Book***

In Chapter One I examine the traditional Mongol social order and the precedents it set for the situation faced by the *Semuren* diaspora as new members of the Mongol empire. Of particular interest are the patterns of elite production and reproduction practiced among the various Mongol tribal units before they were united as a confederation under Chinggis Qan, since it was those patterns that continued to dictate virtually all aspects of the Mongol empire, especially in its early decades. Following a discussion of these typical Mongol patterns as seen in pre-imperial steppe history, we then look at the ways in which those same patterns continued to be utilized in the first decades of the Mongol empire. Included in discussion will be themes such as the “hybrid” culture of the Mongol empire, the social classification system imposed by the Mongols in China that grew out of their own views of social norms, and the notion of the *Semuren* as a status group.

Chapter Two examines the history of the Gaochang Uyghurs, focusing upon the history of the Uyghuristan kingdom in the Tianshan-Tarim Basin area up to the time of the Mongol conquests, on Uyghurs as a diaspora group within the early Mongol empire, on the position of the Uyghurs within the *Semuren* status group as first among equals, and on the question of whether Uyghurs in fact constitute an adequate case study through which to observe

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the processes of *Semuren* elite production and reproduction in Mongol China.

In Chapter Three we will turn to consider specific cases of diaspora Uyghur elites in the early Mongol empire. Seven examples will be considered of prominent Uyghur individuals who made the transition into Mongol service with apparent ease. These examples will illustrate changes that took place within the larger Uyghur community and among prominent Uyghur individuals and their families, the strategies these individuals employed to retain their status as political elites in the Mongol empire, and the repercussions of those strategies for themselves and their descendants.

Chapter Four then looks at later generations of two of these prominent families to assess the ways in which strategies used to produce and reproduce status as political elites changed over time. Following the final conquest by the Mongols of south China, and their increasing engagement of time, materiel and personnel in that part of their empire, came increasing reliance upon Chinese modes of administration, as opposed to traditional Mongol institutions. The net result of this can be seen in increasing clarity and definition in the Yuan administrative structure. The civil and military spheres of authority grew more clearly separated, and officials were less frequently expected to serve with equal competence in civil and military affairs. Furthermore, some of the old Chinese institutions such as the civil service exam system were now reintroduced by the Mongols in an attempt to regularize the administrative machinery and to bring the southern Chinese social and cultural elite to the table of governance.

The two case studies of prominent Uyghur families considered in Chapter Four then set the pattern for the inquiry presented in Chapters Five through Seven, each of which focuses on a family of descendants of one of the three prominent Uyghur individuals discussed in Chapter



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Four. Chapter Five examines two generations of the family descended from the Uyghur high minister, Bilge Buqa, as transitional figures in the history of this family as political elites. The chapter argues that while these men continued to act as powerful political elites in China, the facts of their careers and personal choices illustrate important shifts in their own conceptions of identity.

Chapter Six looks at the ways that members of the Uyghur Xie family were perceived by their Chinese peers of the time. Since most of the important information that we have on Xie family history was written as encomia by Chinese contemporaries, we see in these stories not only the facts of the lives and careers of those Uyghurs, but also their portrayal as members of the social elite, who were just as powerful in the realm of culture as they were in politics.

Finally, in Chapter Seven we see the completion of this transformation. Members of the Xie family were now viewed as a part of the Chinese social elite, capable of using Chinese culture to their own ends. The six Xie family men who obtained the *jinshi* degree within a thirty-three year period really were a new generation of *Semuren*, equally at home in the realms of politics and culture. Their stories reflect larger shifts in the dynamics of Mongol rule in China, which are also touched upon in this chapter.

### *Some Caveats*

In examination of Uyghurs in China, it must, of course, be kept in mind that the Mongol empire spanned most of Eurasia; China was but one portion of a much larger empire. Thus, while the *Semuren* in China may have in some ways shared the experiences of diaspora elites in other parts of the empire, the case studies presented in this book are not necessarily representative of the experience and history of all displaced elites throughout the Mongol empire. Nor will it be possible in a book of this size to do any real justice to any single social or ethnic group in Mongol China, either to

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the *Semuren* as a whole, nor even to all the Uyghur constituents of this group. This book attempts only to take a close look at a few examples of Uyghur *Semuren*. It is, however, my hope that the few case studies presented here will shed new light on some aspects of the history of the *Semuren* status group and the Uyghurs in China, and that this study will encourage others to follow up with similar studies on the Uyghurs and other *Semuren* constituents.

It is also tempting in a study of this kind to dismiss the attraction of the Uyghur *Semuren* to Chinese culture as nothing more than a calculated strategy to enhance their social power in China. I would, however, argue that we need to take their interest seriously. Such involvement does, in fact, make sense in the light of their background; many *Semuren* personnel came from aristocratic, highly cultured stock in their native lands, and they were undoubtedly already familiar with Chinese culture before they were moved to China by the Mongols. Strategy and genuine interest can go hand in hand.

Finally, while this book focuses on Uyghurs who became part of the Chinese social fabric, the reader should remember that there are just as many examples of Uyghurs and other *Semuren* who chose to remain distinct from the Chinese world during the Yuan period. Their histories are just as important as the Uyghurs portrayed in this book in reconstructing the history of the *Semuren* as a status group in China. That part of the story has still to be told.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Some *Semuren* individuals who remained apart from the Chinese sphere have been portrayed in Igor de Rachewiltz, Hok-lam Chan, Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing and Peter W. Geier, eds., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200-1300)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993).

### *Mongol Social Order*

chief. Well below the chief's kin and allied inner clans in the social hierarchy came the "outer clans," forced into alliance with a dominant clan because of defeat in battle or economic marginalization. At the very bottom of the nomadic social scale were tribute-paying vassals and slave tribes.

Temüjin's genius, and the reason for his success in organizing the Mongol clans where earlier chieftains had failed, lay in his ability to reorient the loyalties of the several competing Mongol clan chiefs to himself as the grand qan. He accomplished this by rewarding other Mongol leaders who had been faithful to him with the title of companion and vesting them with considerable power. By doing so he effectively redirected the primary loyalties of those various chiefs to himself as the supreme qan, which overrode or displaced pre-existing kin loyalties. Of course, the forced biological absorption of other nomadic steppe peoples into the Mongol ranks by giving their wives and children to Mongol males also disrupted traditional tribal affiliations in favor of a supreme qan. In any event, the strategy united the many fractious Mongol clans as a powerful force against their common enemies.

Reorienting the loyalties of those Mongol elites required, in turn, that the leading clan legitimate its authority on the basis of something more potent than mere ability to rule by force. Here, Temüjin skillfully adapted aspects of earlier steppe nomadic ideology by promoting the notion of the ruling, charismatic clan that was ordained by heaven to universal rule, an idea that had its origins in Eurasian shamanic practices and the worship of three key deities, the sky-god (*Tängri*), the mother-goddess (*Umay*), and the elements of earth and water (*yir-sub*).<sup>10</sup> He also

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<sup>10</sup> See especially Allsen's discussion of these issues in his "Spiritual Geography." For reflections of nomadic altaic ideology in other steppe societies, see Tang Chi, "The Religious and Lay Symbolism of the T'u-Chüeh as Recorded in Chinese History," in *Religious and Lay*