

Chapter 1

Mongol Social Order

The social and administrative category of *Semuren* in China was part of a new social order that was formed in the long process of confederation and consolidation of the Mongol tribes around Chinggis Qan's leadership. We must, therefore, understand Mongol taxonomies of social power in order to understand the role and status of the *Semuren* in China. After all, the same social values and hierarchies or networks of power that informed life on the steppe for the Mongol confederation certainly shaped the ways that the Mongols administered and organized the societies they conquered, the ways they ranked people and the kinds of skills they deemed most important.

This chapter examines the cultural influences that operated in the early Mongol administration. Put in terms of the sources of social power, we ask what networks of social interaction and power were salient in the construction and organization of Mongol nomadic society in the steppe, and then in China.¹ We begin with a brief

¹ A note on sources is in order here. The only extant source that purports to have come down directly from the Mongols of Chinggis Qan's era is the *Secret History of the Mongols* (C. *Yuanchao bishi* 元朝秘史), now in several translations. For authoritative translations, see Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols: For the First Time done into English out of the Original Tongue and Provided with an Exegetical Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Igor de Rachewiltz, tr., *The Secret History of the Mongols: a Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003). For discussion of the problems associated with the Secret History as a historical text, as well as studies of that text, see Rachewiltz, "Introduction," in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, xxv–cxiii; Frederick W. Mote, "A Note on Traditional Sources for Yüan History," in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 6,

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overview of the history of the formation of the Mongol confederation and early steppe empire, and conclude with an assessment of Mongol perspectives revealed in Chinese sources written after the Mongols had begun to rule China.

Early Mongol History

Temüjin's rise to power among the contending Turco-Mongol tribes and chiefs, which culminated in his appropriating the title of grand qan and epithet Chinggis Qan in 1206, is a well-known story that need only be briefly recounted here.² The "Mongols," in the sense that

Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368, ed. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 693–94; and Michael A. K. Halliday, *The Language of the Chinese "Secret History of the Mongols"* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1959). See also David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), for discussion of the sources on Mongol history. Of course, there are also accounts written by Chinese, Persian, and Western writers who traveled to or were associated with the early Mongol empire that are important contemporaneous secondary sources for that history, and will be discussed in more detail below.

² The enormous body of scholarship on Mongol history is too long to list here. For a list of studies of Mongol history in western languages, see Thomas T. Allsen, "The Mongols in East Asia, Twelfth–Fourteenth Centuries: A Preliminary Bibliography of Books and Articles in Western Languages," *Sung Studies Research Aids*, no. 1 (Philadelphia: Sung Studies Newsletter, 1976), 7–14. Useful general histories of the Mongols include Peter Brent, *Genghis Khan* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976); René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, tr. Naomi Walford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970); Morgan, *The Mongols*; Tamura Jitsuzo, "The Legend of the Origin of the Mongols and problems concerning their Migration," *Acta Asiatica* 24 (1973): 1–19; and the essays in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For specific studies of the elevation of Temüjin to Chinggis Qan and the rise of the Mongol confederation, see especially René Grousset, *Conqueror of the World*, tr. Marian McKellar and Denis Sinor (New York: Orion Press, 1966); Leo de Hartog, *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); H. D. Martin, *The Rise of Chingis*

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we know them, really only emerged as a distinct group of tribes (M. *ulus*) in the twelfth century, living in the area of present-day northwest Outer Mongolia where they were divided roughly into two main groups: pastoral steppe tribes, and forest dwelling hunters. The aristocrat appears to have played a more prominent role among the steppe pastoralists than the forest dwellers, serving to find good grazing lands and to make sure that there were enough clients and slaves to take care of the tribes' herds and tents. This division, argues Grousset, was manifested in the two main classes of tents used by the Mongol peoples: the *ger*, a round felt tent that relies on a large number of wood poles for its structural integrity, denotes people who live within easy reach of supplies of wood, the forest; while the *maikhan*, a low woolen tent easy to put up and transport, is consistent with nomads who live in the treeless steppe.³ The nomadic tribes were the ones most in contact with more settled steppe peoples such as the Uyghurs, the Qitans and the Jurchens, and it was from this group of Mongol tribes that Chinggis Qan would arise.

The future Chinggis Qan was born about 1167 to Yesügei, a chieftain (M. *ba'atur*) of the Kiyat clan, one of the sub-clans in the aristocratic Borjigin tribe, on the banks of the Onon River in present-day Outer Mongolia.⁴ Yesügei was killed when Temüjin was only about twelve, by hereditary enemies of the Mongols, the Tatars. The Tatars were perhaps the most powerful of the steppe tribes of the time; they lived in the eastern part of the steppe region and

Khan and his Conquest of North China (Baltimore, 1950); and Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*, trans. Thomas N. Haining (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

³ Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*, 196.

⁴ See Bat-Ochir Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: a Reconstruction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), for descriptions of these Mongol tribes and a map showing their locations in the steppe.

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had support from the Jurchen Jin dynasty. This left Temüjin and his family to fend for themselves in their tribal area in the Kentei Mountains (also known as the Burqan Qaldun), by the headwaters of the Onon River.

Eventually, the young Temüjin allied himself with Toghril, qan of the Kerait tribe. Temüjin's acceptance by Toghril Qan was made easier by the fact that Toghril had earlier been an *anda* ("sworn brother") to Yesügei. In 1196 Toghril Qan and Temüjin defeated the Tatars on behalf of the Jurchen Jin court, and as a reward Toghril Qan was granted the title *ong-qan* ("prince-qan"; in the Chinese sources as *wang* 王-*qan*). Temüjin was also rewarded by the Jin court, and as Buell has shown, this alliance effectively put Temüjin in association with Jin frontier organizations, which aided considerably his own efforts to organize the disparate Mongol tribes into a confederation.⁵

The alliance between Toghril Qan and Temüjin eventually broke apart, and by 1206, the year he was elected qan of all the Mongol tribes, Temüjin, now known by his imperial title Chinggis Qan, had eliminated all of his rivals in the northern frontier region. This made possible his first assault on the Tangut Xixia kingdom in 1209, and then his first attacks on the Jin empire itself in 1211. Chinggis Qan's gradual consolidation of power over the Mongol tribes was thus made possible by his advantageous alliance with Toghril Qan and the fact that he was coming into his own just as the Jin was losing control over the steppe and northern China. But the consolidation of the Mongol tribes into a confederation led by Chinggis Qan, and the gradual "bureaucratization" of this confederation, was also made possible by a long association of the

⁵ See Paul D. Buell, "The Role of the Sino-Mongolian Frontier Zone in the Rise of Chinggis-Qan," in *Studies on Mongolia: Proceedings of the First North American Conference on Mongolian Studies*, ed. Henry G. Schwarz (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1979), 63–76.

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Mongols with tribal and settled neighbors from whom they adopted administrative models.⁶

The Mongol tribes, especially the more nomadic ones in the steppe, had absorbed significant Turkic and Persian social and political ideas through neighboring nomadic groups. Ancient Turkic imperial ideology had been known and shared for centuries among a host of steppe tribes, while Mesopotamian-Persian religious influences from further west, transmitted via the Sogdians, were passed on to the Mongols by tribes such as the Naiman and Uyghurs. Temüjin drew freely from these various traditions as he refashioned the traditional Mongol tribal system into a confederation.⁷ These ideas would

⁶ This consolidation of the Mongol tribes into a bureaucratized confederation may also be seen as a natural outgrowth of the essentially political purpose of any nomadic tribe, which “served, first and foremost ... the protection and enhancement of the position of its tribesmen in the face of the wider world.” See Rudi Paul Lindner, “What Was a Nomadic Tribe?,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24.4 (1982): 689–711.

⁷ Peter Golden argues that the Mongols owed a great deal of their early social and political hierarchy to Turkic and Persian influences in the region. See Peter B. Golden, “Imperial Ideology and the Sources of Political Unity Amongst the Pre-Cinggisid Nomads of Western Eurasia,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2 (1982): 37–76. For discussion of sources of imperial ideology upon which Temüjin drew, see also Thomas T. Allsen, “Spiritual Geography and Political Legitimacy in the Eastern Steppe,” in *Ideology and the Formation of Early States*, ed. Henri J. M. Claessen and Jarich G. Oosten (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 116–35; Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), especially Chapter 9; Igor de Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan’s Empire,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973): 21–36; and Klaus Sagaster, “Herrschaftsideologie und Friedensgedanke bei den Mongolen,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 17.2–4 (1973): 223–42. I have drawn from all of these works for the following discussion.

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become the ideological and functional basis for bureaucratization of the Mongol confederation.

Since the Mongol confederation drew so much from ancient Turkic ideas, it is worth revisiting these before we proceed on. First, the ancient Turk tribal union was organized around a hierarchy of clans, at the top of which was the leading qaghanal clan.⁸ The qaghanal clan developed its political power by force: the authority of a clan chieftain could be usurped by a contender who based his claim to leadership on the evidence of his success in battle and leadership, which was also seen as proof of divine sanction of the leader's position. The qaghanal clan, in turn, maintained its leadership position over other clans by demonstrating its ability to lead successful raids, to provide booty and secure resources from sedentary sources for subordinate clans, and to organize the economic activities of the other clans.

In addition to their abilities, the Turkic qaghanal clan also related to subordinate clans on the basis of familial and voluntary relations. Just below the leading clan were the so-called "inner clans," which had married into the leading clan or allied themselves to it by a voluntary pact of loyalty. Perhaps the most important voluntary relationship at this level was the comrade or companion (M. *nöker*).⁹ A companion was a person who transferred his loyalty away from his blood relatives to another clan and

⁸ On the meaning of the term *qaghan*, see Igor De Rachewiltz, "The Title Činggis Qan/Qaran Re-examined," in *Gedanke und Wirkung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Nikolaus Poppe*, ed. Walther Heissig and Klaus Sagaster (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), 281–98.

⁹ For discussion of the role of the companion, the *nöker*, in Mongol social order generally, and as key members of Chinggis Qan's early administration, see B. Vladimirtsov, *Le Régime Social des Mongols: le Féodalisme Nomade*, tr. Michel Carsow (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1948), esp. 110–18; and Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, 110.

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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*).¹⁰ He also

¹⁰ 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*

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proved his spiritual authority by his ability to gather around him wise men from afar.

Once he had legitimized his authority (and that of his clan) as leader over the Mongol tribes, Temüjin needed to maintain the loyalties of his companions. He accomplished this by forming a corps of personal advisors and bodyguards that served as the principal administrative apparatus for the early Mongol empire. It was that group into which prominent *Semuren* would be placed as a first stage in their service careers.

The system of imperial bodyguards (C. *suwei*, M. *keshig*) was based on ancient nomadic customs of demanding loyalty of the companions to the chief. As Hsiao points out, the *keshig* was “a product of the Mongolian society and can only be understood in the social context of the Mongols around the turn of the thirteenth century.”¹¹ Initially made up of his closest companions (his *nököd*), the qan’s personal bodyguards eventually included eldest sons and brothers of those same companions, and their formation into a discrete group served two purposes. Admission into his bodyguard troop translated into elevated social status and real power for the enlistees, since guards performed the gamut of household and guard duties and thus had personal daily access to the qan and his family. It also ensured the loyalty of those men whose sons or brothers were members of the guard, since they were also

Symbolism in the Altaic World and Other Papers, ed. Klaus Sagaster and Helmut Eimer (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), 386–98; and István Zimonyi, “The Concept of Nomadic Polity in the Hungarian Chapter of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De administrando imperio*,” in *Historical and Linguistic Interaction Between Inner-Asia and Europe*, ed. Árpád Berta (Szeged: University of Szeged Department of Altaic Studies, 1997), 459–71.

¹¹Hsiao Ch’i-ch’ing, *The Military Establishment of the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 34. I have drawn freely from Hsiao’s exhaustive study of the imperial guard for the following discussion.

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effectively the qan's hostage. As the number of tribes and peoples absorbed into the Mongol confederation grew, the qan's bodyguard also grew, and soon evolved into an administrative organ where guards began to take on specialized administrative duties such as secretaries, etc., all while also performing their household duties. They eventually became the core of the Mongol administration.¹²

The *keshig* was first organized as an official unit around 1189, sometime after Temüjin's companions selected him as leader of the Mongol tribes. The Mongol sources make clear that Temüjin carefully selected the most suitable men from among the various tribes and clans to be members of his personal guard, which effectively redirected the loyalties of these companions to him as the grand qan.¹³ Eventually, the companions were organized into ten groups, or offices, each of which performed a specific function that ranged from household, kitchen and camp service duties directed specifically towards the qan and his immediate family, to guarding the qan and the entire camp, herding the camp's animals, and acting as envoys and messengers for the qan.¹⁴

¹² For a description of this evolution, see Thomas T. Allsen, "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251–59," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46.2 (1986): 495–521

¹³ See Denis Sinor, "The Making of a Great Khan," in *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia* (Ashgate: Variorum, 1997), Ch. 14 (rpt. from *Asiatische Forschungen* 126, Wiesbaden, 1993). Those men were loyal both to Temüjin the man and to him as holder of this title.

¹⁴ See relevant passages in *Secret History of the Mongols*, §§123 and 124, Cleaves, tr., 54–57; Rachewiltz, tr., 49–51, and commentary at 453–66. These entries are undated. Hsiao dates these developments to 1189 in his discussion of the development of the imperial guard. See his *Military Establishment*, 33–35. Barthold supplies the names of each of these 10 divisions of the imperial guard in his discussion of the Mongol imperial guard. See W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 3rd ed. (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1988), 382–83. See also Christopher I. Beckwith, "Aspects of the Early History of the Central Asian Guard Corps in Islam," *Archivum*

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By 1203 the future Chinggis Qan had expanded his leadership over most of the Mongol tribes, and he expanded the number of guards to a total of seventy dayguards (*turyaq*), eighty nightguards (*kebtegiil*), and one thousand braves (*bayatud*). As the empire grew so did the need for more administrative staff, and the guard was eventually divided into four groups, or shifts, each of which was headed by a general who had proved his loyalty to Temüjin in past struggles. Leadership of these four shifts was passed hereditarily within the families of these Mongol generals.¹⁵ It was this reorganization that was crucial to Temüjin's consolidation of power over the Mongol tribes.

By 1206, Temüjin had defeated his old rival, Jamuqa, and had consolidated his leadership over all the Mongol tribes. At a meeting of the tribes (a *quriltai*) he was proclaimed Grand Qan and took the name Chinggis Qan, at which point he raised the total number of imperial guards to 10,000 and issued a decree (or series of decrees) that established the process of recruiting new members into the guards units.¹⁶ Prospective members were to be chosen from among the sons and younger brothers of Mongol military leaders or from among the common people. Each enlistee also had to bring with him a specified number of

Eurasiae Medii Aevi 4 (1984): 29–43; and Allsen, “Guard and Government,” for discussions of the early history of the guards units.

¹⁵ Hsiao, *Military Establishment*, 36; and *Secret History of the Mongols*, §§191 and 192, Cleaves, tr., 119–20; and de Rachewiltz, tr., 113–14 and commentary, 689–94. See also David Farquhar, *The Government of China Under Mongolian Rule* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 245–46.

¹⁶ See *Secret History of the Mongols*, §§224–234, Cleaves, tr., 161–71; Rachewiltz, tr., 152–62 and commentary, 817–42. These appear to be a series of decrees issued by Chinggis in 1206, presumably after his claim to title of grand qan. The title Chinggis Qan has generally been translated to mean “Universal Ruler,” but for an alternate rendering as “The Fierce Ruler,” see Rachewiltz, “The Title Činggis Qan/Qaran Re-examined,” 288.

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relatives and companions, and the sponsoring military unit supplied the required horses. Thus, Temüjin secured his leadership over the Mongol tribes by an adroit realignment of the traditional social hierarchies within the Mongol tribes, since traditional kin loyalties were superseded by new political loyalties focused on the grand qan.¹⁷

This mechanism of recruitment into the *keshig* enabled Chinggis Qan to maintain a loyal body of retainers in two ways. First, his imperial guard served as a means to extend imperial favor (and accompanying perquisites) to family members and friends of leaders who had already proven their loyalty. This meant that induction into the guards opened up access to the ranks of the elite for inductees. As other tribes and states were conquered or submitted to the Mongols, sons of their leaders were also inducted into the qan's bodyguard, and the *keshig* became the most important route of upward mobility for sons of Mongol and *Semuren* political elites. This continued to be the case in Yuan China even after the civil service exams were reinstituted in 1315.¹⁸

¹⁷ Isenbike Togan has described the realignment of Mongol tribes as having resulted from large-scale changes in Central Asian society, which she characterizes as a combination of tribalization and dissolution of tribal formations. Temüjin was able to capitalize on the fluidity of the situation by drawing to himself companions who were attracted to his character and abilities. But this was not an anomaly, and "it was the *nökers* themselves who made the first choice.... In a way they came to gather around Temüjin to escape from tribal loyalties." Isenbike Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations: The Kerait Khanate and Chinggis Khan* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 131–32.

¹⁸ It is unclear the extent to which Yuan qans after Qubilai drew from their personal bodyguard corps to staff positions in their central administrations, but we know that such imperial guards were maintained throughout the dynasty. As Thomas Allsen has shown, this patrimonial style of governance was in operation during Möngke's reign. He drew heavily from his and his father's personal guards troops for personnel for his central government. See Allsen, "Guard and Government."

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Second, the imperial bodyguard served as a holding area for hostages, whose presence near the qan insured the continued loyalty of commanders and leaders out in the field. In fact, the Mongol term for a member of the imperial guard, a *turyay*, could mean either a guard or a hostage.¹⁹ This second function was to prove indispensable once Chinggis Qan began his campaigns of conquest in north China and Central Asia, since the imperial guard also served as the natural focus for the disposition of family members of conquered royalty and other political and social elites, and guaranteed the loyalty of these newly conquered peoples to the Mongols.²⁰ The qan's bodyguard also retained the tradition of fusing civil and military spheres of power typical of nomadic societies throughout the period of Mongol rule in China, and had an important part in shaping the identity and roles of the first generation of *Semuren* in China.

All Mongol princes of the royal clan were allowed to maintain their own personal bodyguard troops, and all of the Mongol qaghans who ruled in China also maintained

¹⁹ Lien-sheng Yang discusses the use of internal hostages by the Mongols, and the organization of the sons and younger brothers of Mongol lords and military officers into hostage armies. See his "Hostages in Chinese History," in *Studies in Chinese Institutional History* (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, n.d.; rpt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 43–57. Yang cites a 1263 decree made by Qubilai Qan, in which the Mongol system of hostages was reiterated. See pp. 53–54.

²⁰ Yang calls these "external hostages" in contrast to the internal hostages demanded by Chinggis of his Mongol subordinates. See his "Hostages in Chinese History," 48, where Yang cites a decree issued by Qubilai Qan in 1268 to Korea that demonstrates this policy in action in Yuan China. At least in some cases, these external hostages appear to have been required in numbers proportional to the population of the surrendered state. The practice of demanding external hostages was not, however, unique to the Mongols. Yang demonstrates that the practice of demanding external hostages was used by Chinese emperors at least as far back as the Han dynasty.

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the institution. While the imperial bodyguard did begin to lose its military function from the time that Qubilai began his reign as Qaghan (1260-1294), it continued to act as the most important conduit for upward social mobility for Mongol and *Semuren* individuals, and people inducted into the imperial bodyguard continued to receive official titles that had originated in the earlier steppe period. At the same time, those individuals were also granted titles and duties that reflected the traditional Chinese administrative bureaucracy, the result of the growing importance of native Chinese social and political institutions by the mid-Yuan. One example of this phenomenon is the office of Mongol scribe of the second class (C. *bishechi*, M. *bichigechi*).²¹ The Mongol *bichigechi* was originally a secretary or a person who handled documents for the qan, but the title does not adequately convey to the modern reader the amount of real power that a scribe wielded, especially during the reign of the first three qaghans. Scribes were used by the qans of many nomadic tribal societies, and since a scribe was also a member of the qan's personal bodyguard who served as a personal retainer and handled all day-to-day matters that concerned the qan or his immediate family, that person had routine access to the innermost circles of power. As the empire grew, the scribal unit evolved into an important office within the administration, but it continued to be staffed by members of the qaghan's personal bodyguard.

Earlier Chinese dynasties, especially the Song, had experienced similar discontinuities between office title and

²¹ See Farquhar, *Government of China*, 31, 64 n. 139, and 246. See also Igor de Rachewiltz, "Personnel and Personalities in North China in the Early Mongol Period," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 9 (1966): 100–01, n. 3 and 5. Curiously, this title is not listed in any of the *Secret History* entries that describe the constituents of the *keshig*. It is, however, listed in *Yuanshi* 99 as a constituent of the imperial guard (*suwei*).

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function. In the Song period, administrative titles from the Tang period were used to indicate an official's pay and rank but did not indicate, or correlate with, the actual function of the post to which that official was assigned.²² As in the Song, the discontinuity in official titles indicates the meeting of two different bureaucratic models and hierarchies of power. In the Yuan period, we can characterize this problem as the persistence or overlay of the traditional Mongol nomadic "patrimonial" system in the context of the Chinese bureaucratic model.²³

In addition to restructuring the traditional Chinese routes of upward social mobility by maintaining the qaghan's imperial bodyguard as one of the main sources from which men were drawn for service in the civil bureaucracy, the recruitment process was also qualitatively different from earlier periods of Chinese history (with the exception of the Liao and Jin dynasties), because all of those methods of recruitment were based on a new social classification scheme imposed on China by the Mongols.

²² See Kracke, *Civil Service in Early Sung China*, for a discussion of this problem in the Song period.

²³ Several scholars have described the early Mongol imperial government as "patrimonial" in the sense that the qan's household establishment is indistinguishable from the state administrative organization. For discussion of this issue, see Hsiao, *Military Establishment*; Allsen, "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke"; and Jack L. Dull, "The Evolution of Government in China," in *Heritage of China*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 55–85. According to Dull, a "patrimonial" form of government is one in which the essential power relationships are defined in terms of kin or associated type relationships. The Mongols continued to use the guards corps in such places as Central Asia. See, for example, Paul D. Buell, "Sino-Khitans Administration in Mongol Bukhara," *Journal of Asian History* 13.2 (1979): 121–51.

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Mongol Social Order in China

One of the most intriguing aspects of Mongol rule of China is the classification system they imposed on the entire population. After they consolidated their conquest of North China, the Mongols organized society into four discrete status groups in order to maintain a separation between themselves and their subjects, and to facilitate extraction of resources from the sedentary population. That system, which was probably adapted from a similar one used by the Jurchen to maintain their hold on power in north China during their Jin Dynasty, consisted of a hierarchy of four distinct groups that included, in descending order of social status, Mongols (*Mengguren*), Central and West Asians (*Semuren*), Northern Chinese (*Hanren*), and Southerners (*Nanren*).²⁴ This classification system is described or alluded to in a wide variety of sources from the Yuan period, but only one source, the description by the fourteenth century writer Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (fl. 1335-1402), purports to list all of the constituents of the four groups.

Tao Zongyi's list of clans and peoples is contained in his collection of miscellanea entitled *Notes Made While Resting from the Plow*.²⁵ It is an invaluable source of

²⁴ The administrative mechanisms deployed by the Mongols probably had their origins in ancient China, and had been adopted by other steppe polities like the Türk and Uyghur empires, as well as the Jin Dynasty and its later rejuvenation further west under the Qara Khitai. For discussion of this history, see Donald Ostrowski, "The *tamma* and the dual-administrative structure of the Mongol empire," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61.2 (1998): 262–77.

²⁵ Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, (*Nancun*) *Chogeng lu* (南村) 輟耕錄 [Notes made while resting from the plow] (1366; rpt. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1987). For summaries of Tao's personal and professional history, and an extensive bibliography of relevant scholarship on Tao, see Frederick W. Mote, "Notes on the Life of T'ao Tsung-i," *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun-Kagaku-Kenkyusyo Kyoto University* (Kyoto, 1954), 279–93; and Peter Chang and Chaoying Fang, "T'ao Tsung-i," in *Dictionary*

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information about social conditions in Yuan China because Tao commented on all sorts of problems and conditions that would never have been included in official records from the period. Tao's description is titled simply "Clans and Peoples" (*shizu*) and in it he lists four separate groups: Mongols, *Semuren*, Chinese, and Jin Dynasty Jurchens.

He lists seventy-two different types (*zhong*), presumably tribes, of Mongols, thirty-one different types of *Semuren*, eight types of Chinese, and thirty-two Jurchen names and their Chinese equivalents.²⁶ This is a curious list for several reasons. Since he lists the Mongols first, Tao presumably reflects the relative status and power of each group in Yuan society. One glaring inconsistency between Tao's list and other Yuan sources is the omission of the group *Nanren* (southerners) from his list of Yuan social-status groups. The peoples Tao lists as *Hanren* follow the general custom of the period by including all peoples who lived in northern China at the time of the Mongol conquest, since he includes Koreans, Jurchen, and Qitan peoples in that category. Presumably, then, the Jurchen clans or lineages with their Chinese surnames that Tao listed under his fourth and last category, "Surnames and Clans of the Jin" (金人姓氏), were subjects of the former Jin who may or may not have lived in northern China proper. They seem to have constituted (at least for Tao) a separate social status group.

Tao's list of *Semuren* constituents is particularly interesting because of its duplications and omissions of the names of certain groups that appear in different contemporaneous sources. More important, Tao does not seem to

of Ming Biography, 1368–1644, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 1268–72.

²⁶ Tao, *Chogeng lu*, 24–28. On the other end of the Mongol empire, the Il-khan official and writer Rashid al-Din also compiled such a list. Thomas Allsen, personal communication.

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be cognizant of or to care about differences between ethnicity, placename and religion, since names that represent both types of groups (in other contemporaneous sources) are thrown in the list without differentiation. Other contemporaneous sources that explain, delineate, or otherwise comment on the *Semuren* in Yuan society, such as the Yuan legal code, do differentiate among the various constituent groups in ways that Tao does not, if even only partially or sporadically. Thus, while Tao's list of Yuan social groups is the most comprehensive of its kind from that era, it should be read with due caution. By the early twentieth century, Yanai Watari 箭内互 in Japan and Meng Siming 蒙思明 in China had both recognized the importance of Tao's descriptions to understanding Yuan social history.²⁷ It is worthwhile revisiting their findings because, while problematic in some respects, they both reached important conclusions that still influence our views of Yuan China.

Yanai Watari published his study of Tao's list in 1930. He followed Tao's list quite strictly, and concluded that the Mongols divided Yuan society into three main classes, Mongol, *Semuren* and *Han*, based on socio-economic and ethnic considerations. Like Tao, Yanai does not differentiate between northern and southern Chinese, but includes all people who could be considered ethnically Chinese as members of the Han group. Nor does he comment on Tao's curious omission from his list of the group known as *Nanren*. He does, however, take the time to point out other errors in Tao's lists, including

²⁷ Yanai Watari 箭内互, *Yuandai Meng Han Semu daiyu kao* 元代蒙漢色目待遇考 [Study on the treatment of Yuan Dynasty Mongols, Han and Semu], tr. Chen Jie and Chen Qingquan (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1963); and Meng Siming 蒙思明, *Yuandai shehui jieji zhidu* 元代社會階級制度 [The social class system of the Yuan Dynasty] (1938; rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

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duplications and other problems in the 31 different *Semuren* provided. He argues that only twenty of these thirty-one groups should be considered true *Semuren*.

One of the most useful parts of Yanai's work is his exhaustive study of the history and use of the term *Semu* in China prior to the Mongol period. Yanai goes back to Tang dynasty sources to show early usage of both *Semu* and its two constituent characters, *se* 色 and *mu* 目, to denote other types of people, especially foreigners. In the Chinese sources Yanai cites, these terms were used to indicate the "other," often but not exclusively foreigners. In its classical usage, *Semuren* were usually people from areas immediately west and north of China proper, the "western regions" (*xiyu*).²⁸ *Semu* could also mean someone who was different, or somehow strange to the Chinese, without a specific ethnic or geographic designation in mind. Yanai concludes that it was not until the Yuan dynasty that the term *Semu* was used to specifically denote a Western or Central Asian. But Yanai also admits that even in the Yuan sources it is used interchangeably with specific place names to denote a person's foreign identity.

Meng Siming, who published his study in 1938, built on but also went well beyond Yanai's conclusions in some important ways. He agreed with Yanai's basic argument that there was a good deal of interaction among the various status groups in Yuan society, but parts ways with Yanai in his Marxist-oriented economic analysis of the *Semuren* group, and in his more exhaustive treatment of the Yuan sources.

First, Meng argues that the Mongols organized China into four, not three, distinct social groups, Mongols, *Semuren*, *Hanren* ("Northerners," which included Chinese

²⁸ The Chinese understanding of the west, or the "Western Regions" was always hazy and imprecise; it could mean the regions immediately to the west of China (now known as Turkestan or Central Asia), or perhaps areas even farther to the west.

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and other subjects of the former Jin Dynasty), and *Nanren* (Chinese and other subjects of the southern Song Dynasty, and aboriginal peoples in frontier areas). Meng also argues that these groups were distinguished by economic criteria first, and then in terms of ethnicity.

Meng was clearly a man of his time in using a Marxist economic approach to analyze class in Yuan China. He argues that China had a well-entrenched class system long before the Mongol conquest, and that the Mongol conquest did not really disturb this economically defined class system. Thus established, he then argues that the *Semuren* group, as with all of the Yuan status groups, was viewed as a separate class by the Mongol elites and by the Chinese cultural elites on the basis of economic factors, such as land ownership and ability to participate in traditional China's socio-economic order. One of the most interesting parts of Meng's monograph, and in some senses the most useful for students of Yuan social history, is the extensive data on employment of people of all four classes that he mined from a wide array of Yuan sources to support his economic class analysis.²⁹

One point that especially pertains to my discussion here is Meng's assertion that the various social classes in Yuan China had frequent and sustained interactions in economic, social and cultural arenas. He makes this point when he discusses the fundamentally economic character of Yuan class structure, which echoes Yanai's argument that the supposedly hard boundaries between classes were, in fact, permeated quite frequently. For example, both Yanai and Meng point out that a good many "Han" people (anyone in the "Hanren" category, not necessarily ethnic

²⁹ See Meng, *Yuandai shehui jieji zhidu*, Chapter 4, in which he describes in detail the economic status of people in upper, middle and lower classes, and how economic status was related to ethnicity. Of course, this type of Marxist analysis of Chinese social history had preceded Meng's work, as early as the 1920s.

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Chinese) were appointed to offices that were, in theory, to be held only by Mongols or *Semuren*. This conclusion certainly rings true with my own findings on the activities of Uyghur elites in Yuan China.

Both Yanai and Meng conclude that Mongols and *Semuren* occupied the top rungs of administrative hierarchies in China, and that very few ethnic Chinese were included in the ranks of officialdom. They also interpret Tao's categories as ethnic categories, but point out that the theoretically strict hierarchy of his population groups was not, in practice, always followed in Yuan society. Meng departs most radically from Yanai in his conclusion that Mongol ethnic categories were influenced by longstanding economic hierarchies: shifts that occurred in economic hierarchies as a result of the Mongol invasion, especially the increasing wealth and influence of Chinese from the mid-Yuan onwards, had an impact on the Mongol ethnic social class system. This conclusion reflects Meng's Marxist interpretation by which economic issues override all other divisions in any society.³⁰

There is no doubt that ethnicity factored in the systematic classification of the population in China starting in the 1230s. However, as both Yanai and Meng indicate, it is not apparent that the Mongol classifications were based primarily or solely on ethnic considerations. In fact, a close reading of Yuan-era sources shows that the Mongols were interested in administrative efficiency and protecting their ruling interests, and that they classified people according to

³⁰ For an assessment of Meng's work in this regard, see Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing 蕭啓慶, "Yuandai de ruhu: rushi diwei yanjin shishang de yizhang" 元代的儒戶: 儒士地位演進史上的一章 [Yuan Dynasty Confucian households: a chapter on the evolution of Confucian scholars in Chinese history], *Dongfang Wenhua* 16.1-2 (1978): 151-70; rpt. in his *Yuandaishi xintan* 元代史新探 [New studies on Yuan Dynasty history] (Taipei: Xinwenshuang chubanshe, 1983), 1-58.

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a combination of race, religion, occupation, and location of residence.

Both Yanai and Meng assume that ethnicity was a category that was naturally part of the social discourse in Yuan times and which the Mongols used to classify people in China. This is evident by their consistent use of the term *minzu* (translated variously as “nationality,” “race,” or “ethnic group”) to describe the Yuan status groups (their “classes”). But the term *minzu* was part of the discourse of nationalism that was imported into China only in the late nineteenth century from Japan (*minzoku*).³¹ In order to construct an alternative to the Qing imperial project, it was essential to include different ethnic groups as equal members of the new nation-state of China. *Minzu* may be an adequate expression for ethnicity in modern Chinese society, and *zu* had already by the end of the Tang been broadened beyond its original meaning of “lineage group” to describe different ethnic groups. However, the use of this modern category *minzu* by Yanai and Meng to describe the Yuan social groups and the thinking that informed that classification system is problematic, and reveals more

³¹ Stevan Harrell, in a personal communication, has pointed out the origins of this term in Sun Yatsen’s efforts to construct a new identity for China as a modern nation-state composed of five main ethnic groups. Frank Dikötter traces a “racialisation of lineage discourse” to the late 19th century reformers such as Kang Youwei, who viewed race and population as scientific categories that could be investigated, and who fashioned a “racialized identity called *huangzhong*, meaning both ‘lineage of the Yellow Emperor’ and ‘yellow race’.” See his “Racial Discourse in China: Continuities and Permutations,” in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, ed. Frank Dikötter (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 14–16. For a discussion of race in Japan and its relationship to ideas in China in the same period, see in that same volume Michael Weiner, “The Invention of Identity: Race and Nation in Pre-war Japan,” *ibid.*, 96–117. For general discussion of race and national identity in China and Japan see other essays in that same volume, and the essays in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

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about their early twentieth century worldview than it does about Mongol concerns and views of proper social order.

Did the Mongols define people in terms of their ethnicity? They were certainly aware of tribal differences, both among themselves and other nomadic groups, but more important for the Mongols than ethnicity seems to have been the distinction between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles. Neither Yanai nor Meng raise the issue of Mongol values, perhaps because they were active at a time when race and ethnicity were powerful attributes of national and personal identity.³²

Yanai and Meng also both describe the Yuan social groups as economic classes, which reflects the Marxist presuppositional framework of their time. Since both Yanai and Meng were working in the 1920s and 1930s, their approach is easy to understand. However, it is doubtful whether the Mongols would have been concerned about organizing people within their empire according to strict economic criteria. And it is highly questionable whether the kind of class analysis invoked by Yanai and Meng can be applied back to premodern periods at all. Even if class analysis is useful in a study of premodern societies, a hierarchical ordering of people according to economic criteria would have been more important and relevant to sedentary societies than to nomadic groups like the Mongols. Moreover, while it is true that the Mongols adapted somewhat to the societies they conquered, for the most part they remained focused on keeping their power over and extracting resources from the people and areas they conquered and ruled.

Many types of Yuan-era sources reveal how social order was conceptualized and constructed at that time, such as the imperial chronicles, essays and biographies that

³² Hon-ming Yip, "The Class System of Yuan Society – A Critique of Meng Siming's *Yuandai Shehui Jieji Zhidu*," *Journal of Asian Culture*, 4 (Spring, 1980): 82–106.

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appear in the dynastic history, and the Yuan legal code. These materials show quite clearly that the Mongol social classification system was not nearly as rigid as has usually been portrayed, and there was considerable crossover among the various groups. Yet, it must also be admitted that it was effective in keeping real power in the hands of the Mongols and their Central Asian allies, and for this reason it was maintained through the end of the Yuan Dynasty.

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It is difficult to determine precisely when the four groups – Mongol, *Semuren*, *Hanren* and *Nanren* – came into common usage as fixed categories in Mongol China. The earliest reference to specific status groups is an entry in the basic annals (*benji*) section of the *Yuanshi* 元史 (the Standard History of the Yuan Dynasty) dated 1229, the first year of Ögödei's reign (r. 1229-1241), concerning taxation rates for Mongols (*Menggumin*), northern Chinese (*Hebei Hanmin*), and westerners (*Xiyuren*).³³ An entry in the chronicles dated the 12th month of the year 1247 appears to be the first mention in the chronicles of the term *Semu* as a social category. In this case, a certain Peiluhe (from somewhere in Central Asia) was appointed by imperial edict to the post of secretary (*bishechi*) and he was to govern alongside other “*Semu* officials” (*semuguan* 色目官).³⁴

The next references in the *Yuanshi* chronicles that include a description of or reference to specific status groups are found in entries during Qubilai's reign. In 1265 an entry describes administrative offices that were to be

³³ Song Lian 宋濂, ed., *Yuanshi* 元史 [History of the Yuan Dynasty] (1370; rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976) 2.29–30. All subsequent references to the *Yuanshi* refer to this edition.

³⁴ *Yuanshi* 3.46.

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reserved for Mongols (*Mengguren*), Chinese (*Hanren*), and Muslims (*Huihui*).³⁵ Yet in the same chapter, in an entry dated 1268, we also find references to specific tribal or state entities, rather than the more inclusive social groups used by the Mongols. Thus, in an imperial edict concerning personnel assigned to the powerful office of agent (M. *darughachi*), the order went out “to dismiss all Jurchen, Qitan, and Chinese (*Hanren*) who are agents in the circuits, and to let all Moslems (*Huihui*), Uyghurs (*Weiwu*), Naiman and Tanguts remain as they were previously.”³⁶ Non-Mongol foreigners in China probably found it useful to invoke different identity markers as a way to situate themselves within the power structure in China, and that ambiguity is reflected in the sources from the time. Thus, in the terminology used to describe Central Asian peoples, we see a tendency to invoke either their religion or their native place.

³⁵ *Yuanshi* 6.106. By Qubilai’s reign the term *Huihui* was used to describe Moslems, a significant development from the pre-Yuan practice of using *Huihui* as a general designation for Central Asians, without regard to religious affiliation.

³⁶ *Yuanshi* 6.118. *Darughachi* has been translated variously as governor or agent. This office was originally intended to function as a military overlord who was sent out to maintain control for the Mongols in newly conquered areas. After Qubilai’s accession to the throne, *darughachi* were paired with administrators down through the county level, and neither could act independently of the other. Thus, they continued to function as agents of Mongol authority at all levels of administration. See Francis W. Cleaves, “*Darūya* and Gerege,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 16.2 (1953): 237–46; Elizabeth Endicott-West, “Imperial Governance in Yüan Times,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46.2 (1986): 541–45; idem., *Mongolian Rule in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Farquhar, *Government of China*, 23. For a later iteration of this office in another part of the Mongol Empire, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, “The Office of *Darugha* under Tamerlane,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1985): 59–69.

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The label *Huihui* is a good example of the conflation of religious and native place identity. As Huang Shijian has pointed out, the category retained a religious meaning even as it was used to describe very different groups of people in Yuan China. “Broadly speaking, ‘*Huihui*’ was a vague and changing concept during the Yuan dynasty. We can only say that it generally referred to Türks..., Persians and Arabs, who were from Central and Western Asia and who followed Islam.... Some nations or tribes, such as the Arghuns who also believed in Islam, were not called *Huihui* for a long time...[and] Jews were sometimes called *Huihui*.”³⁷ Detailed evidence on the inconsistencies that applied to the registration of peoples in Yuan China can be found by perusing Bai Shouyi’s compendium of *Hui* peoples in the Yuan dynasty.³⁸ It is clear from Bai’s records that the designation *Huihui* or *Hui* denoted a person’s religious affiliation and had nothing to do with ethnicity or place of origin. People from different ethnic groups or widely scattered areas in Central and West Asia all were called *Huihui* at some point in the Yuan.³⁹

³⁷ Shijian Huang, “The Persian Language in China During the Yuan Dynasty,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 34 (September, 1986): 84. I am indebted to Professor David O. Morgan for this reference.

³⁸ Bai Shouyi 白寿彝, ed., *Huizu Renwu Zhi* 回族人物志 [Records of Hui persons], 2 vols. (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1985, 2000).

³⁹ The same confusion over application of the term *Huihui* can also be seen in the Yuan household registration system. The Mongols developed a fairly comprehensive system of registering the population of China according to household occupation to aid their tax collecting. The local Chinese population was divided into four types of households: ordinary farming households (*minhu* 民戶), households subject to military duty (*junhu* 軍戶), households subject to service in the transport system, such as the postal system and relay stations, waterways, and porters (*zhanhu* 站戶), and artisan households (*jianghu* 匠戶). This system, unlike the larger-order classification system, was based on occupation, not ethnic or political criteria. Both systems had

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This four-fold system was certainly in use by the time that Chinese-style civil service exams were reinstituted by the Mongols in the early fourteenth century. The *Yuanshi* contains detailed descriptions of discussions and imperial edicts that dealt with the ways in which the exams were to be conducted, including the types of questions submitted to each social group and the various grades and types of offices and quotas of examinees available to each of the four groups.⁴⁰ It is clear from this

in common the need of the conquering elite to determine numbers and occupational groups in their newly-conquered territories so they could impose and collect taxes and extract labor and other resources from the subject population. On the Yuan household classification system, see Huang Qinglian 黃清連, *Yuandai huji zhidu yanjiu* 元代戶計制度研究 [Research on the Yuan Dynasty household system] (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Daxue Wenxueyuan, 1977); Ōshima Ritsuko 大島立子, “Gendai no kokei to yokei” [Categories of households and their labor duties in Yuan China], *Rekishigaku Kenkyu* 484 (1980); and *idem*, “The Chiang-hu in the Yüan,” *Acta Asiatica* 45 (1983): 69–95.

⁴⁰ *Yuanshi* 81.2017–27. For general studies of the Chinese civil service examination system, see Benjamin A. Elman, “Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (Feb. 1991), 7–28; and his more lengthy study of the Chinese exam system, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Wing-tsit Chan, “Chu Hsi and Yüan Neo-Confucianism,” in *Yüan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion Under the Mongols*, ed. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 197–231. For studies of the Yuan examination system, see Yao Dali 姚大力, “Yuanchao keju zhidu de xingfei ji qi shehui beijing” 元朝科举制度的行废及其社会背景 [The social background and promotion of the civil examination system in the Yuan period], *Yuanshi ji beifang minzushi yanjiu jikan* 元史及北方民族史研究集刊 5 (1982): 26–59; John W. Dardess, “Confucianism, Local Reform, and Centralization in Late Yüan Chekiang, 1342–1359,” in Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Yuan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 327–74; Yan-shuan Lao, “Southern Chinese Scholars and Educational Institutions in Early

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text, and from extant lists of successful examinees who were granted imperial degrees, that Mongol and *Semu* individuals were placed in different tracks from the Chinese and other “southerners.”⁴¹

In fact, the questions put to Mongol and *Semuren* candidates were both qualitatively and quantitatively easier than those that the Chinese candidates had to answer, which further reinforced the fact that recommendation and hereditary privilege continued to function to keep Mongols and *Semuren* in their dominant positions in government.⁴²

Yuan China: Some Preliminary Remarks,” in *China Under Mongol Rule*, ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 107–33; Yang Shufan 楊樹藩, “Yuandai keju zhidu” 元代科舉制度 [The Yuan Dynasty civil examination system], *Songshi yanjiuji* 宋史研究集 14 (1983): 191–219; Yuan-chu Lam, “On Yüan Exam System: The Role of Northern Ch’eng-Chu Pioneering Scholars,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1985): 15–20; and Hsiao Ch’i-ch’ing, “Yuandai keju yu jingying liudong” 元代科舉與菁英流動 [Yuan Dynasty civil examinations and elite mobility], *Hanxue yanjiu* 5.1 (1987): 129–60.

⁴¹For an extant list of successful *jinshi* degree examinees in the 1333 examinations, see *Yuantong yuannian jinshilu* 元統元年進士錄 [*Jinshi* holders list from Yuantong era first year examination], rpt. in Wang Ting 王頌, comp., *Miaoxue Dianli. Yuan hunli gongju kao. Yuantong yuannian jinshilu* 廟學典禮。元婚禮貢舉考。元統元年進士錄 [Temple and Academy ceremonies. Study of Yuan marriage ceremonies and civil examinations. *Jinshi* list from 1333 civil examination] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), 171–226. For studies of this examination, see Hsiao Ch’i-ch’ing, “Yuantong yuannian jinshilu jiaozhu” 元統元年進士錄校注 [Critical annotation of the 1333 civil examination *jinshi* list], *Shihuo yuekan* 食貨月刊 13 (1983): 72–90, 147–62. For *jinshi* degree holders throughout the Yuan period, see Gui Qipeng 桂栖鵬, *Yuandai jinshi yanjiu* 元代進士研究 [Research on Yuan Dynasty *jinshi*] (Lanzhou: Lanzhou Daxue chubanshe, 2001).

⁴²Benjamin A. Elman, “An Early Ming Perspective on Song-Jin-Yuan Civil Examinations,” unpublished paper presented at the *Conference on the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, Lake Arrowhead, CA, June 5–11, 1997, esp. pp. 40–49.

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Thus, the Mongols continued to privilege themselves and the *Semuren* group by continued reliance on old nomadic hierarchies of power, as formalized in the four-fold social classification system. Some northern and southern Chinese were admitted to office, but most of these through other avenues, and into relatively low-level offices, such as clerks. Even after the exams were restarted in 1315, Chinese remained the minority in positions of real power throughout the dynasty.

Official biographies of eminent persons in the *Yuanshi* also reflect the ambiguities of the Mongol social classification system. One example is the interesting biographical entry of a Chinese general, Guo Baoyu 郭寶玉 (fl. 1215), which contains a description of the way in which military households were organized and the number of males required for compulsory military service from each type of social group: “Every male in Mongol and *Semu* military households must register, and is liable for service, while only one male in Chinese households with at least three males that hold four *qing* [equal to 400 *mou*] must register for military service.”⁴³ Naturally the Mongols were concerned to maintain dominance over the military, and so privileged themselves and *Semuren* personnel over the Chinese population, but this information probably also reflects the concern that the local population continue to produce food and other resources for the Mongols. This was an activity that the Mongol military elites were certainly not going to take up, but which was necessary for their survival.

The Yuan legal system also reflects the ethnic complexity of that society. As Paul Ch'en has observed in his work on the development of the Yuan legal code, Mongolian legal and customary practice had a large impact on the overall structure of the Yuan legal code, and both

⁴³ *Yuanshi* 149.3521.

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Mongol and Central Asian customs persisted in the justice system that evolved.⁴⁴ This can be seen in the complex system of courts and judges that had jurisdiction over different segments of the population, as well as in customary laws that the Mongols tried to enforce from time to time.⁴⁵

For example, entries in the chapters on civil officials in the *Yuanshi* describe the special judicial bureaus that had jurisdiction over Mongols and Uyghurs in China. The High Court for Mongols (*da zongzhengfu*) decided criminal cases that involved Mongols, *Semuren* and even some Northern Chinese who lived at the northern capital Shangdu.⁴⁶ This office originated with the Mongol system

⁴⁴ Paul Heng-chao Ch'en, *Chinese Legal Tradition under the Mongols: The Code of 1291 as Reconstructed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁴⁵ Several entries in the Yuan legal code, *Yuan Dianzhang*, demonstrate the application of the four social group classification system in China. For example, a 1285 entry in the *Yuan Dianzhang* concerning agents differentiated between Uyghurs, Muslims and other peoples from Central Asia: "... *darughachi weiwuer, huihui, semu guanren* ..." See *Da Yuan Shengzheng Guochao Dianzhang* 大元聖政國朝典章 [Statutes of the Great Yuan Dynasty] (1323; rpt. Taipei: Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan, 1972) 35.1b. For examples of the ways that different legal jurisdictions applied to the various status groups in criminal matters in the Yuan, see Iwamura Shinobu 岩村忍, "Gen tensho keibu no kenkyu" 元典章刑部の研究 [Criminal procedure in the Yuan Dynasty], *Tōhō Gakuhō* 東方學報 24 (1954): 1–114. For translation into French of parts of the Yuan legal code, see Paul Ratchnevsky, *Un code des Yuan*, 4 vols. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1937–1985).

⁴⁶ *Yuanshi* 87.2187–88. For the history and personnel of that office, see Farquhar, *Government of China*, 244. Curiously, Ch'en does not mention the wide jurisdiction of this office over all three groups, Mongols, *Semuren* and northern Chinese. While Ch'en makes a point of emphasizing the impact of Mongol customs and the Mongol legal system on Yuan laws and judicial system, for some reason he ignores the central role of the Mongol "judge" (*chahuhuchi*) in this bureau, as Farquhar points out. Ch'en, *Chinese Legal Tradition*, 82; Farquhar, *Government of China*, 244, 284 n. 18.

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of judges (*jarghuchi*), who had wide-ranging authority as administrators in the early decades of the empire. There was also a separate Court of Justice for Uyghurs (*duhufu*), which had more limited jurisdiction over Uyghurs who remained in their native Uyghuristan or who moved to and settled in north China.⁴⁷ This court was probably intended to serve those members of the Uyghur aristocracy associated with the Uyghur *idikut* after 1209, and it certainly reflects the high status enjoyed by the Uyghurs in Yuan China, who were understood as first-among-equals among the various *Semuren* because of their proximity to the Mongol ruling elites. No similar judicial office is listed for any other group of *Semuren*.

Another interesting example of the complex social system in Yuan China is integration into the Yuan legal code of various nomadic customary practices, and their implementation in society. One such practice was the custom of levirate marriage, whereby a man's brothers could (and were expected to) marry that man's wife if he predeceased her.⁴⁸ The practice was intended to retain the husband's property with the patriline, and was apparently

⁴⁷ *Yuanshi* 89.2273; and *Yuan Dianshang* 53.34 (entry titled 都護府公事, dated 1313). See Farquhar, *Government of China*, 245, for the history of this office. Ch'en states that this bureau served "Central Asians" (*Semuren*?) in general, and was not limited to Uyghurs. See Ch'en, *Chinese Legal Tradition*, 82.

⁴⁸ On levirate marriage in Yuan China, see Paul Ratchnevsky, "The Levirate in the Legislation of the Yuan Dynasty," in *Tamura hakushi shōju tōyōshi ronsō* 田博士頌壽東洋史論叢 [Asiatic studies in honor of Professor Tamura] (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1968), 45–62; Jennifer Holmgren, "Observations on Marriage and Inheritance Practices in Early Mongol and Yuan Society, with Particular Reference to the Levirate," *Journal of Asian History* 20.2 (1986): 127–92; Bettine Birge, "Levirate Marriage and the Revival of Widow Chastity in Yüan China," *Asia Major*, 3d ser., 8.2 (1995): 107–46; and her later expanded study, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960–1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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widely practiced among the Mongols and other nomadic groups. The institution was incorporated into the Yuan legal code and was enforced from time to time. However, it was virtually never universally enforced throughout the population, and seems to have been relegated to people of the lower classes in families that practiced it. It is interesting to note, however, that levirate marriage came to be accepted among the Han Chinese after the Song legal code was officially abolished by the Mongols in 1271.

Conclusion

The four categories Mongol, *Semuren*, Hanren and Nanren, were not “classes” in the Marxist sense of being a unique group defined or identified in terms of their proximity to the means of production. They encompassed aspects of social status that included but went beyond mere economic power, and they became the main ways that social mobility was defined in Mongol China. This system reflected steppe culture’s emphasis on controlling people, rather than land, as was the case in sedentary societies, and also the patriarchal, hierarchical social structure that the nomadic Mongols were used to. People were classified according to several criteria, including their ethnicity or place of origin, the order and way in which they had become Mongol subjects (voluntary versus forced), and their usefulness to the Mongols. Economic status was but one aspect of categorization (with, perhaps, the exception of the Muslim merchants whom the Mongols used in great number as their agents in international trade).⁴⁹

The *Semuren* status group occupied a unique position in Yuan China’s social structure, since members of

⁴⁹ The Muslim merchant in the Mongol empire is a subject beyond the scope of this book. For discussion of that history see Thomas T. Allsen, “Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners,” *Asia Major* 2.2 (1989): 83–126; and Elizabeth Endicott-West, “Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The *Ortoy*,” *Asia Major* 2.2 (1989): 127–54.

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that group could be perceived both as part of the conquering elite and as subjects of the Mongols not too dissimilar from their Chinese contemporaries. Obviously, the *Semuren* had some distinct advantages over their Chinese peers, but they were also ultimately subjects of that same Mongol political elite. They were people in the middle, and in spite of, or perhaps because of, the sense of alterity that must have developed among *Semuren* personnel as a result of that intermediate position, many spanned that divide by becoming political and social elites.⁵⁰ That strategy ultimately worked to their advantage, as many *Semuren* remained in China long after the Mongols lost power and returned to the steppe. Their stories in post-Mongol China remain to be told, but it is clear that the Mongols had an enormous impact on social and political institutions in China long after they were deposed.

Just as important as it is to see the *Semuren* as a distinctive group apart from the Mongols, we must also remember that many different peoples were thrown together into this category *Semuren*, and it would be just as problematic to ignore this as it is to think of all foreigners in China as essentially the same. In fact, not all *Semuren* were equal, and to do justice to this group's role in Yuan China we really must look at the stories of the *Semuren* constituents, each of whom brought their own unique talents to bear in the Mongol empire. This was certainly the case for the Uyghurs.

The Uyghurs were the first Central Asian state to submit voluntarily to Chinggis Qan, and their entrance into the Mongol camp had a profound impact on the structure of the Mongol empire, and on the ability of the Mongols to effectively administer sedentary populations they

⁵⁰ On the notion of alterity within the *Semuren* status group, see Brose, "Central Asians in Mongol China."

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conquered. They brought with them substantial knowledge and skills that were immediately drawn on by the Mongol imperial clan, and their submission also insured their survival long after their independent state was subsumed into the growing Mongol empire. In an attempt to rescue the history of the Uyghurs as one of the *Semuren* constituents, the rest of this book follows the stories of some of the Uyghur aristocrats who, after being dispersed to China, utilized their intellectual and social resources to integrate smoothly into the Mongol administration as political elites, and eventually into communities in China as social elites.