

Chapter 2

The Gaochang Uyghurs and their Steppe Ancestors

The Gaochang Uyghur Kingdom, which spanned both sides of the eastern Tianshan Mountain range down into the Tarim Basin and Turfan Depression, was home to one of the most important groups of subject peoples who served the Mongols as administrators and advisors in their new empire (see Map 2). They were the first Central Asian kingdom to submit voluntarily to Chinggis Qan (in 1209), and their submission provided Chinggis Qan with important military and psychological capital in his quest to dominate wider areas of Central and Eastern Asia. Their submission had enormous consequences for the fate of the Uyghur people long after the Mongols had disappeared as a Eurasian empire.

The Gaochang Uyghur kingdom occupied important strategic and cultural space in early thirteenth century Central Asia. It straddled the most important overland east-west trade routes that ran along the northern edges of the Taklamakan Desert and Tarim Basin, and it was situated between several powerful regional kingdoms that eventually included the Qitan Liao and Jurchen Jin empires to the east, and the Qara Khitai and Xixia kingdoms to the west and south, respectively. Uyghuristan was thus a “pivot of Asia,” (borrowing from Lattimore’s description of this same area in the modern period), control of which provided the Mongols with a great strategic advantage.

Culturally, Uyghuristan was much more sedentary than most of its neighbors, and the Uyghur elite who formed this state after their deposition from the steppe brought long experience of managing a complex society

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that combined urban settled groups alongside nomadic tribes. They provided excellent models for Chinggis Qan's imperial ambitions. Their submission also provided Chinggis Qan with important ideological and spiritual legitimacy, since he was able to marshal into his service these highly cultured people who possessed the very administrative and cultural skills and knowledge that the Mongols themselves lacked. In other words, the skills that the Uyghurs possessed were associated with spiritual force and power that then accrued to Chinggis Qan. Thus, even though they were near neighbors to the Mongol tribes, the fact that Chinggis Qan could count them among the first people to join him was an important event.

But the fact that they had submitted of their own accord did not mean that the Uyghurs' status as subjects was in any way minimized. It is true that many Uyghur personnel were valued for their skills and knowledge, and that they were treated favorably by the Mongol nobility. But the fact remains that most members of the Uyghur aristocracy were still dispersed from their homeland throughout the Mongol empire in order to serve their new masters. Some of the highest placed members of that group, including the Uyghur king (*idiqu*), accompanied the Mongols on military campaigns. Others were sent to serve Chinggis Qan's brothers and sons as tutors, advisors, and administrators of appanage lands. Sons and other family members of these prominent Uyghurs were inducted into Chinggis Qan's personal bodyguard as servitors and hostages. Thus, a significant part of the Gaochang aristocracy became a unique diaspora group.

Diaspora has traditionally been defined as a group of victims who have been displaced from their native place, usually by foreign conquerors, and who are destined to live as aliens thereafter. This typology of diaspora is inevitably framed as a negative experience, taking on a sense of homelessness, loss of identity and oppression. In the past

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three decades, however, the term diaspora has been used by a growing number of groups to describe their situations and identities in positive ways. They do not see themselves as victims of an unwilling dispersal, but as members of a voluntary diaspora who moved to improve their lives.¹ It is clear that Chinggis Qan's expansion of his confederation by conquering neighboring tribes and states in the early thirteenth century posed a very real threat to the Gaochang Uyghur kingdom, and that they really did not have a lot of choice when they transferred their allegiance from the decrepit Qara Khitai to the Mongols. The Uyghurs probably also knew that once they submitted their best craftsmen, specialists, and members of the higher levels of the aristocracy would naturally be requisitioned or allotted to the Mongol imperial clan as booty, dispersed to serve on their appanage lands or in military campaigns. Thus, in this respect, the Uyghurs were not a voluntary diaspora group into the Mongol Empire.

¹ This trend has been summarized by Robin Cohen, who makes a convincing argument for the need to expand our definition of diaspora beyond the traditional negative evaluation. See Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997). Cohen's typology of diaspora groups can be applied to pre-modern groups of migrants, such as the Gaochang Uyghurs, as well as modern labor, trade, and imperial diasporas. Among the criteria he lists for identification as a diaspora group, the following appear especially relevant to the 13th century Uyghurs:

- (1) Dispersal from an original homeland... to two or more foreign regions;
- (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
- (4) an idealization of the putative ancestral home...;
- (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness...;
- (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen, 26)

Cohen's descriptions of the ways in which diaspora groups are created emphasize voluntary movement and a much more positive view of that identity than is traditionally associated with the term.

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Yet their status as a diaspora group was also not simply that of unwilling victims. First, members of the Uyghur aristocracy actively worked to overthrow their existing tributary status under the Qara Khitai in favor of the Mongols. As we shall discuss below, that voluntary submission not only guaranteed the Uyghurs preferential status in the emerging Mongol imperial administration. Some of the Gaochang aristocracy were also allowed to retain their positions and power in their homeland, ruling now on behalf of their new masters. Others were distributed throughout the expanding Mongol empire.

Since the Gaochang Uyghur kingdom straddled the most important overland east-west trade routes (the so-called Silk Road), the Uyghur nobility who submitted to the Mongols may have done so not least to try to maintain some level of involvement in (and thus profit from) international trade and diplomacy in the new era of Mongol power. We know that these Uyghurs had great experience as cultural middlemen, and they also certainly knew what resources they could provide to the Mongol ruling elite.

Most of this book focuses on the descendants of the very first Uyghurs who served Chinggis Qan in China, and argues that those people used strategies that derived in some sense from their identity as a diaspora group to consciously construct new identities for themselves and their families as cultural and political elites in China. Since that diaspora identity was tied to the ways in which their ancestors became part of the Mongol imperial project, this chapter introduces the history of the Uyghur peoples as heirs to a long tradition of imperial rule and high culture. The Uyghurs whose stories are examined in the following chapters did not necessarily see themselves as a “diaspora” people *per se*. They did, however, use an implied identity as a diaspora people, that influenced the ways that they were integrated into the highest levels of power in the Mongol imperial project. John Armstrong’s category

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“mobilized diaspora,” as people who took advantage of their unique intellectual resources to retain some power for themselves in their new home, well describes these Uyghurs.²

Armstrong’s premodern mobilized diaspora were aristocratic elites who commanded certain resources, especially linguistic and other intellectual skills, not available to the dominant ethnic group in their new, adopted land. Members of a diaspora group who could mobilize those resources were able to obtain important advantages in their new home by accommodating the needs of the new dominant elites. The Gaochang Uyghurs mobilized these kinds of intellectual resources after they submitted to the Mongols. As I discuss below, their prominent position in the growing Mongol administration resulted, at least in part, from the unique linguistic and technical skills that they offered in service to the Mongols.

But Armstrong’s typology is also pertinent to the Uyghur case because he questions how diaspora elites interacted with the dominant ethnic group in the new multiethnic polity in which they moved. He proposes six characteristics that may describe the interactions of the mobilized diaspora with the dominant ethnic group (in our case the Uyghur subjects and the dominant Mongols). The first of these is that “within the multiethnic polity, the mobilized diaspora is temporarily indispensable for the dominant ethnic elite.”³ The stress here is on the paucity of skills that the dominant elites possess, and the fact that the mobilized diaspora group can fill those needs. If the dominant ethnic elite group consists mainly of “warriors, landlords and priests,” then diaspora groups that possess desired, highly transferable skills or knowledge will benefit. And the fact that the dominant group is able to gather those

² Armstrong, “Diasporas,” 395.

³ Armstrong, “Diasporas,” 397.

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skilled people unto itself also brings a certain legitimacy and prestige to the dominant group.

Literacy was one of the most highly valued skills or types of knowledge in most premodern societies, which literate diaspora aristocrats were able to exploit for their own benefit. “In addition to their technical role specialization, the diasporas’ communications skills have been especially prized by dominant elites who rarely possess either the multilingual ability or the more subtle understanding of diverse communication patterns required to deal effectively with a multi-ethnic population. Thus the first Arab caliphs found it necessary to employ Christian secretaries for civil administration....”⁴ This could easily describe the roles of Uyghurs in the early Mongol empire.

As important as their skills were to long-term survival, however, the dependency of any diaspora group on their new hosts is also an important consideration. “Within the multiethnic polity, the mobilized diaspora depends for security on the dominant ethnic elite.”⁵ The Mongols were clearly the dominant power in the Central Asian steppe area by the early 1200s, a fact not lost on the Gaochang Uyghurs. Their subordination to the Mongol ruling elites remained a fact of life in their new home in China when Uyghurs and all other non-Mongol, non-Chinese personnel were classified as *Semuren*. But subordination did not mean loss of importance. In Armstrong’s case studies, as well as in the Mongol empire, mobilized diaspora groups were always key players in internal structures of power and in state-state relations.

For example, members of literate diaspora groups were essential to successful foreign policy because they were employed as interpreters and envoys, and as agents in international commerce, all because of their multi-linguistic

⁴ Armstrong, “Diasporas,” 395.

⁵ Armstrong, “Diasporas,” 398

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talents and their familiarity with the customs of different peoples and states. Interpreters and translators were almost ubiquitous in Mongol China, and many *Semuren* performed vital services to the Mongol nobility in their roles as *ortogh* (T. *ortaq*, C. *wotuo*) merchants in international trade.⁶

In thinking about the movement of any group of dispersed people into the Mongol empire, we also need to take into account how the role and status of the diaspora group in their new home influenced group identity. Probably the vast majority of the *Semuren* who ended up in some part of the Mongol empire were moved there as a group, selected on the basis of their skills and usefulness to the Mongol nobility. As such, those groups undoubtedly maintained at least some of their preexisting networks of social power in their new home. The migration of social networks and the impact of those networks on the long-term social status and power of diaspora groups in their new land is a topic that few historians of the premodern period have explored, but seems relevant to explaining the history of the *Semuren* in Mongol China.⁷ As I shall discuss

⁶ On interpreters and translators in Mongol China, see Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing, "Yuandai de tongshi he yishi: duo Yuan minzu guojia zhongde goutong renwu" 元代的通事和譯史: 多元民族國家中的溝通人物 [Translators and interpreters in Yuan China: the several nationalities groups in Yuan China who were communications personnel], in *Qingzhu Zhaqisiqin jiaoshou bashi shouchen xueshu lunwenji* 慶祝札奇斯欽教授八十壽辰學術論文集 [Festschrift in honor of the eightieth birthday of Professor Jagchid Sechin] (Taibei: Lianhebao Wenhua Jijinhui guoxue wenxianguan bianyin, 1995), 199–267. On international merchants in Yuan China, see Allsen, "Mongolian Princes and their Merchant Partners"; and Endicott-West, "Merchant Associations in Yuan China: The *Ortoy*." Some examples of Uyghurs who acted as interpreters and translators will be discussed below. However, the commercial activities of the *Semuren*, while fascinating, are beyond the scope of my discussion.

⁷ Michael Chamberlain's study of the Damascene elites is one of the few exceptions, and I have used his work as a model for my own

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in more detail below, members of the Uyghur aristocracy who were removed from their homeland to serve the Mongols seem to have had a sense of group identity from the moment they submitted to Chinggis Qan in 1209. This is alluded to in various ways in the sources of the period, especially in their specific identification with the Uyghur *idiqu* and the marriage alliances that prominent Uyghur clans continued throughout the Yuan dynasty. Their Uyghur identity was rooted in their long history as imperial elite, both in the steppe and at Gaochang.

We begin with a brief review of the history of their steppe empire, also known as the Uyghur qaghanate, and then describe the Gaochang kingdom that developed in the mid-ninth century. This will lay the basis for examination in the next chapter of the stories of the first group of Uyghur aristocrats who accompanied their leader in turning to the Mongols in 1209.

Who Were the Uyghurs?

The Uyghurs first appear in the historical records in the sixth century of the common era, as the leading tribe in a confederation of nine Turkic tribes known as the Toquz Oghuz confederation.⁸ The confederation of Turkic tribes

research. See his *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Charles Tilly has examined this topic with regard to migration in the modern period. See his “Transplanted Networks,” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 79–95.

⁸ On the Toquz Oghuz confederation, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “Some Remarks on the Toquz Oghuz Problem,” *Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher* 28 (1956): 35–42. For discussion of the complex history of the Türk ethnos, led by the Ashina clan, and how that specific term was eventually applied to many of the Turkic-speaking peoples, see Peter B. Golden, *Ethnicity and State Formation in Pre-Chinggisid Turkic Eurasia* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Department of Central Eurasian Studies, 2001).

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later split into western and eastern halves, and the Uyghurs came under Chinese protection. They eventually defeated the last ruler of the Eastern Türk empire, with the help of other Turkic tribes, and established their own Uyghur empire in 744.⁹ The second Uyghur leader, Bilgä Köl Qaghan (aka Bilgä kül, or Moyanchuo 磨延啜, r. 747–759), added territory and prestige to the fledgling empire, most especially by extending Uyghur control over a wide area, especially to the west, and by building a capital city, Qarabalghasun (located on the Orkhon river in the central Mongolian steppe) (see Map 1). He also came to the aid of Tang China during the An Lushan rebellion (755–63), reaping generous rewards and important ties to China. It is because of their involvement in China's internal affairs that we know so much about the Uyghur empire. The continuing reliance of the Tang court on Uyghur military

⁹ For the history of the Uyghur steppe empire, see especially: Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*; Feng Jiasheng 冯家昇, Cheng Suluo 程溯洛 and Mu Guangwen 穆广文, *Weiwuerzu shiliao jianbian* 维吾尔族史料简编 [Concise compilation of historical materials on the Uyghur nationality] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1958; rpt. 1981); Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*; Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*; James Russell Hamilton, *Les Ouïghours à l'époque des cinq dynasties d'après les documents chionis* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955); Ablet Kamalov, *Drevnie Ugury VIII–IX CC* [The ancient Uyghurs, 8th–9th centuries] (Almaty: Nash Mir Publishing House, 2001); Colin Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire: According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972); and his later essay “The Uighurs,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 317–42; Denis Sinor, “The Uighur Empire of Mongolia,” in *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia* (Ashgate: Variorum, 1997); *Weiwuerzu jianshi* 维吾尔族简史 [Simplified history of the Uyghur people] (Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1991). I have drawn freely from all of these sources for the following brief discussion of Uyghur history.

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strength meant that the Uyghurs could largely dictate their own terms, and the subsequent history of the Uyghurs in Tang China up to the time of their own conquest by the nomadic Kirgiz in 840 was one of raw exploitation of the land and people by a series of Uyghur qaghans.

From the point of view of the Uyghurs themselves, undoubtedly the most important aspect of their empire was that they controlled the ancient Türk homeland in the sacred Orkhon area centered around Mt. Ötüken and the Selenge River valley, with all of the cultural and religious symbolism embodied therein.¹⁰ But the Uyghurs were also open to other religious traditions. The most important change in that arena occurred when the third Uyghur qaghan, Tängri Qaghan (also known as Mouyu 牟羽, r. 759–779), converted to Manichaeism, a Persian religion favored by the East Iranian Sogdian peoples.¹¹

Mouyu initially met Sogdians in China when he was there to help suppress the An Lushan rebellion, and after

¹⁰ The Uyghurs used essentially the same language and runiform script and imperial titles as the Türks and have been seen by some as merely a third Türk Empire. See, for example, S. G. Kliashtorny, who argues that the Uyghurs saw themselves as having established three kingdoms in the Mt. Ötüken area: the first was created just after the creation of the world and lasted some 200–300 years. After a period of some 100 years of decline this was followed by another kingdom established by the Yaghlaqar clan, also in this same area, lasting a mere eighty years, which was eventually followed by the third revival of their steppe kingdom in 744. See his “Nadpis’ uigurskogo Begiu-kagana,” *Tsentrāl’saiia Aziia. Novye pamiatniki pis’mennosti I isskustva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 19–37. I am indebted to Peter Golden for this information.

¹¹ While Manichaeism was based on Persian Zoroastrian dualism, it also included characteristics of Babylonian Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism and even Buddhism. See the several works of Samuel N. C. Lieu, especially his *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: a Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); and *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998).

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conversion imposed that religion on the Uyghur people. Acceptance of Manichaeism also paved the way for Sogdian advisors to wield a large amount of power at Mouyu's court. Ultimately, however, reliance on these same Sogdian advisors proved the qaghan's undoing, as he was wrongly advised to attack Tang China, his erstwhile ally. Mouyu was murdered by his first minister and cousin, Dun Bagha Darqan (also known as Dun mohe 頓莫賀, r. 779–789). This transition also marked the beginning of the decline of the Uyghur steppe empire.

As a result of this history, the Uyghurs adopted a range of Turkic, Sogdian and Chinese administrative models for their own use.¹² Though countered by a substantial element within the Uyghur aristocracy, Sogdian influence also contributed much to Uyghur steppe society and its later manifestation in the Tianshan-Tarim Basin area. Manichaeism continued to be followed by many Uyghurs, and Sogdians were responsible for transcribing many of the rare Buddhist, Christian and Manichaean religious texts that have been found in Turfan and other parts of the

¹² On Uyghur imperial titles, see Hilda Ecsedy, "Old Turkic Titles of Chinese Origin," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 18 (1965): 83–91; Hamilton, "Appendice," in *Les Ouighours*, 145–70; Omeljan Pritsak, "Old Turkic Regnal Names in the Chinese Sources," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (1985): 205–11; R. Rahmet, "Der Herrschertitel *Iduq-qut*," *Ural-Altische Jahrbucher* 35 (1964): 150–57; Han Rulin 韓儒林, "Tujue gonghao kaoshi" 突厥宫号考释 [Elucidation of Turkic official titles] in *Qionglu ji* 穹庐集 [Collected works of Han Rulin], *Ershi shiji Zhongguo shixue mingzhe* 二十世纪中国史学名著 [Famous twentieth century Chinese historians] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyi chubanshe, 2000), 355–78; Volker Rybatzki, "Titles of Türk and Uigur Rulers in the Old Turkic Inscriptions," *Central Asiatic Journal* 44.2 (2000): 205–92; Mori Masao, "The T'u-chüeh Concept of Sovereign," *Acta Asiatica* 41 (1981): esp. 69ff. For a study of a Uyghur stele text commemorating the Gaochang *idiqu*s, see Geng Shimin and James Hamilton, "L'inscription Ouïgoure de la stèle commémorative des iduq qut de Qoço," *Turcica* 13 (1981): 10–54.

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Uyghur Gaochang kingdom.¹³ The Sogdians, in fact, developed three different writing systems to be used for different purposes, roughly divided according to religious or secular needs. At least one of these scripts, the kind used for Buddhist religious literature, had been introduced to the Uyghurs by the sixth century, and eventually became the basis for one of the writing systems taught to Chinggis Qan's sons and brothers by a Uyghur.¹⁴ In addition to this, Sogdian influence can be seen in many of the ruins of Qarabalghasun, while Sogdians worked closely with the

¹³ See Takao Moriyasu, *Die Geschichte des uigurischen Manichäismus an der Seidenstrasse* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2004); and Xavier Tremblay, *Pour une histoire de la Séinde: Le manichéisme parmi les peuples et religions d'Asie Centrale d'après les sources primaires* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001).

¹⁴ There are two early stone inscriptions that show the prominence of Sogdian language and writing among the Uyghurs. The earliest inscription, mostly in Sogdian and erected by the Turks, is from Bugut in the central Mongolian steppe, dated to 582. A second inscription is the trilingual Sogdian, Chinese and Uyghur Turkish one that was found at the Uyghur capital of Qarabalghasun, dated to 810 or 821. On these inscriptions, see S. G. Kliashtorny and V. A. Livshiz, "The Sogdian Inscription of Bugut Revised," *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 16 (1972): 69–102; Olaf Hansen, "Zur soghdischen Inschrift auf dem dreisprachigen Denkmal von Karabalgasun," *Journal de la Société Finno-ougrienne* 44.3 (1930): 3–39; and articles (including photos and line drawings) in Takao Moriyasu 森安孝夫 and Aiuudain Ochir, eds., *Mongorukoku genson iseki, hibun chōsa kenkyū hōkoku* モンゴル国現存遺跡。碑文調査研究報告 [Provisional report on researches of historical sites and Inscriptions in Mongolia from 1996 to 1998] (Toyonaka: Central Eurasian Studies Society, 1999). I thank Peter Golden for providing this information. On Turkic stone inscriptions, see also Geng Shimin 耿世民, "Gudai Tujue wen zhuyao beiming jiqi jiedu yanjiu qingkuang" 古代突厥文主要碑铭及其解读研究情况 [The major Old Turkic stone inscriptions, their decipherment and study], in his collected works, *Xinjiang wenshilun ji* 新疆文史论集 [Collected works on language, literature, and history of Xinjiang] (Beijing: Zhongyang Minzu Daxue chubanshe, 2001), 28–42.

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Uyghurs to develop their respective roles in international trade, something that later generations of Uyghurs at Gaochang would also use.¹⁵

The Uyghurs developed a thriving urban culture in their steppe empire, centered in their capital cities, and this undoubtedly owed a great deal to their ongoing relationship with Tang China, as well. By the mid-eighth century, the Uyghurs had a lucrative trade relationship with China, where they supplied China with horses in exchange for luxury goods, especially silk and tea. Many Uyghurs became quite wealthy as a result of that trade and wielded enormous economic power within China itself as landowners and money lenders. Five Chinese princesses were also sent north to be married to Uyghur qaghans. The Chinese court often used these kind of marriage alliances as a way to maintain friendly relations with their northern neighbors, and the fact that three of these five Chinese princesses were actual daughters of Tang emperors reveals

¹⁵ In fact, some Tang-era Uyghurs followed the Sogdian pattern when they settled in China to engage in trade. On premodern trade diasporas, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). On the Sogdians and their roles in the early international silk trade and as advisors to the Uyghurs, see Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia from Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 1996); A. K. Narain, "Indo-Europeans in Inner Asia," in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; rpt. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1991), 151–76; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "A Sogdian Colony in Inner Mongolia," *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952): 317–56; Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Merchants in China and India," in *Cina e Iran da Alessandro Magno alla Dinastia Tang*, ed. Alfredo Cadonna and Lionello Lanciotti (Firenze: Olschki Press, 1996), 45–67; Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner, *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and The Asia Society, 2001); and Étienne de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens* (Paris: Collège de France, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2002).

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the power of the Uyghur qaghanate at the time as well as their importance to China.

The Uyghur empire was not, however, as strong as their record in China made them appear, and they were unable to withstand the centrifugal forces that had torn apart other earlier nomadic confederations.¹⁶ First, after reasserting its presence there, the Tang court evicted the Uyghurs from China, a result of the looting and brigandage they had pursued. More important, the Uyghur empire was torn apart by a highly contentious succession dispute, and warfare with two powerful enemies, the Tibetans and the Kirgiz. Qarabalghasun fell to the Kirgiz tribes in 840, and the great Uyghur empire ceased to exist.

After the capture of Qarabalghasun, the Uyghur elite fled south and west from the Orkhon area to avoid capture, and two groups eventually emerged out of that diaspora. One group of Uyghurs settled in present-day Gansu province, where they succeeded in establishing a semi-independent kingdom that was eventually absorbed into China proper.¹⁷ A second group migrated further west, where they eventually settled in two cities that spanned the eastern end of the Tianshan Mountain range, Beiting (Beshbaliq) and Gaochang (Kocho), and which became the two capital cities of this new western Uyghur kingdom

¹⁶ Michael R. Drompp has developed this concept of centrifugal forces in nomadic societies in his “Centrifugal Forces in the Inner Asian ‘Heartland’: History versus Geography,” *Journal of Asian History* 23.2 (1989): 134–68.

¹⁷ On the Gansu Uyghurs, see Elizabeth Pinks, *Die Uiguren von Kan-chou in der frühen Sung-zeit (960–1028)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968); and Lu Qingfu 陆庆夫, “Lun Ganzhou Huihu yu Zhongyuan wangchao de gongshi guanxi” 论甘州回鹘与中原王朝的贡使关系 [Discussion of tribute-envoy relations between the Ganzhou Uyghurs and China], *Minzu yanjiu* 1999.3: 62–70. On the fate of the Uyghur remnant who first sought accommodation in China, see Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

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(referred to hereafter as the Uyghur Gaochang kingdom; see Maps 2 and 3).¹⁸ Of all the offshoots of the original Uyghur empire, only the Gaochang kingdom managed to resurrect Uyghur imperial ambitions and mechanisms sufficiently to continue to play important roles in international trade and steppe political and military affairs.¹⁹ The Gaochang Uyghur kingdom remained rela-

¹⁸ Beiting, which lay on the north slope of the Tianshan Mountains near present-day Urumqi, was formerly a Tang protectorate where Uyghurs had had a strong presence at the time of their steppe empire. After the Uyghurs migrated there in the 840s it was also known by its Uyghur name, Beshbaliq. Gaochang, on the south side of the Tianshan Mountains and near to present-day Turfan, was the site of an ancient kingdom, and became known by its Uyghur name Kocho. For descriptions of the various renderings of the names of these two important cities in all of the relevant languages, see Liu Yitang 劉義堂, “Hanyi Tu Hui yu ‘Bieshibali’” 漢譯突回語 ‘別失八里’ [Chinese translations of the Turkic Uyghur name ‘Beshbaliq’], in his *Tu Hui yanjiu* 突回研究 [Research on the Turkic Uyghurs] (Taipei: Jingshi shuju, 1990), 393–413. Although I shall refer to the western Uyghur kingdom as the Gaochang kingdom, the Uyghurs who settled and lived there may have thought of themselves as natives or residents of a particular city or oasis settlement, and not necessarily or even primarily as members of a united Uyghur kingdom, because of the relatively large distances that separated oases and the relatively distinct cultures that developed in each oasis settlement. It must be acknowledged that we know very little about how Uyghurs from that period identified themselves, and it seems likely that localized forms of identity really developed in the sixteenth century after the ethnonym “Uyghur” had faded. But if these urban-oriented Uyghurs drew on the social customs of their Chinese neighbors, then place name, toponym, was a part of their identity. For examples of this from modern Uyghurs, where a person from Turfan will identify himself first as a “Turpanlik,” see Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China’s Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Cuiyi Wei and Karl W. Luckert, *Uighur Stories from Along the Silk Road* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998).

¹⁹ For the history of the Uyghur Gaochang kingdom, see especially Abe Takeo 安部健夫, *Nishi Uiguru kokushi no kenkyū* 西ウイグル國史の研究 [Study of the history of the western Uyghur kingdom] (Kyoto:

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tively independent and important from the 870s until the 1280s.

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Sometime after 840 a Uyghur prince named Menglig Tegin (C. Mangli) led a group of Uyghurs to Beiting where he was recognized by the Tang court as the Uyghur *qaghan* in 857.²⁰ The Uyghurs themselves called their leader the

Ibundo Shoten, 1955); translated into Chinese by Song Suying 宋肃瀛, Liu Meisong 刘美崧, and Xu Bofu 徐伯夫, *Xi Huihu guoshi de yanjiu* 西回鹘国史的研究 (Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin chubanshe, 1985); Akira Haneda, "Introduction," *Acta Asiatica* 34 (1978): 1–21; Juten Ota, "Part I. Uighuristan," *Acta Asiatica* 34 (1978): 22–45; Annemarie von Gabain, *Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qoço (850–1250)* (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 18–33; Annemarie von Gabain, *Das uigurische Königreich von Chotscho, 850–1250* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964); Geng Shimin, "Gaochang Huihu wangguo" 高昌回鹘王国 [The Gaochang Uyghur kingdom], in *Xinjiang wenshilun ji*, 229–38; Khamit Khamraev, *Uigury* [The Uyghurs], tr. Turghun Almas, 2 vols. (Almaty: private publication by Zinaudin Bosakov Fund, 1994); and Golden, *Introduction to the History of the Turkic People*, 163 ff. Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), Ch. 6; and *Weiwei wuerzu jianshi*, Ch. 3, describe the military and political aspects that led to the formation of the Tianshan-Tarim Basin Uyghur kingdom. For early Arabic and Chinese accounts of visits to Uyghuristan, see Vladimir Minorsky, "Tamīm ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghurs," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12.2 (1948): 275–305; and the official account of the Song emissary Wang Yande 王延德 to Gaochang in 981–983, *Gaochang xingji* 高昌行記 [Record of travel to Gaochang], tr. and analyzed by Stanislas Julien, "Kao-Tch'ang-hing-ki, ou Relation d'un voyage (officiel) dans le pays des Oïgours (de 981 à 983), par Wang-Yen-Té," *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1847): 50–66.

²⁰ On the role of Beiting/Beshbaliq for the Uyghurs, both before and after their steppe empire collapsed, see Hilda Ecsedy, "Uigurs and Tibetans in Pei-T'ing (790–791 A.D.)," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 17 (1964): 83–112; Takao Moriyasu, "Qui des Ouïgours ou des Tibétains ont gagné en 789–792 à Beš-baliq?" *Journal Asiatique* 169 (1981): 193–205; and Nancy S. Steinhardt, "The Uighur Ritual Complex in Beiting," *Orientalia* 30.4 (1999): 28–37.

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idikut, a term used previously by the Turkic Basmil tribe, one of the Toquz Oghuz tribes, which means “Sacred Majesty.”²¹ He then forced the Tibetans out of Gaochang, which had been under their control since the 790s, and occupied it as his second capital in 866. He formed his new Uyghur kingdom around those two cities sometime between 866 and 872.²² While the functions of the two

²¹ The Uyghurs actually used a variety of imperial titles that came from their ancient Türk heritage, including *qan*, *Elig qan*, *Tengriken* and *idikut*. See Gabain, *Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qočo*, 68. Since *idikut* predominates in the sources used for this book, I use only that term hereafter. See Moriyasu, *Die Geschichte des uigurischen Manichäismus an der Seidenstrasse*, Appendix 1, for a list of the Uyghur *idikuts* at Gaochang from 954 through 1067.

²² The administrative structure of this state, including the relative importance of the two capital cities, has been the focus of debate for some time. For some of the early scholarship on this issue, see Paul Pelliot, “Kao-Tch’ang, Qočo, Houo-Tcheou et Qarâ-Khodja,” *Journal Asiatique* ser. 10, 19 (1912): 579–603; Walter Fuchs, “Das Turfangebiet: seine äußeren Geschehnisse bis in die T’angzeit,” *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, new series, 2 (1926): 124–66; Friederich W. K. Müller, “Der hofstaat eines Uiguren-königs,” in *Festschrift Vilhelm Thomsen zur vollendung des siebenzigsten lebensjahres am 25. januar 1912* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1912), 207–13; Abe Takeo, “Where was the Capital of the West Uighurs?”, in *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyusyo* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1954), 435–50; Akira Shimazaki, “On Pei-t’ing 北庭 (Bišbaliq) and K’o-han Fu-t’u-ch’êng 可汗浮圖城,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 32 (1974): 99–117; Emil Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Resources*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), Vol. 2, 27–31. Abe argues that the Uyghur capital was located at Beiting/Beshbaliq (the northern capital) and not Gaochang/Kocho, and that this was the seat of a “fifth qanate” in the early decades of the Mongol empire. Since Beiting/Beshbaliq is located on the northern side of the Tianshan Mountains, it was apparently the summer residence of the Uyghur Qan, while Gaochang/Kocho, which has a milder climate than Beshbaliq, was the qan’s winter residence. The Persian historian Juvaini, on the other hand, states that Beiting/Beshbaliq was the main Uyghur capital. See ‘Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-

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capitals are still debated, both places were important to the identity of the new Uyghur state, since the Uyghurs had had a longstanding presence at both places.

The new Uyghur kingdom also inherited strong political and cultural traditions from other earlier inhabitants of the Tianshan-Tarim Basin ecology. Since this area was strategically situated along the major east-west trade routes (the so-called “Silk Road”) it has long been a natural meeting place for peoples of diverse cultures, including Xiongnu, Kushans, Hephthalites, Tokharians, Chinese, and Sogdians.²³ Indo-Iranian peoples are the first recorded groups in the area. Buddhism entered the area probably in the first century of the common era, and Manichaean and Christian missionaries and believers were there by the fifth century.²⁴ By the ninth century the local population consisted of a mixture of Uyghur, Iranian and Tokharian urban and semi-sedentary peoples and nomadic non-Uyghur Turkic peoples such as the Basmil and Toquz Oguz tribes. A mixture of Indo-European, Turkic, and Chinese cultural traditions all thrived in the Uyghur Gaochang kingdom, as can be seen in its rich complexity of artistic styles.²⁵ Religious diversity flourished as well, with

Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, tr. John Andrew Boyle (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1958), 47.

²³ See William Samolin, *East Turkestan to the Twelfth Century: A Brief Political Survey* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964); J. P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); and Jianjun Mei and Colin Shell, “The Iron Age Cultures in Xinjiang and their Steppe Connections,” in *Ancient Interactions: East and West in Eurasia*, ed. Katie Boyle, Colin Renfrew and Marsha Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 213–34.

²⁴ See especially Steinhardt, “The Uighur Ritual Complex in Beiting”; and Albert E. Dien, “Turfan Funereal Documents,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 30 (2002): 23–48.

²⁵ For more information on the artistic remains that document the complex Uyghur culture that prevailed throughout their Gaochang kingdom, see especially Albert Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische*

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Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and three different Buddhist cultures (Sogdian and Khotanese in the south and west, Tokharian in the north, and Chinese in the northeast).²⁶

The abundant cultural exchange that took place over time in the area that these western Uyghurs now inhabited had a profound impact on them. After they entered the Tianshan-Tarim Basin area, the Uyghur diaspora quickly

Kultstaaten in Chinesisch-Turkestan (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1912); Albert von Le Coq, *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan* (1928; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Mario Bussagli, "The Turfan Group," in *Central Asian Painting: From Afghanistan to Sinkiang* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1979), Ch. 6; Monique Maillard, "Essai sur la vie materielle dans l'oasis de Tourfan pendant le haut moyen age," *Arts Asiatique* 29 (1973): 3–185; William Samolin, "Ethnographic Aspects of the Archaeology of the Tarim Basin," *Central Asiatic Journal* 4 (1958): 45–67, who divides the Tarim Basin area into three distinct culture areas, a far eastern Lop area, a northern zone from Aksu to Turfan, and a southern zone centered at Khotan; and Annemarie von Gabain, *Die Formensprache der uigurischen Malerei* (Wiesbaden: In Kommission bei Otto Harrassowitz, 1987).

²⁶ Buddhism, however, appears to have dominated the area. By the time the Song envoy, Wang Yande 王延德, visited Gaochang in 982, he found only one Manichaean temple and fifty Buddhist monasteries and a library of Buddhist literature; see Johan Elverskog, *Uygur Buddhist Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 7. A large portion of the extant Uyghur literary corpus produced in the Gaochang kingdom was religious, consisting of Buddhist sutras and commentaries, and Manichaean and Christian texts, written in several different writing systems, including Brahmanic, Tibetan, Pahlavi, and Sogdian. There is a long history of scholarship on this subject too numerous to list here. For some descriptions of the corpus of Uyghur religious literature, in addition to Elverskog, see Ronald E. Emmerick, *A Guide to the Literature of Khotan*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1992); several of the essays by Geng Shimin in *Xinjiang wenshilun ji*; Berthold Laufer, "Zur buddhistischen Literatur der Uiguren," *T'oung Pao* 8 (1907): 391–409; and Peter Zieme, *Religion und Gesellschaft im Uigurischen Königreich von Qočo* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992).

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established their dominance over the native population, and built a civilization that reached its height in the tenth century. One of the distinctive cultural elements that set the Uyghur Gaochang kingdom apart from their neighbors was the multiplicity of writing systems used there. I have already commented on the fact that Sogdians introduced at least one of their writing systems to the Uyghurs when they were still masters of their steppe empire at Qarabalghasun. That cursive writing system was one of many used by the Uyghurs to create a body of religious and secular literature for which they became well known. It was also that Sogdian cursive script that a Uyghur introduced to Chinggis Qan in the early thirteenth century and which became known as the “Uyghur script.”²⁷ But a number of

²⁷ Gabain, *Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qočo*, Ch. 16, discusses the full spectrum of languages and writing systems used by the Gaochang Uyghurs. For more general discussion of the Uyghur languages and writing systems, see Thomas F. Carter, “The Printing of the Uigur Turks,” in *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1925, 1955), 140–49; Larry V. Clark, “Introduction to the Uyghur Civil Documents of East Turkestan (13th–14th cent.),” Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1975, esp. pp. 6–7, and 35–38, n. 15 and 16; Gerard Clauson, “The Diffusion of Writing in the Altaic World,” in *Aspects of Altaic Civilization*. Proceedings of the Fifth Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference held at Indiana University, June 4–9, 1962, ed. Denis Sinor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 139–44; A. Rona-Tas, “Some Notes on the Terminology of Mongolian Writing,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 18 (1965): 119–47; György Kara, “Aramaic Scripts for Altaic Languages,” in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 536–58; S. Robert Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), Ch. 10; and Nicholas Sims-Williams, “The Sogdian Sound-System and the Origins of the Uyghur Script,” *Journal Asiatique* 269 (1981): 347–60. The earliest form of writing of a Turkic language was a runic script, used to write several inscriptions detailing events in early Türk history found in the Mongol steppe. This runic script has no relationship to the Sogdian syllabary used by the Uyghurs.

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other writing systems were also used at Gaochang and other oasis settlements in the area, and the Uyghurs became well known for their multicultural society and their multilingual abilities. It was because they were familiar with such a wide range of languages that many Uyghurs were eventually used as tutors to the Mongol nobility, and as translators and interpreters in Mongol China.²⁸

Drawing on their prior experience at running a steppe empire, and on relationships established in the area while they were still in power at Qarabalghasun, the Uyghurs maintained their own kingdom at Gaochang from approximately 866 to about 1131, when they became vassals to the Qara Khitai to their west, a remnant state of the old Qitan Liao confederation.

The Qitan, a confederation of forest tribes that originated in northeast Asia, began their conquest of north

For a detailed study of the grammar of old Turkic and Uyghur languages, as well as examples of the various scripts, see Annemarie von Gabain, *Alttürkische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1950).

²⁸ One measure of the richness of the Gaochang Uyghur society is the number of languages that were used there. The Uyghurs have left texts in several alphabets. The most common written language appears to have been a Semitic script system, which probably originated among Manichaean or Christian followers (it was this system that the Uyghurs eventually taught to Chinggis Qan). A runic alphabet was also used; said to have derived from Indic Brahmi scripts, it may be a cultural residue of Tocharian peoples who lived in the area. Finally, texts written in a Tibetan script have also been found. Most of these extant texts are religious in nature, primarily representing Manichaean, Nestorian Christian, and Buddhist teachings. It is also likely that as much as a quarter to a third of the Uyghur population were literate in one or another of these languages as well as their own native Uyghur. Thus, Uyghur social and religious elites, and perhaps some sectors of the lower classes as well, seem to have been widely literate.

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China in the early 900s.²⁹ Their Liao dynasty ended in 1125 when they were expelled from north China by the Jurchen, who then established their own Jin dynasty in north China. One member of the Liao imperial house, a certain Yelü Dashi 耶律大石 (?–1143) refused to submit to the Jurchen and in 1124 fled west to Kedun in southwest Mongolia, the Liao's westernmost outpost, with some 10,000 horsemen. Dashi and his followers eventually moved further west, and in 1130 was granted permission to travel through Uyghur territory by the *idikut* Bilge, who entertained Dashi, presented him with six hundred horses, a hundred camels, and three thousand sheep, gave some of his own sons and grandsons as hostages, and then declared himself a subject of Dashi. Yelü Dashi eventually conquered a wide swath of territory from the Qarakhanids and settled in their old

²⁹ On the history of the Qitan Liao and Qara Khitai states, see Toghto 脫脫, et al., *Liaoshi* 遼史 [History of the Liao Dynasty], 5 vols. (1344; rpt. Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1974), Ch. 30; Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1946), especially the appendix, pp. 619–74; Wei Liangtao 魏良弢, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu* 西辽史研究 [Research on Western Liao history] (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin chubanshe, 1987), and his later *Xi Liao shigang* 西辽史纲 [Outline history of the Western Liao] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991); Denis Sinor, “The Kitan and the Kara Khitay,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Volume 4: *The Age of Achievement: A.D. 750 to the end of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. M. S. Asimov and C. E. Bosworth (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), 227–59; Michal Biran, “China, Nomads and Islam: The Qara Khitai (Western Liao) Dynasty 1124–1218,” Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000, her later article “‘Like a Mighty Wall’: the Armies of the Qara Khitai,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 44–91, and more recent book, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, “The Liao,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 6, ed. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43–153. See Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, Appendix 2, for maps of the Qara Khitai kingdom.

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capital city Balasaghun, in the Chu valley of present-day Kirgizstan.

Yelü Dashi took for himself the title of *gürkhan* (“universal qan”), as well as Chinese imperial and reign titles, and his empire, known in Muslim sources as the Qara Khitai (lit. “Black Qitans,” where the color black probably referred to the geographical direction north) and by the Chinese as the Western Liao, *Xiliao*, eventually controlled an area that stretched from the Oxus river in the west to the Altai mountains in the east, and from Lake Balqash in the north to Balkh and Khotan in the south (most of present-day Xinjiang, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and southern Kazakstan). (See Map 4.) Strategic thinking must have played some part in the *idiquit*’s decision, since the Uyghurs would act in similar manner again within eighty years when they voluntarily submitted to the new center of gravity in the region, the Mongols.

We know very little about the relationship between the Qara Khitai and the Gaochang Uyghurs in the first decades of their alliance, and it seems that the Qara Khitai were content to collect an annual tribute payment from the *idiquit* with little overall interference. The Qara Khitai *were undoubtedly* secure in their power over the Uyghurs because members of the *idiquit*’s own family were residing at the Qara Khitai capital as hostages, and because the Uyghurs did not pose a military threat to them. Over time, the relationship between the Qara Khitai and the Uyghurs worsened. We know that the Uyghur *idiquit* offered tribute to the Jin in 1138 and again in 1144 after Dashi’s death a year earlier.³⁰ At the same time, the Qara Khitai became more onerous in their demands on the Uyghurs. Their worsening relations seem to have reached a low point in the early 1200s, when the Qara Khitai sent a Buddhist monk, described in the sources as arrogant and ruthless, as

³⁰ *Jinshi* 4.73, 121.2637.

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overseer at the Uyghur court.³¹

Thus, by the time Barchuq el-Tegin 巴而忒阿而忒的斤 (fl. 1209–1230s) became *idiqu*, the Uyghurs' relationship with the Qara Khitai had declined considerably. The Buddhist monk overseer (*Seng shaojian* 僧少監) was killed in 1209 in a plot organized by Barchuq el-Tegin and his top officials. Shortly thereafter, the Uyghur *idiqu* submitted to Chinggis Qan, accompanied by the most prominent members of the Uyghur aristocratic elite. These men thus formed the first generation of Uyghur subjects to the Mongols. In the next chapter we shall look at members of that first group, since they constituted an important precedent for their descendants, as a group and as individuals.

The Uyghurs provided the Mongols with much needed military manpower and expertise in technical matters of empire that included the use of writing, the mechanics of administration and management of sedentary populations, as well as specialists in higher cultural matters such as the arts and religion. Once they came over to the Mongol camp, most of the Uyghuristan elites were dispersed throughout the Mongol empire. The *idiqu* himself, as well as several other members of the Uyghuristan aristocracy, led Uyghur troops alongside the Mongols in military campaigns while others were sent to serve members of the Mongol imperial clan, usually at their appanage lands, as advisors, tutors, and administrators. Sons and younger brothers of most of the prominent Uyghur elites were inducted into Chinggis Qan's personal

³¹ The fact that a Buddhist monk was a high official for the Qara Khitai is not surprising since, unlike most of their neighbors, they never converted to Islam. See Michal Biran, "True to their Ways: Why the Qara Khitai did not Convert to Islam," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 175–199. Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, 120–23, discusses the functions of the *shaojian* overseer.

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bodyguard troop, where they were both hostages and journeyman members of the Mongol administrative system. Thus, their early submission enabled the Uyghurs to be given highly desirable positions as advisors and administrators in the upper echelons of the Mongol imperial clan. That legacy was a long-term source of power for Uyghurs in Mongol service; in China, the Uyghurs became arguably the single most important sub-group of the *Semuren* administrators, and many also established reputations as cultural literati acceptable to their Chinese counterparts.

Conclusion

The Uyghur Gaochang kingdom was in many ways quite different from its earlier incarnation as a steppe empire. For one thing, the Gaochang Uyghurs had become much more sedentary and urban-based than their ancestors. Moreover, Uyghur society in the Tianshan-Tarim Basin area was, if anything, even more richly multicultural than their empire centered at Qarabalghasun. This was due not least to the fact that the earlier Indo-Iranian influence the Uyghurs had absorbed from the Sogdians was bolstered by other Indo-European, Tibetan and Chinese cultural influences that had infiltrated into the Tianshan-Tarim Basin area over several centuries, as people came and went and competed for control of the overland trade routes that ran through the area and depended for their survival on the various oasis settlements like Gaochang that the Uyghurs now controlled.

It is especially striking that the Gaochang Uyghurs continued to follow the traditions of Turkic nomadic states that had, from very early times, used sedentary non-Turkic specialists in a symbiotic relationship by which the nomads could gain skills to deal with sedentary states. Just as the Sogdians provided the semi-nomadic Uyghur steppe qaghanate expertise and advice in trade, diplomacy, and culture, now the Uyghur aristocracy at Gaochang were

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positioned to act in similar roles as advisors and specialists for the nomadic Mongols. As I shall discuss in the following chapters, the Gaochang Uyghurs were able to act in these roles because of the rich cultural and intellectual resources that they brought with them into the Mongol imperial project.

The Gaochang Uyghurs also continued to play important roles in international affairs after migrating to Beiting and Gaochang. They maintained official relations with a waning Tang China, and afterwards with the Song empire, as well as with the Liao and Jin courts to the east. Uyghuristan's political role in the Eurasian steppe was informed by its location astride the major trade routes. Encountering and welcoming as they did a wide mix of peoples and cultures allowed the Uyghurs to become practiced statesmen in their own land and skilled envoys at neighboring courts. One thing, however, was not welcomed or accepted in this unique poly-religious urban culture; the Uyghur *idiqu* continually rebuffed attempts by the Muslim Qarakhanid state centered in Kashgar to convert the northern Uyghurs at Gaochang and Beiting to Islam. This was undoubtedly due to religious and cultural differences between the Buddhist and Muslim traditions. The southern Uyghurs (living in the oasis settlements along the southern and far western end of the Tarim Basin) were among the earliest converts to Islam in the area (they converted in the tenth century), while Islam did not penetrate the northern oases and Beiting until at least the late fourteenth century.³²

The Uyghurs at Gaochang had a large reserve of

³² Geng Shimin quotes the 16th century historian Mirza Haidar in asserting that "it was only after Khizir Khoja Khan of the eastern Chagatai kingdom (ruled about 1389–1399) waged a holy war against the Turfan region several times that the Turfan area Uyghurs were forced to accept Islam"; Geng Shimin, "On the Fusion of Nationalities in the Tarim Basin and the Formation of the Modern Uyghur Nationality," *Central Asian Survey* 3.4 (1984): 12.

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resources to draw on when they submitted to the Mongols in 1209, including their own earlier diaspora experience, their experience at administering a mixed population of nomadic and settled peoples of a variety of cultures and histories, the appreciation of and functionality in different cultural and linguistic traditions, and their more recent history as a kingdom in an intermediate frontier zone. But did their submission entail or create a sense of group identification among those members of the Uyghur aristocracy who were close to the *idikut* at the time? The Chinese sources of the time imply that such was the case, by stating that they accompanied the Uyghur *idikut* in submitting to the Mongols. While some may argue that this is simply idiomatic literary Chinese, it should perhaps not be so easily dismissed without comment.

We know from research on diaspora groups in the modern period that when a group migrates to another place, a sense of common ethnic identity may develop where there was not a strong sense of that unique identity before their diaspora experience.³³ This is an important point to make when we are considering the history of the Uyghurs as a diaspora group in the Mongol empire, since much of the scholarship on the *Semuren* in Mongol China adopts the view that that social classification scheme merely expressed the natural, pre-determined ethnic solidarities of these subject peoples. The Uyghur elite who were brought into China undoubtedly already had a clear sense of their own unique cultural identity. Subsuming them into the larger group of *Semuren* must have heightened that shared identity. Moreover, while the Mongols were certainly cognizant of tribal or ethnic differences, not least among themselves, other factors such as a state's form of

³³ See especially Cohen, *Global Diasporas*; and Tilly, "Transplanted Networks." Both scholars agree that a specific ethnic identity may naturally arise after a group has migrated to a new place, in contrast to the group importing an already-formed identity.

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submission (voluntary or forced) and resources also informed the ways in which they organized their new subjects. We know that one of the more brilliant moves that Chinggis Qan made in the first years of his imperial project was to undercut traditional tribal affiliations in favor of a person's proximity to and favor with the qan. Similar logic was at the heart of the four-fold classification system in China.

In the premodern world one's identity also revolved primarily around one's native place, and it is often difficult to tell the difference between a toponym and an ethnonym. For example, the Uyghurs whose stories we shall take up below are almost always described in terms of their perceived place of origin, as in "so-and-so, a native of Gaochang". In some cases the text also describes the person in question as a *Semuren* or as a "Uyghur" (variants of the term *Weiwuer*, or *Weiwuerren*), only the last of which invokes ethnicity. But native place would immediately imply for the contemporaneous reader a person's ethnic identity. A native of Gaochang would thus without doubt be a Uyghur. By the time Uyghurs had been living in China for two or three generations, that reference also indicated a person's political and social status, as the case studies in the following chapters will demonstrate.

We would like to know whether the Uyghurs in Mongol China thought of themselves first as a distinct ethnic group (as "Uyghurs") or as members of an administrative status group (as *Semuren*), and how their peers viewed them. The sources imply that both loci of identity were equally important. My research on the Yuan Uyghurs began by trying to answer this difficult question. At a minimum, what the sources do reveal, and what I hope this book conveys, is that the Uyghur elites from the Gaochang Kingdom who were moved into China after 1209 defined themselves in terms of sets of lineages that had been displaced from their native place and were maintained

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over time in their new home by marriage alliances and other professional and personal ties. Those ties were probably formed by a sense of group identity that developed among the first generation of Uyghur elites who were directly associated with their *idikut* in 1209. Those Uyghurs most likely saw themselves as the first among peers in the larger *Semuren* social status group.