



Kublai Khan's Court



Letter to the Delegate

Dear Delegate,

You have been formally invited to sit upon, and participate in, the Royal Council of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China and Great Khan of All Mongols. You will be required to use your extensive knowledge of both current and past events to assist me in the governing of my domain, as well as advising me on all matters, be it political, economic, or military. What follows is a detailed recent history of our great empire, as well as several notes on our current foreign and domestic affairs.

I trust you will not fail me,

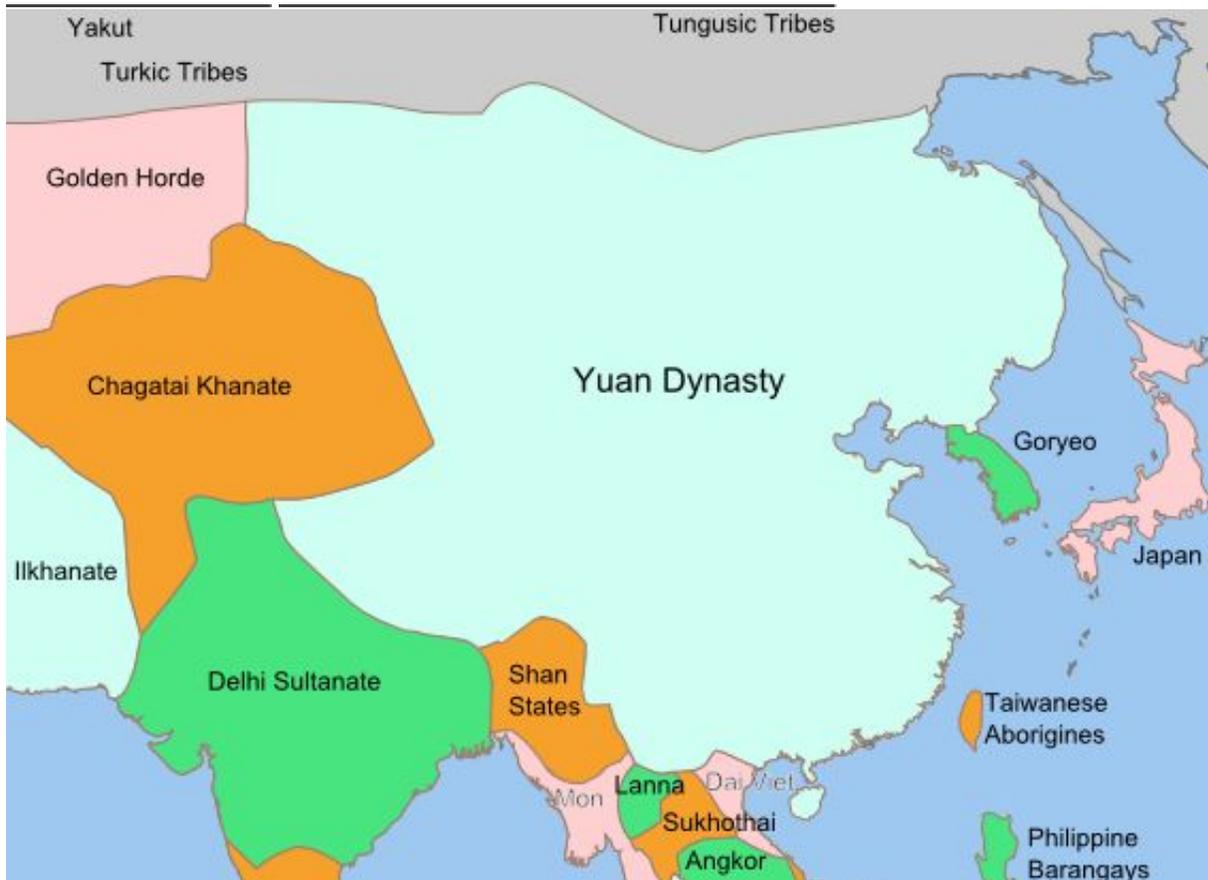
Kublai Khan Emperor of China and Great Khan of All Mongols

Section 1: Mongolian Government and Society

Government

In 1271, the Mongol government was administered at Dadu (now Beijing). The Empire was split into four subdivisions known as Khanates: Khipchak, or the Golden Horde, ruled Russia; the Ilkhanate ruled Persia and the Middle East, the Chagatai ruled over Asia and the Great Khanate Mongolia and China. This is shown above in Fig 1. Regional rulers and administrators were foreigners, owing to the Mongol social class system to be explained later. Following Chinese tradition, Kublai Khan's civil servant body is organized in six ministries: the Ministry of Personnel, the Ministry of Revenue, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Rites, and the Ministry of Public Works. These ministries are administered jointly by Kublai Khan's Right and Left Prime Minister. Both Ministers answer to the Head of the Secretariat. He is also surrounded by a group of trusted nobles which counsel him in matters of public policy and of war according to their best judgement, in accordance to both Mongol and Chinese ruling tradition. Kublai Khan retains the ultimate decision power, and while he delegates some business to his trustees, he is

often directly involved in the decision-making process.



Kublai Khan

Kublai, son of Ogedei and grandson of Genghis Khan, was born in 1215 and rose to power in 1260. He was often referred to as the greatest leader in the history of the Yuan dynasty, and built the Forbidden City, in what is now Beijing, for himself. His military exploits prior to gaining power include the conquest of the Dali Empire in 1253, and the Song in 1259, making him the first ruler to control all of China. He was the Khagan, meaning that he overlooked the four Khanates.



As one noticed in the earlier section on governance, his style was inspired from the Chinese tradition, unlike earlier Mongol leaders who governed using Mongol tribal law or Genghis Khan's secret Yasa code of law. His benevolent rule made him known as the "Wise Khan" across the Empire.

Social Classes

The Mongol social class system consisted of four classes: Menggu Ren, Semu Ren, Han Ren, Nan Ren. The Menggu Ren were Mongols of a privileged military caste, who were exempt from taxation and lived at the expense of Chinese peasantry. The Semu ("coloured eye") Ren were foreign auxiliaries of Mongols, usually Muslim, who interacted with other merchants and had similar privileges as the Menggu Ren. The Han Ren and Nan Ren were the Northern and Southern Chinese respectively, with the latter also being known as

the manzi. Chinese people were not given authoritative positions in government or business, and thus served usually as servants. Of the Chinese, the Southern Chinese were considered to be the least trustworthy of the two geographic groups.

Religion

The Mongols tolerated rival religions, but favored popular religions. The main Mongolian religion was Shamanism. This religion focuses on a connection of nature, healing of self and community, spiritual practice, pilgrimage and ceremony. Buddhism and Daoism were also looked favorably upon, and Islam was established as a major religion at the time as Muslims were government officials and merchants. Religious communities were exempt from tax, especially Buddhist communities, as Buddhist temples were donated resources and land for construction and Tibetan monks lived lavishly at the time.

Military



Genghis Khan was responsible for the mass expansion of the Mongolian Empire. He first started off with only 120,000 men, but these men were very skilled horsemen who could shoot targets at a full gallop. Genghis Khan's success is owed to his method of dividing his troops into decimal units (hundreds, thousands, ten thousands)

and communicating through

unit-specific hand signals. He laid siege to towns or communities that resisted and wiped out entire groups of inhabitants. As a result, most towns surrendered to him immediately.

Ogedei Khan, son of Genghis Khan, took rule from 1227-1241, where he invaded the Chinese Jin Dynasty in alliance with the Song Dynasty. Ogedei's army had mastered the use of gunpowder weapons and siege engines during their invasion of the Jin Dynasty, which was defeated in 1234. After the Jin Dynasty was conquered, Ogedei broke his alliance with the Song Dynasty, and Kublai started a military campaign against them in 1259, leading the Mongols to victory over the Song Dynasty by 1279.

Finances

Most trade occurred between foreign merchants from Arabia, Persia and sometimes Europe. Paper money known as 'chao' was used as the sole method for exchange. This allowed for easy exchange and transactions, but caused inflation later in the dynasty due to over-issuing the money. Agriculture was the main economic staple; however, the smaller textile industry was the most prosperous. Trade was made easier with the improvement of the Grand Canal and the Silk Road was used to expand trade to Europe and Middle East.

Section 2: The Silk Road



The Silk Road was a vast ancient land trade route which spanned from Italy to China. In the early 13th century, trade was negatively impacted due to Genghis Khan's conquest of parts of China to Persia to the Mediterranean which created the Mongol Empire. It soon split into the three Khanates and the Kublai Khan-led Yuan Dynasty, which would complete the conquest of China. The size of the empire allowed significant interaction between regional cultures. The route of the Silk Road had become important as a communication pathway and further enhanced trade. Any trader could use the Silk Road, and there were large guest houses known as caravanserais to facilitate their journey. It was during this time that the first Europeans came to visit the Orient. Franciscan friars visited the city of Karakorum. Northern Europeans visited Kublai Khan's court in 1261. However, we know the journey of Marco Polo best and his role will be talked about later.

During this time period, the Mongol Empire more or less unanimously controlled the Silk Road, due to the Genghis Khan-enforced Pax Mongolica. The development of the Silk Road commerce under the

Mongols was a result both of its direct promotion and the creation of an infrastructure which ensured safe conditions for travel.

Section 2: Foreign Relations East Asia:

North China :All of Northern China was conquered by Ogedei in 1234; the people of this area, called the Han people (Chinese, Jurchen, and Khitans), were considered lower class (third out of the four classes).

Korea:

Mongol invasions in Korea (then known as Goryeo) began in 1231 and six major campaigns took place. The Royal court was in conflict between the Literati party (opposed to war with Mongols) and a military junta (kept pressing for war), until the Literati party killed the leader of the military junta in 1270, resulting in a peace treaty and 80-year alliance between the Mongolian Empire and Goryeo.

Hui:

The Hui were a very small minority of Chinese Muslims. They are currently subdued and peaceful; however, they have been known to grow uneasy during periods of extended war and conflict, especially when Mongolia invades Muslim nations.

Japan:

The Mongols attempted to invade Japan twice, first in 1271, and again in 1281. Mongolian and Korean ships failed to capture Japan in both events due to storms and bad weather; both storms were credited to be miraculous, and are referred today as 'kamikaze' by the Japanese. Although there was political unease between Japan and the Mongolian Empire during the time between the first and second invasion attempts, Kublai Khan finally retreated from Japan as he believed Japan was protected by supernatural forces. This incredibly demoralizing and recent defeat weighs heavily upon Kublai's conscious.

Pagan Kingdom:

The Pagan Kingdom is considered to be the first Burmese empire. The Mongolian empire pressed to conquer the Pagan Empire starting in 1271, as Kublai Khan sent emissaries to demand tribute, but Narathihapate, the last leader of the kingdom, resisted. Up until this point there has been only one major campaign against the Pagan Kingdom, culminating in the Battle of Ngassaunggyan (1277). The conquered portion has been annexed by Kublai and is referred to as the Shan States (see first map). The lower third of the region is still entirely independent. There is massive unrest in the conquered region, and it seems likely that freedom fighters are crossing from the independent south to the conquered north to assist their rebellious brethren. Narathihapata is still at large.

Vietnam:

Three attempts were made to take over Vietnam, one in 1257, one in 1284, and one in 1287, but ultimately the conquest of Southeast Asia was unsuccessful due to the foreign climate, disease, and the Vietnamese defense tactics. In the 1257 invasion, Kublai Khan reached the capital of Vietnam, Thang Long, but had to retreat due to shortage of food and tropical climate. Afterwards the Vietnamese counter-offense drove the Mongols out. There is an uneasy peace at the moment, with Kublai itching to prove Mongolia's true might and protect his military reputation.

Europe:

The Silk road opened up trade to Europe and linked travelers and merchants to the European mainland. Of these travelers, Marco Polo was the most influential; he met Kublai Khan in 1266, then stayed in China from 1275 to the time our story begins, only to return to Italy to spread knowledge about Chinese culture. His accounts of the Mongol Empire shed light on everything from the economy to the daily life of the Mongolian people. He was also a gifted linguist, spoke four languages, and was given high posts in Kublai Khan's

administration. He was sent on special missions to China, Burma and India. He was appointed as an official of the Privy Council in 1277 and for 3 years he was a tax inspector in Yanzhou, a city on the Grand Canal, northeast of Nanking. Most European trade occurred in Italy; trade goods included silk, ceramics, etc. Catholic missionaries and crusaders in China returned to European nations with vast knowledge on Chinese culture, society, and literature.

Middle East:

Trade between China and Islamic nations allowed advancements in science and technology. This was primarily due to the popular use of the Silk Road. Arab-Persian astronomy and astronomical instruments were introduced to China during Kublai Khan's reign. Middle Eastern physicians practiced widely in China; Arabic numeral system was introduced. Many Middle Eastern merchants regulated trade between China and the Middle East and were considered to be one of the upper class, namely, the Semu Ren. Reports have been delivered speaking of military conflicts cropping up along the Ilkhanate border, near the city of Baghdad. The unknown troops have been observed riding camels and fly a flag with a white crescent moon on a yellow background.

Section 3: The Lead Up to The Current Climate

In 1260, Kublai's eldest brother, the Great Khan Mongke dies. Kublai's youngest brother Ariq Böke assumes power in Karakorum, presumably to prevent anarchy until a tribal council known as a kuriltai can be convened. Upon the news, Kublai returns from his campaign against the Sung dynasty. He is designated as the Great Khan of Mongols by a kuriltai he assembles in haste.

However, his kuriltai does not involve the majority of the Mongol nobility, but rather, his supporters, which add up to the required minimum. Hence, Kublai's authority is challengeable.

In addition, Kublai decides to style himself "Emperor of China". While this may allow him to rule the conquered Chinese territories, it may

also weaken his claim of being Great Khan of Mongolia. In K'ai-p'ing, the seat of his authority, Kublai assembles his counsellors, newly named ministers and supporters in order to begin ruling and expanding his new Empire, but also to prepare against opposing claims to the title.

While the emperor can rely on the vast experience of his counsellors, the political climate is very tense in K'ai-p'ing. Indeed, Kublai Khan is known for his impatience and perfectionism, and a single mistake can lead to an execution. In addition, Kublai Khan's precarious leadership position is likely to create chaos and suspicion between his few supporters.

Upon his election as Great Khan, Kublai can rely on his and his supporters' traditional **M**ongol cavalry, which is particularly effective on open-field battlefields, the traditional **M**ongol war tactics may no longer be sufficient to vanquish the enemies the Emperor will face.

Section 4: The Current Climate

The year is now 1281, mere months after Kublai's massively failed invasion of Japan. His enemies look upon his defeat with hungry eyes, seeing the failed invasion as a sign of weakness in an enemy that has been seemingly unstoppable. Kublai Khan's counsellors will have to guide their leader through difficult times: not only is his title still in danger, but the campaigns against the Sung dynasty, Japan, and the Pagan Kingdoms have left his coffers empty. In addition, there are rising tensions between the ethnicities in Kublai's empire, as well as within his own family. On the western front, there are the Arab Muslim invasions, the European trade hegemony and the Crusades to worry about. The council has a hard task ahead of them. Will they rise to occasion?

Section 5: Character List

1. Chungnyeol of Goryeo, Korean Crown Prince● Prince Chungnyeol

was raised by Khubilai Khan's court. As a result, he is more familiar with Mongol and Chinese customs than his own culture. Although he is officially an honored guest at court, he is aware that he is a hostage. Despite his education, he remains conscious of his important role as future monarch of the Kingdom of Goryeo (Korea). He will do everything to ensure the well-being of his father's subjects.

2. Chen-chin, Crown Prince● Raised by Confucian teachers, he is considered too Chinese by many at court.

Nevertheless, his position as Crown Prince requires Chen-chin to understand and apply Mongol traditions. He is desperate to prove himself to his father and impose himself amongst the rest of the court.

3. Nomukhan, Kublai's second son● Prince Nomukhan was raised to become a military leader. Unlike his elder brother, he

does not feel the need to prove himself. Rather, he is aware of his military talent, and wishes to serve the Mongol Empire by rising quickly through the ranks and making use of his military genius.

4. Shiregi, Möngke Khan's son● Although he appears loyal to his uncle Kublai, Shiregi is often doubted by other

members of the nobility. Indeed, as Möngke Khan's son, he also has a claim to the title of Great Khan. He has provided good advice to the Emperor, but his own advancement is also very important to him.

5. Hantum, Head of the Secretariat● The Head of the Secretariat is responsible for all major civil decisions. He holds a great

deal of decision making authority. However, his decisions are subject to the Emperor's approval. Hantum is conscious of his precarious position: while he has an immense power, he also has the most to lose.

6. Hülegü, Kublai Khan's loyal brother● After Möngke Khan's death,

Hülegü was one of the first to rally to Khubilai's cause. He

is fiercely loyal to his brother, and will not let anything sway his loyalty. He always puts

the interests of the Imperial Family first.⁷ Phags-pa lama, Kublai's trusted Tibetan advisor;

- The Tibetan monks are known to possess magical abilities, which makes Phags-pa lama particularly valuable to Kublai Khan. The Great Khan is aware that the lama does not actually possess any powers, but other advisors are not so sure, and the population believes in and is frightened by the Tibetan magic. Thus, Phags-pa lama uses his influence and might to gain more advantages for the Tibetan monks.

8. Liu Ping-chung, Kublai's trusted advisor; ● Liu Ping-chung is particularly interested in his own advancement at the Mongol Court.

While he is careful not to alienate other advisors, and above all, the Great Khan, he is

always looking for opportunities for advancement.⁹ Liu Kan, Right Prime Minister, responsible for the activities of the ministries;

- Liu Kan is responsible for the ministries of Personnel, War, and Rites. As he has to oversee thousands of functionaries, he is very demanding and exact. As a Prime Minister, he had very little possibilities of further advancement: the Head of the Secretariat is the only functionary above the Right Prime Minister. Liu Kan entertains a fierce rivalry with Xu Heng, the Left Prime Minister.

10. Xu Heng, Left Prime Minister, responsible for the activities of the ministries;

- The Left Prime Minister is responsible for the activities of the ministries of Revenue, Justice and Rites. He appreciates the work of his colleague the Right Prime Minister, and does not understand the grudge the latter bears him. However, Xu Heng covets the Finance Minister's influence on all economic matters.

11. Marco Polo, respected merchant; ● Marco Polo was part of a delegation to promote the commercial relationship between

the Mongol Empire and the West. His main objective is to develop the Silk Road and gain the greatest profit from his mission. As Polo is a representative of the Western World, Kublai Khan holds a certain interest for him, and allows him to participate to his councils. However, the merchant never forgets that he holds minimal value for the Khan and that his life is at risk.

12. Ahmad, Finance Minister; ● The Finance Minister is known to be ruthless. Generally hated by the people and by the

other advisors, his task is to determine the budget and provide the money for all government projects. The Great Khan values his opinion greatly. Ahmad strongly believes in his own interest, and always acts accordingly.

13. Bayan, Kublai's most gifted general; ● Bayan is considered the ultimate military authority at court. He has lead multiple

campaigns, and has gained the Emperor's trust. A seasoned military leader, the general

never enters battle lightly, and always considers all outcomes before engaging combat. 14. Tögh Temur, a Mongol prince;

● As a great Mongol prince, he has a certain influence at court. While he is currently loyal to the Emperor, he values Mongol traditions, and believes that the Crown Prince would not make a good Emperor. Tögh Temur acts in the interest of his subjects and insists on respecting tradition.

15. Chabi, Khubilai's favourite wife; ● The Emperor strongly values his wife's opinion, and rarely makes a decision without

consulting her. While the rest of the court is aware of the influence she has on the Great Khan, Chabi knows that she cannot act too overtly, for fear of weakening the Emperor's claim. She entertains

tense relations with the other advisors, and always acts in the interest of her children.

16. Manggala, one of Kublai's sons • The son of Kublai, Manggala founded direct control over Chang'an and Shanxi in 1272.

He was also the viceroy of Shaanxi. 17. Rabban Bar Sauma, Kublai's Ambassador to Europe

- Turkic/Chinese monk turned diplomat of the "Nestorian" Church of the East of China. He strives to expand the trade flow through the Mongolian Empire and, more specifically, create alliances and trade networks through all of Europe.

18. Gammala, one of Kublai's grandsons • Kublai Khan told his grandson, Gammala to accept a position as the overseer of

Burkhan Khaldun. This was the place that Genghis Khan was buried, a considered incredibly sacred and was protected at all times by the Kublaids. These were a personal security force of highly skilled members of Kublai's army. They are loyal only to the overseer of Genghis's tomb.

19. Gou Shoujing

- Renown hydrolic engineer and astronomer and well-educated advisor to Kublai. In his spare time, he was well known to build strange and well-crafted devices and instruments of many purposes

20. Nanyan Sauma • Nanyan has gained many riches acting as an overseer for a large stretch of the Silk

Road between Baghdad and Karakorum. Now retired, he wields great influence over

traders and merchants traveling the Silk Road. 21. Lian Xixian

- Kublai appointed Lian to investigate abuses of power by Mongol landowners in 1274. Since then, he has acted a secretive agent of the

Khan, capable of investigating crimes and silencing enemies with the help of a network of Mongolian agents around the empire.