The Mongol Impact on China

Rise of the Yuan
Inquiry Questions

• What was the impact of the Mongols on the political structure of China?
• What was the impact of the Mongols on the economic systems of China?
• What was the impact of the Mongols on the intellectual and artistic culture of China?
Mongol impact -- Political

• 1271 – conquered China and moved capital to Beijing
  – Massive walls built around city
  – Streets made broader and wider
  – Artificial lakes and islands in closed complex ("forbidden city")
  – Summer palace at Shangdu (Xanadu)
Political impact

- In southern Song period China was relatively dis-unified
- Re-united China
- Brought experts from Middle East, Central Asia to administer China
- Did a census for tax collection purposes
- Re-Districted provinces, put under control of governors, increased central control
Economic Impact

• Tax Farming
• Foreigners brought in to collect taxes
• Some cities prospered: esp. entrepot cities on Silk Roads
• Re-unification of China revitalized north-south trade along Grand Canal
• Ports in South China revived due to grain trade
Economic Impact

- Businesses managed by corporations representing investors
- Paper money issued – failed (no trust)
- Copper coins came back when trade with Japan terminated, helped economy
- Gentry moved into cities (URBANIZATION)
- Cities became cosmopolitan, catered to merchant class (like city-states of Italy)
Economic Impact

• Cottage industry
• New infrastructure improvements:
  – Waterwheels
  – Dams
  – Irrigation systems

Many farmers suffered under Mongols:
Evictions
Brutal Tax Farming
Economic Impact

• Changes to Tax Farming too late (as in Middle East)
  – Farmers forced into servitude
  – Dams and dikes broken
  – Flooding in Yellow River area severe
Intellectual Impact

• Muslim scholars to lead calendar making and astronomy
• Social status depended on ancestry (end of civil service exam system)
  – Highest to lowest:
    • Mongols
    • Central Asians and Middle Easterners
    • Northern Chinese
    • Southern Chinese
    INVERSION of old SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
Intellectual impact

• Confucians alienated from Yuan, disagreed with social ranking system:
  – Merchants given too much status, esp. foreigners
  – Doctors given too much status
Intellectual impact

• Doctor’s status increased – Chinese medicine began integrating native and foreign practices (SYNCRETISM)

• New literature in Mandarin introduced
  – Impact of Mongolian language on Chinese still present today

Manuals on farming, etc. increased yield
Intellectual Impact (cont)

• Syncretism under Pax Mongolica
• Mongol leaders kept in touch, exchanged new technologies and ideas
• Il-Khan science & technology exported to China
• Scholars and texts imported from China to Middle East
• Observatories set up across Central Asia
• Algebra and Trig to China; Fractions to Middle East
• Islamic and Persian medicine to China
• Elevation of status of merchants meant less opportunities for traditional Confucian elite
• Gentry families went into business instead
• In countryside, population declined:
  – Bubonic plague
  – Migrations South to avoid the Mongols and flooding
40% of population lost during Yuan (1279-1368)