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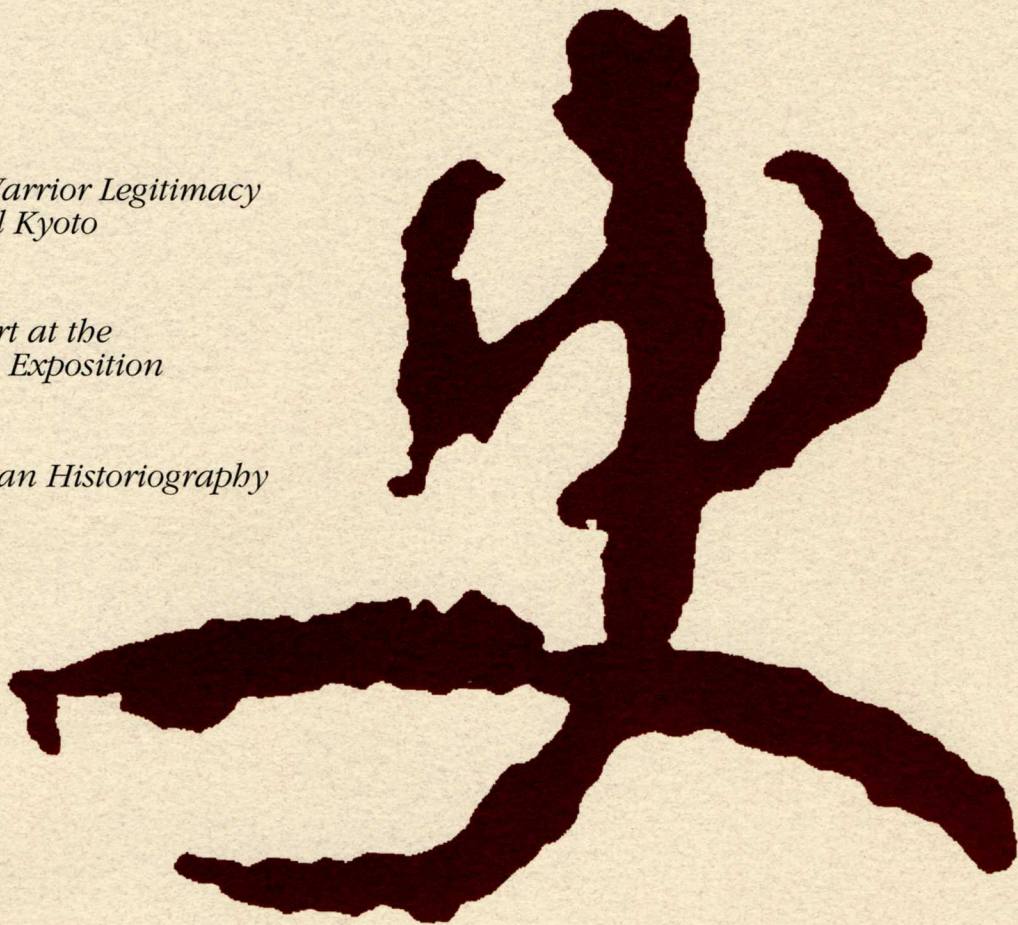


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THE GENESIS OF THE NAME “YEKE MONGŪOL ULUS”

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In 1952, A. Mostaert and F.W. Cleaves conclusively demonstrated that the Mongol expression Yeke Mongŷol Ulus corresponds to the Chinese expression Ta Meng-ku kuo 大蒙古國 which appears in the Chinese sources of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹ (We shall leave aside, for the time being, the question of whether Yeke Mongŷol Ulus means The Great Mongol Nation or The Nation of the Great Mongols.)

Modern Mongol scholars have reasonably assumed that even if this fact is not mentioned in any source (whether Mongol, Persian or Chinese), the name Yeke Mongŷol Ulus was given by Činggis Qan to his tribal confederation in 1206 when he was elected (or, rather, re-elected) *qan* at the great *quriltai* held at the sources of the Onon River. It was on this momentous occasion that he assumed, or was conferred also the epithet Činggis, as is well known.² At first sight, these events—election and assumption of a suitable appellation for himself and for the newly established nation—seem to go well together, and I too was of this opinion until ten years ago, but a subsequent closer investigation of the Mongol and Chinese sources has compelled me to reconsider the position.³

The designation Ta Meng-ku kuo for the Mongol nation is found in the earliest Chinese detailed account of the Mongols, Chao Hung's 趙珙 *Meng-Ta pei-lu* 蒙鞞備錄 [*A Complete Account of the Meng-Ta (= Mongol-*

Studies 15 (1952): 487–491.

² See *The Secret History of the Mongols. A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, translated with a historical and philological commentary by I. de Rachewiltz, *Brill's Inner-Asian Library* 7/1 and 7/2 (Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, 2004, 2006, hereafter *SH*), p.133.

³ See I. de Rachewiltz, H.-L. Chan, C.-C. Hsiao Ch'i-ch'in, P.W. Geier, eds, with the assistance of M. Wang, *In the Service of the Khan. Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200–1300)*, *Asiatische Forschungen* 121 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), pp.v, xi; I. de Rachewiltz, “The Mongols Rethink Their Early History,” in *The East and the Meaning of History, International Conference (23–27 Novembre 1992)*, *Studi Orientali* 13 (Rome: Dip. di Studi Orientali, Università di Roma “La Sapienza,” 1994), p.374, n.44; *SH*, pp.760–1. See also Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing 蕭啟慶, *Meng Yüan shih hsin yen-ch'iu* 蒙元史新研究 [New Studies in Mongol-Yüan History] (Taipei: Yün-ch'en wen-hua shih-yeh ku-fen yu-hsien kung-szu, 1994), *hsiü-yen*, p.5; and pp.37–8. I regret that I am to some extent responsible for Professor Hsiao's eventual acceptance of the same date (1206) for the Mongols' adoption of the appellation Yeke Mongŷol Ulus.

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¹ A. Mostaert, F.W. Cleaves, “Trois documents mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic*

⁴ See Wang Kuo-wei's 王國維 edition of Chao Hung's 趙珙 *Meng-Ta pei-lu* 蒙鞞備錄 under the title *Meng-Ta pei-lu chien-cheng* (蒙鞞備錄箋證) in *Hai-ning Wang Ching-an hsien-sheng i-shu* 海寧王靜安先生遺書 (Shanghai: Lo Chen-yü ed., 1940, hereafter *MTPD*), ts'è 37, 4b; cf. N.C. Munkuev, trans. and annot., *Mèn-da bèi-lu* ("Polnoe opisanie Mongolo-Tatar"), *Pamyatniki Pis'mennosti Vostoka* 26 (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), p.53; *Meng-Ta pei-lu und Hei-Ta shih-lüeb. Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237*, nach Vorarbeiten von Erich Haenisch und Yao Ts'ung-wu übersetzt und kommentiert von Peter Olbricht und Elisabeth Pinks eingeleitet von Werner Banck, *Asiatische Forschungen* 56 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980, hereafter *CG*), p.17; Möngkejayaya, trans., *Mongyol-Tatar-un tuqai birin temdeglel, Qara Tatar-un tuqai kereg-intobci* (Qaramören, 1979), pp.23-4.

⁵ *MTPD*, 4a; Munkuev, *Mèn-da bèi-lu*, p.51; Möngkejayaya, *Mongyol-Tatar-un tuqai*, p.18. Both Munkuev's and Möngkejayaya's versions are misleading because neither translator had access to the full text of Li Hsin-ch'uan (see below, n.7), which is only partially quoted by Wang Kuo-wei. The 31 characters omitted by Wang give, in fact, the exact time reference, i.e., the Mongols' invasion of the Chin kingdom.

⁶ On Li Hsin-ch'uan and his work, see H. Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies, Münchener Ostasiatische Studien* 16.2 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner Verlag, 1976), pp.562-4.

⁷ See Li Hsin-ch'uan, *Chien-yen i-lai ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* 建炎以來朝野雜字, photo-reprint of the 1893 ed., *Sung-shih tzu-liao ts'ui-pien ti-i chi* 宋史資料萃編第一輯 (Taipei: T'ai-lien kuo-feng ch'u-pan-she, 1967), *i-chi* 乙集 19, 10a (p.1187); cf. *CG*, p.22, n.15. For the year of completion of the *i-chi* (Chia-ting 嘉定 9 = 21.1.1216 - 7.2.1217), cf. Chang Chün-heng's 張鈞衡 colophon, *Chien-yen ... i-wen* (逸文), 6a (p.1273).

⁸ Huang Chen 黃震, *Ku-chin chi-yao i-pien* 古今紀要逸編 (photo-reprint of the *Ssu-ming ts'ung-shu* 四明叢書 ed. of 1932, Yang-chou, 1981), 1st *chi*, 5a. Cited by Wang Kuo-wei in *MTPD*, 4a; cf. Munkuev, *Mèn-da bèi-lu*, pp.51-2; Möngkejayaya, *Mongyol-Tatar-un tuqai*, p.20.

⁹ *SH*, pp.58 (§134), 102 (§179), 492-5, 647-8.

¹⁰ Sung Lien 宋濂, et al., eds, *Yüan-shih* 元史 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü 中華書局, 1976,

Tatar) of 1221.⁴ However, in his commentary to the *Meng-Ta pei-lu*,⁵ Wang Kuo-wei 王國維 (1877-1927) has pointed out that an earlier Southern Sung source, the *Chien-yen i-lai ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* by Li Hsin-ch'uan 李心傳 (1167-1244) which was completed in 1216/17,⁶ records the same designation in connection with the Mongols. Li Hsin-ch'uan a reliable contemporary historian with access to Sung official documents, states that the Mongols designated themselves as Ta Meng-ku kuo at the time of the invasion of Chin, that is, in or after 1211, not before.⁷ The year 1211 is specifically mentioned also by a later Sung writer, Huang Chen (fl. 1255), as the year in which the Mongols began calling their nation Ta Meng-ku kuo by "combining their name and appellation"—their name having been until then, as both Li and Huang (after him) say, simply Meng-ku kuo, that is Mongyol Ulus, and the appellation or epithet being, of course, "Great" (Ta/Yeke).⁸ I now believe that Li Hsin-ch'uan is right. Until Činggis Qan attacked Chin he was a nominal subject of the Chin state. We know that c. 1196 he had been given a Jurchen minor military title, *ja'ut quri* (something like an honorary captain or commander), which he used with reference to himself,⁹ and that he paid, or was supposed to pay, an annual tribute in kind to the Chin court.¹⁰ This is specifically stated in the *Yüan History* (*Yüan-shih*) in a section which derives from Mongol sources compiled under Qubilai.¹¹

In 1206, Temüjin was recognized as the supreme tribal leader in Mongolia, but we must not forget that he was still a vassal of the mighty Chin kingdom in the south. It is, therefore, most unlikely that still being in a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* the Chin, he would have named his tribal confederation Yeke Mongyol Ulus, The Great Mongol Nation, on the very model of the name of the Chin state, called Ta Chin kuo 大金國, that is, The Great Chin Nation. That this was not, in fact, the case is indirectly confirmed by the *Secret History of the Mongols*, which says in §202 that upon his election in 1206, Činggis Qan "appointed the commanders of a thousand of the Mongqol Ulus",¹² not of the Yeke Mongqol Ulus. However, things changed rapidly. Two years later, in 1208, when the Chin court sent an envoy to Činggis Qan to exact tribute and receive obeisance, Činggis refused to comply. In 1210, another envoy was sent to him to request that he acknowledge with the customary kowtow the Chin ruler who had since been enthroned. Činggis turned his face south, spat and dismissed the envoy with insulting words directed at the Chin sovereign.¹³ Činggis

/hereafter *YS*), p.15.

¹¹ W. Hung, "The Transmission of the Book Known as *The Secret History of the Mongols*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 14 (1951): 481 (K).

¹² *SH*, p.134.

¹³ *YS*, p.15; T'u Chi 屠寄, *Meng-wu-erb shih-chi* 蒙兀兒史記, 1934, reprint (Taipei: Shih-

/chieh shu-chü, 1962), 3, 9a; cf. H.D. Martin, *The Rise of Chingis Khan and His Conquest of North China*, ed. E. Lattimore (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1950, reprint New York: Octagon Books, 1977), pp.120-1. The *YS* gives also the precise location south of the Gobi where the Chin embassy met Činggis Qan.

Qan had, in fact, decided to expand southwards and, after the successful campaign against Hsi Hsia just concluded, was set to invade the Jurchen kingdom.

The invasion, as we know, was launched early the following year (1211) and within three years the position was totally reversed, with the Chin court offering a princess, 500 slaves and precious gifts to Činggis Qan to buy peace, or at least time.¹⁴

Činggis's open rebellion in 1210–11 had freed him of any remaining ties of subordination (even if nominal), and from then on he could legitimately challenge Chin suzerainty. It was, no doubt, following the advice of the Chin defectors who had been joining his camp since 1206¹⁵ that Činggis *only then*—and all the evidence points to it—assumed for his “nation” the same terminology employed by the Jurchens (and, before them, by the Khitans) for their nation. It is from 1211 on that in his dealings with China Činggis Qan referred to his tribal confederation as Ta Meng-ku kuo. Thus, Yeke Mongġol Ulus must no longer be regarded as an original Mongol expression, but as the Mongol literal translation of a Chinese expression calqued on the official name of the Chin state. (*Mutatis mutandis*, the process is the same as the one later applied to the book title *Mongġol ni'uča tobča'an*, which is the Mongol rendering of the Chinese title *Yüan-ch'ao pi-shih* [*The Secret History of the Yüan Dynasty*], and not the reverse.)¹⁶ Chao Hung, writing in 1221, was well aware of this. Describing the “National Designation and Year Title” (*Kuo-hao nien-hao* 國號年號) of the Mongols, he says that they—the Mongols—regarding their nation as a powerful one, designated it as Ta Meng-ku kuo, and “that too is something the fugitive officials of the Jurchen taught them”.¹⁷ There is nothing surprising in this, of course, since we know that in 1217/18 Činggis personally conferred on Muqali (1170–1223), his commander-in-chief in North China, not one but two Chinese titles—*kuo-wang* 國王 (Prince of State: mong. *gui-ong*) and *t'ai-shih* 太師 (Grand Preceptor or Instructor: mong. *taiši*)—not in order to increase his prestige in Mongolia but to enhance his authority in China.¹⁸

The fact that the name Yeke Mongġol Ulus does not appear anywhere in the *Secret History*¹⁹ indicates in my view that although such a designation was undoubtedly employed in diplomatic and government business with China, it was not in current use among the Mongols in Činggis Qan's time, possibly because Činggis and his entourage were still in a tribal mind-frame and had no real sense of nationhood. The term *ulus* for them still meant “people”, that is “tribe”, understood as a rather loose nomadic tribal complex, rather than an organic settled state or nation, a concept traditionally alien and, indeed, unattractive to them. The situation changed dramatically with Ögödei and his successors: the Mongols adopted, albeit selectively, forms and modes of governance from China, Central and West-

¹⁴ YS 1, p.17; Tu Chi, *Meng-wu-erb shih-chi*, 3, 14a; cf. Martin, *The Rise of Chingis Khan*, pp.170–1.

¹⁵ See I. 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): 96–7; Martin, *The Rise of Chingis Khan*, p.122.

¹⁶ See A. Mostaert, *Sur quelques passages de l'Histoire Secrète des Mongols* (Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1953), p.ix ff.

¹⁷ *MTP*, 4b; Munkuev, *Mên-da bê-lu*, p.53; *CG*, p.17; Môngkejayara, *Mongġol-Tatar-un tuqai*, pp.23–4.

¹⁸ See I. de Rachewiltz, et al., eds, *In the Service of the Khan*, p.5; *SH*, pp.761–2, 783. As a Mongol transcription of chin. *kuo-wang*, *gui-ong* is preferable to *güi-ong* and *guyang*. (I take this opportunity also to correct a printing error in *In the Service of the Khan*, p.3, line 2, where “1220” should read “1228”.)

¹⁹ The *Secret History* speaks of *qamuq Mongġol ulus* “all the Mongols” (§52), of *Mongġol ulus* “the Mongol people (or tribe)” (§202), and of *olon Mongġol ulus* “the numerous Mongol people” (§272); see *SH*, pp.10, 134, 204. In the first and third expressions it is the “multitude” of the Mongol people (with all its subgroups and heterogeneous elements which constituted it) that is emphasized. As is known, any other tribal group which was conquered and absorbed into Mongol society became an integral part of the Mongol tribal complex, i.e., of the *Mongġol ulus*.

²⁰ See also “Trois documents” (see above, n.1), pp.488–90. As I pointed out in the *SH*, p.760, the expression Yeke Mongyol “The Great Mongols” is, in my opinion, simply an extrapolation from Yeke Mongyol Ulus; in other words, the members of the ruling ethnic group—the Mongol élite, as it were—became known as “The Great Mongols”. (I shall discuss this question in a forthcoming paper.) With regard to the fundamental changes that occurred within the fabric of Mongol society and in their political outlook, my earlier contribution, “The Ideological Foundations of Chingis Khan’s Empire,” in *Papers on Far Eastern History* 7 (1973): 21–36, requires thorough revision and updating. For the way some of these changes are reflected in post-Činggis Qan official terminology, see my paper “*Qan, Qa’an* and the Seal of Güyüg,” in *Documenta Barbarorum: Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Sagaster and M. Weiers (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), pp.272–81. At present I do not wish to adduce the evidence from the famous “Stone of Chingis” in view of the fact that we do

ern Asia, their rulers (while still being *qan*, tribal chiefs or kings), also becoming *qayans*, that is emperors, and the former Mongyol Ulus formally and *de facto* becoming the Yeke Mongyol Ulus, The Great Mongol Nation or, more precisely, The Mongol Empire. But this is another story, like the use of the derivative expression Yeke Mongyol *tout court* (which has deceived us, from John of Pian di Carpine to Mostaert and Cleaves),²⁰ and the whole concept of a Mongol *oikoumenē*, which did not exist in Činggis’s time and the origin of which, I think, must now be approached from a completely different angle.

In conclusion, I wish to say that while we are fully entitled to celebrate in 2006 the 800th anniversary of the unification of Mongolia by Činggis Qan, we should perhaps also hold a celebration in 2011 for the anniversary of the genesis of the Yeke Mongyol Ulus.

/not know whether the text of the inscription was composed c. 1224 or c. 1270, which is more likely. See I. de Rachewiltz, “Some Remarks on the Stele of Yisüngge,” in *Tractata Altaica: Denis Sinor, Sexagenario Optime de Rebus Altaicis Merito Dedicata*, ed. W. Heissig et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976), pp.487–508,

/esp. p.491 ff. As stated in my article “*Qan, Qa’an* and the Seal of Güyüg,” p.279, n.21, the expression *qamuy Mongyol ulus* in the second line of the inscription must be rendered “the entire Mongol Nation”; however, I am not certain now whether “Nation” should be capitalized—in other words, whether *Mongyol ulus* is a proper name or not.

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