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UYGHUR TECHNOLOGISTS OF WRITING AND LITERACY IN MONGOL CHINA[1]

BY

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One issue that is often left out of most popular narratives describing the Mongol conquests and the creation of their world-wide empire is the fact that the Mongols were also interested in the cultures of the great settled civilizations they conquered, for practical and ideological reasons. They generally took pains to preserve those societies' artisans, craftsmen and technologists from slaughter and sent them to work throughout the rapidly expanding empire. In fact, a great deal of intellectual and technological exchange across Eurasia took place as a direct result of the Mongol conquests.[2]

One of the most important technologies that the Mongols acquired as a result of their expansion and conquest of others was a writing system and attendant literacy. As soon as Temujin, the future Chinggis Qan, began to expand his confederation beyond the Mongol tribes by conquering other tribes and states, he recognized the need for people in his administration who were "skillful in the laws and customs of cities."[3] It was one thing to conquer, quite another to rule for an extended period of time. In order for the nomadic nonliterate Mongols to continue to enjoy the fruits of their success they had to administer and keep tabs on this increasingly diverse group

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Whitman College History Department Colloquium, the University of Toronto Central and Inner Asian Seminar, and the University of Wyoming History Department Colloquium. I am indebted to many colleagues in all three venues, as well as to anonymous readers, for numerous helpful suggestions and critiques. An earlier version also appeared as Brose 2000b.

[2] See Allsen 1997a for discussion of the distribution of cultural and technical specialists in the Mongol Empire.

[3] Allsen 1997a, 6, citing *The Secret History*; see also Ratchnevsky 1993 for a general discussion of the process of confederation.

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of subject peoples, most of whom were members of literate societies. This required, eventually, being able to function in the literate mode that their subjects were accustomed to, and for this the Mongols employed a whole host of translators and interpreters who could transmit their decrees to their subjects.[4] As a result, official documents were issued in Chinese, Turkic, Tibetan, Persian, and Russian. But for several practical and ideological reasons the Mongols also needed to represent their own spoken language, Middle Mongolian, in written form. Temujin addressed that need by adopting the writing system used by the Uyghurs, one of the very first Central Asian kingdoms to submit to him voluntarily, as the first official script for the Mongol language, creating a type of *lingua franca* as a common imperial written language that could be used throughout his empire.

Temujin's adoption of the Uyghur script to represent spoken Mongolian is widely known among historians, as is the story of the first Uyghur on record specifically involved in the transfer of that technology in 1204, a man by the name of Tatar Tongga (about whom see below). But Tatar Tongga was not alone in the task of teaching the Mongol princes how to use his native writing system. In fact, several members of the Uyghur elite who were brought into the Mongol confederation early on are specifically lauded in the sources for their familiarity with their own written language and for the fact that they tutored members of the Mongol imperial clan in that writing system. Apart from Tatar Tongga, studies of these Uyghurs have focused on their careers and achievements as civil and military leaders and administrators, not on their roles as technical specialists and advisers. This is an unfortunate omission since it seems clear that their proficiency in their native written language was one of the reasons, or one form of so-called cultural capital, that those Uyghurs could use to guarantee their survival as a powerful political elite in spite of the fact that they were now subjects who were dispersed away from their native land. The present article examines the stories of the persons who introduced the Uyghur script to Temujin and other members of the Mongol ruling elite.

These stories are important for several reasons: they flesh out the importance of a writing system to the maturation of the Mongol empire, they reveal the complex socio-political network of person-

[4] See Hsiao 1995. See also Róna-Tas 1965, de Rachewiltz 1967, and Allsen 2000 on the multilingual characteristics of the Mongol empire.

nel from all parts of the empire that constituted the majority of the Mongol administrative system, and they show us how some of the Central Asians who were brought to China as part of the conquering elite related to the people over whom they held power. Uyghurs and other people from Central and Western Asia played especially prominent roles in Mongol China as administrators, and they form a fascinating part of the elite landscape of the period. One of the most remarkable aspects of their history is the ways in which they acclimated to China and became members of the cultural elite who were accepted by their Chinese peers. Their own cultural experience, especially as men who were highly literate in their native Uyghur written tradition, played a central part in their "sinicization" and ability to function as traditional Chinese-style literati.

The Uyghur individuals examined in this article, as well as many of their countrymen, parleyed their expertise in their own writing system and language into powerful positions as advisers and personal tutors to the Mongol qans, queens, and princes. In this sense, they functioned as a kind of technologists, specialized in the techniques of writing and literacy, and performed just as any other specialist or craftsman inducted into Mongol service by virtue of having been conquered.[5] It was not an unusual experience for them since the Uyghurs had had long prior experience as advisers in similar capacities at the courts of several tribes and states that had relations with Uyghuristan. The kind of multitasking required of these men as tutors in writing, as military leaders who accompanied their Mongol masters on campaign, and as civil administrators, was also not unusual since it was a pattern long established within the Mongol imperial family.

One of the salient features of Temujin's rise to power over the disparate Mongol tribes was his creation of a corps of loyal "companions" (M. *nökör*) that functioned as a nascent administration as well as a body of advisers to the qan.[6] The men chosen for that

[5] The notion that technology is not limited to things but also includes various kinds of knowledge, often defined as technological knowledge, is not new. See, for example, Layton 1974, and Laudan 1984. I am also indebted to my colleague Nina Lerman for discussing the concept of technological knowledge with me in the early stage of this project. For discussions of writing systems and literacy as types of technological knowledge, see especially Ong 1988, and Goody 2000.

[6] See *Secret History* 124; Farquhar 1990, 2, 41; Hsiao 1978. The earliest group of companions included quiver bearers, cooks, shepherds, swordsmen, gelding herd-

inner circle were Temujin's most devoted followers; they came from a number of tribes, and they performed all manner of tasks having to do with the protection and sustenance of the qan and his family. As the number of people having submitted to the Mongols increased, so did the number of advisers and functionaries close to the qan, as well as the scope of their duties. By the early thirteenth century those duties (but not necessarily their titles) had expanded to include more typical imperial administrative tasks, such as issuing the qan's orders and laws and keeping records. Some of these were the sole prerogative of specialized offices of secretaries (M. *bičēči*) who were chosen for their literacy and their mastery of administrative techniques.

The introduction of written modes of communication into the emerging imperial administrative machinery was also a natural outgrowth of the empire-building process started by Temujin when he began to conquer neighboring tribes and states, as well as an adaptation by the nomads to the ways of the sedentary societies that were being conquered.[7] These changes were probably foreordained the moment that Temujin began his conquests since, in general, simple military might was never sufficient to maintain a long-term hold over conquered territories, especially large areas or multi-ethnic states.[8] Most empires that included peoples of different spoken languages were, in a sense, products of writing since a written language enabled the ruling elite to standardize procedures and laws and communicate royal decrees to its constituents. A common written language employs a shared vocabulary that enables (and forces) all peoples within the realm to participate in the imperial project by creating a common experience of empire in spite of linguistic and social barriers.[9]

The adoption of a writing system also eventually drove the spread of literacy among the conquering elite. Using a writing system does

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ers, herders of horses, and those in charge of servants and tent wagons. A qan's choice of and reliance on a group of loyal companions had precedents in other Eurasian steppe nomadic groups long before the rise of Temujin to power. Temujin's genius lay in his trans-tribal investiture of status as companion, which was critical to his maintenance of power over the Mongol confederation of tribes. This institution, one curious artifact of their nomadic heritage, was maintained by all of the Mongol qans in Yuan China until their expulsion in 1368.

[7] See Salzman 1980.

[8] See Innis 1972; Mayo 2000.

[9] For examples of empires in medieval Europe and the Islamic world that were products of writing, see Stock 1983, Clanchy 1993, Chamberlain 1994, and Britnell 1997.

not, per se, equal literacy. But the Uyghurs who introduced the first writing system to the Mongols, as well as the many personnel from other ethnic groups who acted as advisers, translators, and administrators for them—people from the Jurchen Jin dynasty, Persians, Muslims from Khwarazm, and so forth—all came from highly literate societies. Their mastery of literacy, as well as the fact that they were from the "outside," might have given them a special aura of power over their Mongol masters.[10] This was a situation that the Mongols could not accept in the long term, and we see ample evidence in the stories of these Uyghurs of the Mongol desire not only to get hold of a writing system but also to attain literacy itself.

Temujin's adoption of a writing system in 1204, which accompanied the Mongols' increasing interaction with sedentary, literate cultures, also involved a type of cultural change from a solely oral tribal society to one that had to rely increasingly on written communications. At the time of their confederation under Temujin, the vast majority of the Mongol peoples, including the royal tribe, were undoubtedly non-literate.[11] Whenever a non-literate society adopts a writing system (and, presumably, eventually literacy), the introduction of written texts always involves some ideological as well as functional changes.[12] Some of those ideological or cultural changes can be seen in the social mores and laws that developed once the confederation of Mongol tribes began to act as an empire.

For example, even in the earliest years of their empire, a written record of the qan's pronouncements and legal decisions was kept for the first time in a book written in the Uyghur script by Chinggis Qan's adopted brother Shigi Qutuqu (in theory the basis for a later written legal code[13]). The only extant historical source written by the Mongols, the *Secret History*, contains many elements of an oral tradition. But it was also written down, presumably in the Uyghur

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[10] Helms 1988 discusses the role of geographical and cultural distance in the creation of outside experts. Among the chief forms of power for outsiders was that of literacy. Helms reminds us that the Uyghurs were themselves influenced by outside experts, in this case Nestorian missionaries. See pp. 103-104.

[11] Some nomadic tribes associated with the Mongols, especially the Naiman and the Önggud, were literate and had adopted the Uyghur Sogdian writing system much earlier, possibly by the 10th century. See Onon 1990, viii, note 2.

[12] For studies on literacy and orality, and the impact of literacy on oral societies, see especially Finnegan 1988; Goody 1986, 1987, and 2000, 132-151; Goody and Watt 1968, 27-68; and Ong 1988, esp. ch. 4.

[13] See Ch'en 1979, and the discussion below.

script originally.[14] Changes in the custom of levirate marriage among the Mongol elite, as well as its application to the subject population, also occurred over time, based no doubt in part on the codification of Mongol oral customary law and on the relative importance of that tradition vis-à-vis Chinese social and legal norms among Mongols and other groups in China.[15]

It is not our purpose here to comment at length on the differences between oral and literate cultures, but it is clear that the Mongols were influenced by the introduction of a writing system and literacy.[16] The Mongol Empire was a hybrid of oral and literate cultures, and certainly in Yuan China the social structure and administrative apparatus that emerged reflected that blending of nomadic and sedentary ways. While many in the Mongol imperial clan continued to function in traditional oral modes long after the introduction of writing by the Uyghurs, its use had a huge impact on Mongol social customs and on the eventual development of their formal institutions of power. Cummings's description of the relationship of orality to literacy as "counterplay" seems an appropriate way to describe the situation in the Mongol empire. Put simply, instead of implying a close connection and reciprocity between oral and literate traditions, it may be more accurate to describe the relationship between them as more distant, as a situation where each tradition maintained its own power and where there were "inequalities of power separating those who control writing from those who do not."[17] This would certainly describe the situation of the early Uyghurs in the Mongol empire, who were subjects of the Mongols (thus powerless) but who also controlled writing, at least initially (and were thus powerful).

One of the more interesting aspects of the Mongol empire is the

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[14] See Onon 1990, viii.

[15] See Birge 1995 and 2002.

[16] It is usually argued that one of the primary differences between oral and literate cultures lies in how history is conceptualized. Literate cultures produce written records that, in theory, contain data "independent" of the present. History (and all "texts") in oral cultures, on the other hand, are dependent on the present, since the retelling involves selective remembering, performance, and change in the "data" from one performance to the next. The implied "objectivity" of written vis-à-vis oral texts and the implication of hard boundaries separating oral and literate cultures have serious flaws, however, and are helpfully questioned by new scholarship on the interplay between orality and literacy. For a convenient description of that scholarship, see Cummings 2003.

[17] Cummings 2003, 548.

substantial role that other subject peoples besides the Mongols played in administering it, and this also gave rise to its hybrid character.[18] Chinggis Qan recruited craftsmen, administrators and other skilled people from most of the Central Asian states he conquered and distributed them throughout his growing empire, employing them in their areas of expertise to produce goods for the Mongols and using them to maintain Mongol authority.[19] People from Western and Central Asia formed an important administrative class in China, called *semuren* (lit. "people of various kinds").[20] They constituted a powerful and highly influential group in China during the Mongol period, and were one of four classes identified by the Mongols (the other three being the Mongols themselves, the people from North China, known as *Hanren*, or "Chinese," and the people from South China, known as *Nanren*, or "Southerners").[21] Uyghurs came to constitute one of the most important groups that made up the *semuren* class because they were able to use their cultural capital, their literacy, and their knowledge of administrative systems, to gain early favor with the Mongol political elite.

The Uyghurs of the Tarim Basin

The location and the high culture of the Uyghur state and people were powerful currency to Chinggis Qan and influenced his choice of a writing system. By the time of their encounter with the Mongols, the Uyghurs had maintained their own highly cultured, semi-sedentary

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[18] See Allsen 1997a for discussion of the range of ethnic groups who were recruited to manage the Mongol empire.

[19] The Mongols were also interested in continuing and promoting mercantile activities across their empire, to their benefit, and the products of the craftsmen and technologists that they recruited were an important part of that exchange. The "things" exchanged across the empire included all sorts of "cultural wares," including writing systems. See Allsen 1997b and 2001 for a discussion of the history of cultural and material exchange in the Mongol Empire.

[20] Farquhar 1990, 34.

[21] The category *Hanren* included others from North China in addition to ethnic Chinese. Likewise, *Nanren* included other ethnic groups alongside Chinese from the south. The eminent fourteenth-century writer, Tao Zongyi, compiled what appears to be the most complete contemporaneous definition of the constituents of these Mongol classes. See Tao's *Chuogeng lu*, 1.5a-b. The most comprehensive studies of the Mongol class structure in China are still Yanai 1963 and Meng 1967. See Yip 1980, 82-106 for a critical review of Meng's work. See also Ch'en Yuan 1966.

kingdom in the Tarim Basin (in present-day Xinjiang Province) for at least three hundred years. That kingdom, with its two capital cities of Kocho and Beshbalik, was an important part of the international order of the time, and the Uyghur aristocracy appears to have played influential roles in several neighboring nomadic courts.[22] But the Tarim Basin Uyghurs also inherited a longer history of empire that undoubtedly contributed to their political and cultural efflorescence there.

The Uyghurs, who were originally a group of tribes within a larger Türk confederation, established their own empire in the northern steppe area in 744 after having toppled the Türk Qan. The Uyghur steppe empire lasted almost a century, until it was conquered by another nomadic group, the Kyrgyz, in 840. At that point members of the Uyghur royal house and other elites fled southwest to Beshbalik, and then into the Tarim Basin area, where they set up their kingdom in 847.[23]

The Tarim Basin has been a fascinating point of cultural interchange between east and west for millenia, and it had a profound impact on the Uyghurs who ended up there.[24] The Kocho area (present-day Turfan, in Xinjiang) is an oasis surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges. Indo-Iranian peoples (the Sakas, Sogdians, and Tocharians) are the first recorded inhabitants, long before the Christian era. Buddhism entered the region in the first centuries A.D.; Manicheans as well as Nestorian Christian missionaries also came there by the fifth century. That long multi-ethnic and multilinguistic history is explained by the area's position astride the main east-west trade routes (the so-called Silk Roads). After they entered

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[22] The Uyghurs maintained two capital cities, Beshbalik and Kocho, as summer and winter capitals, respectively, but it seems that Beshbalik was the main capital. On the Uyghur capitals, see Bretschneider 1867, vol. 2, 27-31; Pelliot 1912; Abe 1954; Feng et al. 1958; and Shimazaki 1974, 99-117. Beshbalik was apparently the ancient capital of the nomadic Türk Toquz Oguz tribes. Due to its location Kocho has a milder climate than Beshbalik, and it is assumed that it is for this reason, as well as the fact that it had a well-established urban population friendly to Uyghur values, that it was used as the winter residence of the qan.

[23] On the history of the Uyghurs, both as a steppe empire and in their later reconstitution in the Tarim Basin, see Feng et al. 1958; Grousset 1970; Mackerras 1972; Kwanten 1979; Allsen 1983, Czeglédy 1984; Barfield 1989; Sinor 1991.

[24] On the early Tarim Basin see Bretschneider 1867; Barthold 1988; Golden 1992; and Mallory and Mair 2000.

the Tarim Basin, the Uyghurs quickly established their dominance over the native population, and built a civilization that reached its height in the 10th century.

One of the most important aspects of life in the Tarim Basin was the presence of a multiplicity of religions and languages, and the Uyghurs became known for their acceptance of and familiarity with all of the traditions that flourished there. For example, three different Buddhist cultures—Sogdian, Tokharian, and Chinese—existed in the pre-tenth century Tarim Basin.[25] Each had its own writing system, and the Uyghurs read and wrote in all three. The Sogdian writing system, which used a cursive alphabetic system and had probably been adopted by the Turks in the Mongol steppe and in the Tarim Basin area already by the early eighth century,[26] eventually predominated as the Uyghurs' script of choice for their religious and secular literature; but they were also familiar with and continued to use a variety of other scripts, including Chinese, Brāhmī, Tokharian, Turkic, and Tibetan.[27] The Sogdian script that was introduced to the Mongols by the Uyghurs eventually became known as the "Uyghur script" because of its association with them. It might in fact be appropriate to describe the Tarim Basin Uyghurs as a type of culture-broker society in the steppe region. While they continued to manifest their Türk and inherited Indo-Iranian past, they also hosted and propagated various other religious traditions, especially

[25] See Elverskog 1997, 8.

[26] See Clark 1975, 6-7, and 35-38, notes 15 and 16; Kara 1996.

[27] A large portion of the extant Uyghur literary corpus produced in the Tarim Basin was religious, consisting of Buddhist sutras and commentaries, and Manichaean and Christian texts, written in several different writing systems, including Brāhmī, Tibetan, Pahlavi, and Sogdian. For a description of that literature, see Elverskog 1997. Von Gabain 1976, ch. 16, discusses the full spectrum of languages and writing systems used by the Tarim Basin Uyghurs. For a more general discussion of the Uyghur languages see Pelliot 1925, 284-89; Carter 1955, 140-149; von Gabain 1964; Sims-Williams 1981; Ramsey 1987, ch. 10; and Kara 1996. Several studies document the use of Brāhmī and Tibetan scripts among the Uyghurs. See Zieme 1984, Hitch, 1987, and Maue 1996. The earliest form of writing of a Turkic language was a runic script, which was used to write several inscriptions detailing events in early Turk history, found in the Mongol steppe. It has no relationship to the Sogdian alphabetic system, which was originally an Aramaic script borrowed by the Sogdians and later adopted and adapted by the Uyghurs and other medieval Turks. For a detailed study of the grammar of the old Turkic and Uyghur languages, as well as examples of the various scripts, see von Gabain 1950.

Buddhism, Manicheism, and Christianity, and transmitted them, together with their writing systems, on to others.

When Chinggis Qan began his campaigns of conquest in the steppe, one of the first polities he encountered was the Uyghur kingdom in the Tarim Basin; and Uyghuristan was the first Central Asian kingdom to submit to Chinggis Qan, doing so voluntarily. Their voluntary submission, besides making them one of the most important groups of subject peoples who served the Mongols as administrators and advisers throughout the empire,[28] was an important victory for Chinggis Qan, both psychological and military, in his early drive to dominate areas adjacent to the Mongol homeland. Uyghur troops were added to the Mongol military, and other nomadic groups being pursued by Chinggis Qan were no longer allowed sanctuary within Uyghur territory. Control of Uyghuristan also gave the Mongols access to the east-west trade routes.

Just as important as these military and strategic considerations, however, was the fact that Uyghuristan was one of the most highly cultured and organized semi-nomadic states in the region at that time. The Uyghurs' willing submission to Chinggis Qan undoubtedly provided him with a kind of legitimacy, together with access to voluntary personnel, in ways which would not have been possible with forced submission. Moreover, the Uyghur political and cultural elite had a long history of ruling their own state and managing both sedentary and nomadic populations. They provided the Mongols with much needed expertise in technical matters of empire, including the use of writing and the mechanics of administering sedentary constituencies, and also with specialists in higher cultural matters such as the arts and religion.

Once they came over to the Mongols, most of the members of the Uyghur elite were dispersed throughout the new empire. Some of them accompanied the Mongols on military campaigns, while others were attached to Chinggis Qan's sons, whom they served as advisers, tutors, and administrators of appanage lands. Sons of these prominent Uyghurs were inducted into Chinggis Qan's personal guard, where they served as hostages and from which they were selected for service in the Mongol administration. Thus, their early submission placed the Uyghurs in a favorable position in the Mongol camp. In China, they became arguably the single most important constituents

[28] See Allsen 1983, and Li 1977.

of the *semuren* administrators, many of them also establishing reputations as cultural literati acceptable by their Chinese counterparts.

Uyghur Technologists of Literacy

We will examine only a few cases of members of the Uyghur elite who worked as specialists and advisers in technologies of literacy to the early Mongols. However, those individuals and their families were by no means the only Uyghurs who served Chinggis Qan in the wake of the Uyghur submission in 1209.[29] We have chosen them because they are notable examples of the kind of activities that Uyghur specialists were engaged in under their Mongol lords. Tatar Tongga, Bilge Buqa, Kara Igach Buyruq and Mengsus were all members of the pre-1209 Uyghur aristocratic elite who were requisitioned by Chinggis Qan to be advisers on affairs of state, tutors to members of his family, or specialists in administration. They are also interesting examples of the ways in which the social and cultural capital accumulated by these "first-generation" Uyghurs serving the Mongols was used by their descendants to maintain their elite status throughout the period of Mongol rule in China. Finally, we have selected them because of what they reveal of the Uyghur state's diplomatic relations in Central Asia on the eve of the Mongol conquest.

Tatar Tongga and Kara Igach Buyruq had had previous experience as advisers and tutors to other nomadic qans, especially the Naiman and the Kara Kitay, before they were absorbed into the Mongol empire.[30] The Uyghur state maintained diplomatic relations with its neighbors and sent high-level Uyghur advisers to their courts.

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[29] For a sense of the large number of Uyghurs who were employed in the Mongol imperial administration, see Li 1977.

[30] The Naiman were a Turko-Mongol people who lived in the northern steppe and were long-time enemies of Chinggis Qan's own tribe. They seem to have been highly influenced by the Uyghurs; according to Onon, they apparently had adopted the Uyghur Sogdian writing system by the tenth century, they used Turkic imperial titles like the Uyghurs, and many Naiman appear to have followed Nestorian Christianity. They were conquered by the Mongols in 1204. The Kara Kitay inhabited lands to the west of Uyghuristan, in present-day Kyrgyzstan, Xinjiang, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and southern Kazakhstan, forming their state in 1124 out of remnants of the Qidan Liao empire that had ruled over North China until the 1120s. They were conquered by the Mongols in 1218. See Wittfogel and Feng 1949, pp. 657-59, for discussion.

Extensive discussion of these other steppe nomadic societies is beyond the scope of this article, but the cases are interesting because of what they reveal about the Uyghurs' role as culture brokers in the area before 1209. The sources reveal the importance that the chieftains of each of these nomadic groups placed on literacy, perhaps as an end in itself, but certainly also as a means to administering efficiently their respective confederations. The Naiman and Kara Kitay elites were also literate, likely even multi-lingual in their own languages and in Chinese. The Uyghur individuals who were sent to the Naiman and Kara Kitay appear to have combined their roles of envoys or representatives of the Uyghur king with that of advisors or tutors to the qan and his family. The same persons eventually performed similar roles in Chinggis Qan's household and nascent imperial administration.

Tatar Tongga

The first and perhaps single most important Uyghur who is identified as a specialist of writing and literacy is the famous Tatar Tongga 塔塔統阿 (fl. 1190s-early 1200s). He is also undoubtedly one of the Uyghurs best known to students of Mongol history.[31] A close look at his biography in the Standard History of the Yuan Dynasty (*Yuanshi*) reveals the fact that the Naiman, although nomads, had an advanced administrative system which they developed with the help of foreign experts. Given the fact that the Naiman appear to have adopted the Uyghur writing system earlier, it is no surprise to find that Tatar Tongga was in charge of their tax collection system, and was in that job when Chinggis Qan defeated them in 1204.

Tatar Tongga's official biography relates the circumstances surrounding his joining the Mongol camp as a specialist in administrative systems and writing. As soon as the Naiman fell to the Mongols, Tatar Tongga grabbed the seals that were in his possession and tried to flee, but he was quickly captured by the Mongols. The text then relates two exchanges between Chinggis Qan and Tatar Tongga that

[31] Historians have long recognized his importance to Mongol and Yuan history. See Abel-Rémusat 1829 for the first Western rendering of his biography, and de Rachewiltz 1983 for a complete bibliography of primary and secondary sources dealing with him. See also Tatar Tongga's official biography in the *Yuanshi* (Zhonghua shuju ed.), 124.3048-49.

show Chinggis's acute understanding of the importance of a writing system and administrative machinery for his own emerging empire. In the first exchange, Tatar Tongga was questioned about the use and function of the imperial seals he had in his possession when he was captured:

> Chinggis Qan said to him ... "Why are you carrying these seals?" ... and then asked him how they were used. Tatar Tongga replied saying: "The seals are used when someone is sent out to collect taxes; for everything the person who is officiating will use it as an official certification." Chinggis Qan was pleased with this, and ordered Tatar Tongga to join the ranks of his officials. Later, whenever there was an official edict, [he] first used the seals on it, then ordered that it be implemented. (*Yuanshi*, 124.3048)

Chinggis Qan's second exchange with Tatar Tongga reveals his keen desire to obtain a writing system and implies that he was aware of the importance of that technology to the success of his imperial project.

> Chinggis Qan asked him: "Are you thoroughly familiar with your native written language?" Tatar Tongga responded with everything that he was competent about, and in accord with the royal command he was ordered to teach the heir apparent and all the princes to write the national language (Mongolian) using the Uyghur Script. (*Ibid.*)

Tatar Tongga is the first Uyghur who we know joined the Mongols, and he certainly was one of Chinggis Qan's first foreign advisers. It is easy to see why he should have been of value: he was an expert in the all-important techniques of tax collection and in the attendant use of imperial stamps and seals, and he was able to put spoken Mongolian into a written form. It is unclear whether he had introduced the technology of seals to the Naiman court or whether they obtained it from another source, possibly China. But in either case that system along with the writing system that Tatar knew were tools that Chinggis Qan knew he needed in his emerging empire. Finally, Tatar Tongga's loyalty to his deposed Naiman master was a quality that was honored and respected by Chinggis Qan, as we see in his exclamation about Tatar's moral character: "A loyal and filial man!" (忠孝人也). As a result, Tatar Tongga served both Chinggis Qan and Ögödei Qan as a treasury official, while his sons and grandson were also appointed to high offices as administrators in China.

Tatar Tongga's labors for Chinggis Qan resulted in the introduction of a writing system and the production of court documents for

the first time in the Mongol state. For example, by 1206 Chinggis Qan's adopted brother Shigi Qutuqu, one of the first Mongol Princes to master the Uyghur writing system, had been appointed as a judge (M. *yarguchi*). His duties included deciding on and recording legal decisions and maintaining a register of the population, known as the "blue books" (M. *kökö debter*), all of it being written in the Uyghur script.[32]

Other contemporaneous sources also describe the use of the Uyghur writing system at the early Mongol court. For example, the Chinese Daoist monk Qiu Changchun, in a visit to Chinggis Qan's court in 1223, recorded that his words were written down by a scribe who used the Uyghur script.[33] The new written language was used for all diplomatic and imperial correspondence in the empire, some of these texts being inscribed on stone stelae.[34]

Tatar Tongga's capture and enlistment as a tutor and administrator two years before Temujin assumed the title of Grand Qan (in 1206), and five years before Tatar's own countrymen submitted to the Mongols (in 1209), was also an important first step in longer term changes that would eventually occur within the Mongol imperial project. First, a system of imperial seals and a written *lingua franca* were both vital to the evolution of the rational, functionally specific bureaucracy that would eventually be required if the Mongols were to maintain their power over the great sedentary empires they had conquered. While adequate in a nomadic context, typical nomadic patrimonial structures of power, with no clear distinction between civil and military spheres of authority, would not be effective in places like China and Persia that had long traditions of hierarchical bureaucratic systems.[35] Tatar Tongga also heralded a trend as one

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[32] See Bretschneider 1867, vol. I, 282-93; Barthold 1988, 391; Grousset 1970, 219-21; Róna-Tas 1965, 121, n. 7; and Ratchnevsky 1993. Some historians see the blue books as the start of Chinggis Qan's written legal code, the "Great *Yasa*," but Morgan 1986, 96-99, disputes that interpretation, as well as the idea that any such comprehensive legal code ever existed. See also Ch'en 1979 for a discussion of early Mongol legal codes.

[33] See, respectively, Ratchnevsky 1991, 134-36; Haenisch et al. 1980; Dawson 1980, 20-21, 139-140)

[34] See Wu 1950; Franke 1952; Ligeti 1961; Britnell 1997.

[35] For discussions of early Mongol social structure see Krader 1958 and 1968. In Mongol-dominated China a slow but steady emergence of typical Chinese patterns of bureaucracy and social mobility only began in Möngke Qan's time and really took off under his successor Qubilai Qan. But the Mongols never quit their

of the first technologists of writing at the Mongol court. Many of his fellow Uyghurs were to serve the Mongol qans in China in the same capacities. Here we shall briefly examine the stories of three other prominent Uyghurs who were among the first to submit to and join the Mongol empire. As we shall see, not all of them were technologists of writing and literacy, but even those who came to Chinggis Qan's attention for other reasons set the stage for other family members who used their learning in advisory positions entailing great power.

Bilge Buqa

One of the most important members of the Uyghuristan aristocracy who was directly involved in the transfer of allegiance from the Kara Kitay to the Mongols was Bilge Buqa 比俚伽普華, also known as Bilge Temür 帖穆爾 (fl. early 1200s).[36] Bilge Buqa's grandfather Kezhipuer 克直普爾 (fl. early 1100s) is the first family member recorded in Uyghuristan. He was State Minister (*guoxiang* 國相), a position just below the *iduqut* himself in rank and importance, and also held the honorific titles of Free Noble (*Darqan* 答剌罕) and Elder Statesman (*Ata Dudu* 阿大都督).[37] Kezhipuer also spent time representing the Uyghur kingdom at the Liao (or "Qidan") court; there "the Liao king conferred [on him] the titles of Grand Preceptor (*taishi* 太師), Grand Counselor-in-Chief (*da chengxiang* 大丞相), and he was put in charge of the storehouses in the Capital and other Regions (*zongguan neiwai cangshi* 總管內外藏事)."[38] Bilge inherited these titles and served

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nomadic ways entirely, and some institutions that had their roots in Chinggis Qan's earliest days, like the qan's imperial bodyguard, were retained by all Mongol qans through the end of the Yuan period.

[36] For a detailed study of Bilge and his descendants in Mongol China, see Hsiao 1999 and Brose 2000a.

[37] The latter were aristocratic titles conferred by the Uyghur *iduqut*. *Darqan* was an inherited title originally conferred for military merit, and "gave the grantee freedom from many of the customary obligations owed to his superior" (Farquhar 1990, 30; also see Han 2000). *Dudu* is one of the oldest examples of Chinese administrative terms borrowed by the Türks and passed on to the Uyghurs; it meant "military governor of a province, [or] leader of high rank" (see Ecsedy 1965).

[38] See Ouyang Xuan, *Guizhai wenji*, 11.4b. The Chinese honorary title *taishi* was adapted by northern nomadic confederations as early as the Liao, and the importance of the office was undoubtedly due to the power of literate personnel. See Serruys 1977. See also Hucker 1988, 481, n. 6213.

as a high minister at the Uyghur court, second only to the Uyghur *iduqut*. He came from a highly cultured family and was valued by Chinggis Qan for his literacy as much as his political actions. Once the Uyghur *iduqut* decided to abrogate his vassal relationship with the Kara Kitay and go over to the Mongols, in 1209, Bilge coordinated the assassination of the Kara Kitay representative in Uyghuristan. For this Chinggis Qan rewarded him with substantial gifts and additional imperial titles, and he appears to have kept him as a high official in his native land.[39] While he did not serve as an administrative or literary adviser to the Mongol court, his younger brother, Eren Temür, and nephew, Sergius, were both given by Chinggis Qan to his youngest brother, Temüge Odchigin, to serve and advise him and his family as tutors and administrators in Temüge's appanage lands in North China. The sources are quite specific as to why Eren Temür and Sergius were given to such an important person: "They were well versed in their own country's language and literature, and on that count were [assigned to be] tutors."[40]

Eren Temür 岳璘帖穆爾 (fl. 1230s) was an exemplary man: he was "well versed in his native Uyghur writing system, he magnanimously took what he got because of his rank, calculated his wealth and gave it to his family members, and withheld nothing for himself."[41] He was inducted into Chinggis Qan's personal bodyguard after his older brother, Bilge, had joined the Mongols, which proved to be a quick route up the political ladder. At age 15 he accompanied Chinggis Qan on military campaigns and the sources state clearly that he fought in many battles and won considerable merit for his bravery. When Chinggis's youngest brother, Temüge Odchigin, was seeking a tutor, the qan sent Eren to him "to guide the Prince's sons, instructing them that righteousness consists first of all in being filial and respectful of one's elder brothers, sincere and friendly, human and generous and avoiding killing."[42] This probably occurred at

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[39] Bilge is one of the few members of the Uyghur aristocracy specifically mentioned by the Persian historian Juvaini. See Juvaini 1958, 48-53.

[40] *Guizhai wenji*, 11.3a-13a.

[41] *Guizhai wenji*, 11.6a: 精偉兀書，慷慨以功名自許，貲箄悉以畀兄子，身無私焉.

[42] *Guizhai wenji*, 11.6a, and *Yuanshi*, 124.3050: 訓導諸王子以孝弟敦睦，仁厚不殺爲第一義. It is both interesting and unlikely that a Uyghur such as Eren should have been teaching the Mongol prince's sons such typically Confucian virtues. Neither Temüge Odchigin nor any other Mongol prince would have had a compelling reason to adopt core elements of Chinese culture, especially when north China was still not firmly under Mongol control. While we cannot discount the

Temüge's appanage lands in Yidu 益都 in eastern Shandong, where Eren not only was a tutor to the prince's family but was also put in charge of his appanage when the latter was away. He was eventually appointed to an administrative position at the provincial level in North China and died of natural causes.

Eren's cousin, Sergius 撒吉思 (fl. 1260s), also possessed the kind of linguistic and leadership skills sought after by the Mongols. One of his first positions was as a tutor to the Kara Kitay gurkhan. Interestingly, Sergius continued to serve the Mongols in that same capacity since he was also assigned to serve Temüge Odchigin and was sent to Yidu as a secretary (*bishechi* 必闍赤, M. *bichigechi*) and chief tutor to the prince (*ling wang fu* 領王傅).[43] His role as secretary and chief tutor put Sergius in close contact with the upper echelons of the Mongol imperial clan, a position that he used to his ultimate advantage. This is most clear in his success as an adviser to Temüge Odchigin's grandson, Tachar 塔察兒 (fl. 1260s), in a succession dispute after Temüge Odchigin's death. Sergius succeeded in having Tachar recognized by the other Mongol princes as Temüge Odchigin's legitimate successor, and was as a result put in charge of the territory south of Heishan 黑山 in northeast China.

Sergius's connection to the Mongol royal clan continued to be a source of power for him after Qubilai became grand qan; he was promoted then to be the control officer of Beijing prefecture (*Beijing xuanfu* 北京宣撫, northeast of the Yuan capital Dadu), and was given a member of the imperial Onggirat clan (*Wengjila shi* 甕吉剌氏) in marriage as well as gifts of a gold hat and embroidered cloth. The latter indicate the high status in which he was held by the Mongols.

The descendants of both Eren and Sergius continued to hold high positions in the Mongol administration in China throughout the Yuan dynasty. One of Eren Temür's sons, known by the name of Kara Buqa 合剌普華 (1246-84), was a transportation official in South China just after the Mongols conquered the area in the 1270s, but he was killed by rebels there. Kara Buqa's son, known to us by his

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story out of hand, it probably reflects the Chinese values his descendants had adopted some two generations later.

[43] See *Yuanshi*, 124.3243. Sergius must have been a very young man when he served the Kara Kitay gurkhan since the bulk of his career occurred in the 1250s and 1260s. See the biography of his son, Dharma 答里麻, in *Yuanshi*, 144.3431, for information on his service at the Kara Kitay court. See also Ch'en 1966, 238-39.

Chinese-style name Xie Wenzhi 偰文質 (Savinch?) (fl. 1290s-1330s, d. 1340), served as an Agent and regional administrator in Central China.[44] Not only did he adopt a Chinese-style surname for himself and his family, but he also took other steps to solidify his identity as a Chinese-style literatus.[45] Xie Wenzhi heralded a new trend for his family by acting in this Chinese way while also continuing to perform his administrative duties as a *semuren* official. His family's history as members of the Uyghur multi-lingual and highly cultured aristocracy contributed to his decision to become a member of the Chinese literati community in his adopted home in China.

Xie Wenzhi realized his aspirations many times over. Five of his sons and one nephew all passed the highest level civil service examination (the *jinshi*) that was restarted by the Mongols in 1315.[46] Several of these same Xie family members held high-level positions at court or in the provinces. They also participated in more traditional literati activities: at least two of Wenzhi's sons were well known poets and Confucian scholars. The family's status reached its apex with Wenzhi's third son, Xie Zhedu 偰哲篤 (fl. 1320s-1350s).

Zhedu was the first Xie family member to obtain the *jinshi* degree, in the first class in 1315, and he eventually reached the highest levels of government, becoming Minister of Personnel and being involved in determining fiscal policy, among other things. Zhedu also took up his father's role as a local notable at Liyang, and it was under his

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[44] Hsiao 1999, 281-282, argues that Xie was not a true surname but a Chinese transliteration of the first syllable of the Uyghur personal names of members of this family. Thus, Xie Wenzhi should be rendered as Savinch. While I do not dispute Hsiao's argument, there are several facts that back up the argument that the character Xie is also acting as a type of Chinese-style surname. First, we have the clear statement in the contemporaneous history of this Uyghur family that Xie Wenzhi chose this name as a surname in order to remember the origins of his family. Moreover, Xie continued to be used by virtually all male family members after Xie Wenzhi as a surname, even surviving down to the present. Even if the members of Wenzhi's and his sons' generations understood that character as part of a Uyghur personal name, the same cannot be said of people who continued to use Xie as their name several generations after Xie Wenzhi. Thus, it seems that this word Xie had a dual function as a part of a Uyghur personal name and as a Chinese-style surname.

[45] Those steps included his demonstrations of intense filial piety on behalf of his widowed mother, moving the graves of his ancestors to his adopted community of Liyang in Yuan-era Jiang-Zhe Province (present-day Jiangsu), and having all of his sons educated in the Chinese classical tradition, which resulted in all of them achieving the *jinshi* degree. See Brose 2000a for discussion of Xie Wenzhi's life.

[46] On Yuan examinations, see Hsiao 1983, and Lao 1981.

care that the Xie family really reached full maturity as members of the cultural elite there.[47] Zhedu is also an important figure in the long-term history of the Xie family because it was through his direct descendants that it continued to exist in China long after his time. Let us briefly examine his career as a *semuren* official, and then proceed to discuss his life as a member of the cultural elite in Liyang.

Xie Zhedu's *jinshi* class included some illustrious scholars of the Yuan era, such as Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄 (1283-1357), Xu Youren 許有壬 (1287-1364), Huang Jin 黃溍 (1272-1357), and the *semu* poet Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 (1279-1338). After he obtained the degree Zhedu was given the honorary title Grandee of the Nineteenth Class (*zhongxun dafu*) and a position as prefectural magistrate. Then his star rose quickly. He was made an official in the Censorate in 1329, and then promoted to be Assistant Surveillance Commissioner for the Guangdong Circuit. Sometime after 1341 he was appointed to the position of Minister of Personnel at the Yuan court, where he was one of three ministers in charge of the selection, appointment and evaluation of all civil service officials. It was during his tenure as Minister of Personnel, in 1351, that Zhedu also became involved in a major reform of the Yuan currency system.[48]

Interestingly enough, Zhedu was also well known as a man of learning and a model Confucianist in his hometown of Liyang. As a potent symbol of his literati status, Zhedu purchased land and built his own residence and an adjoining study hall, in which he used to teach local young men about Confucian topics. Earlier the Xie family had been granted by the Yuan court the honorary title "The Family who practices the Three Virtues and has Six Jinshi" (*sanjie liugui shi* 三節六桂氏, in recognition of their exemplary behavior and attainments. Zhedu used that same title to grace his family compound in Liyang.

Zhedu's activities as a member of the Liyang literati are also portrayed in a vivid narrative written by an important Liyang literatus, Kong Keqi 孔克齊 (fl. 1350s-60s). Kong wrote a rather detailed description of Zhedu's family life at Liyang, which he simply entitled

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[47] While the family actually lived for over thirty years in Jiangxi, they eventually became known and famous as Liyang inhabitants. See, for example, the citations to various Xie family members in *Liyang xianzhi*.

[48] See *Yuanshi* 97.2483-85; Schurmann 1956; Franke 1949, 93-100; Chan 1990; and Steinhardt 1980.

"Mr. Xie Zhe of Gaochang" 高昌偰哲.[49] By the time Kong visited Zhedu at his home, sometime in the 1350s, Zhedu had managed to build a reputation in Liyang as the head of an exemplary family, known for their propriety as well as for their literary accomplishments. It was Zhedu's family regimen that caught Kong's attention, for, as Paul Smith has made clear, Kong believed that the family unit was the ultimate guaranty against the disorder that he saw occurring in the area: "The family was the only hope for long-term multi-generational protection, by protecting property, transmitting core values to young men and women, and restraining their natural unruliness."[50] For Kong, of all the people in Liyang it was this Uyghur family which stood out as the exemplary model of Confucian virtue. This is why we have a unique record of Zhedu's personal life as a member of the Liyang local elite:

> Xie Zhedu, also known as Shinan, used [his knowledge of] Confucianism to raise the status of his family ... At this time his eldest son, [Xie] Dao, was still a young man, not yet an adult, and his second son was only 15 or 16 years of age. Every day at dawn, all the sons would stand outside the door of the inner quarters of the house to present themselves to their father and mother. If they did not have anything to report, then none of them would dare to go in, and this was repeated in the evening. One day I paid a visit to Zhedu's study hall and a guest was staying there... I saw Zhedu's sons and younger brothers all in correct order. They all seemed to be of good disposition, they wore elegant and refined clothing and they studied assiduously everything in nature. (Kong 1987, 116).

When Kong Qi wanted to have a personal audience with Zhedu, he was told that he would have to follow a certain procedure set by Zhedu, who had laid down strict rules in order to preserve order in his house:

> "If there are officials who approach the gate and inquire about entering, then those in charge send them in. After awhile other people are admitted. None of the students here dare enter in a disorderly fashion." At first I doubted this, but then I was told, "there is really a logic to [Zhedu's] household; just as the servants cannot enter without a reason, likewise his sons cannot enter without a reason. Since I am staying in the hall, I have seen that students who are residing outside observe this rule." [...] I had to admit that [Zhedu's] rule had a logic to it, and I came to admire him greatly and tried to adopt his admonitions. [...] The restraint [in family life] brought about by Zhedu's regulations

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[49] Kong 1987, 116-117. I am indebted to Paul J. Smith for pointing out to me Kong Qi's essay on Xie Zhedu. For information on Kong and the socio-political context of his essay, see Smith 1998.

[50] Smith 1998, 52.

> is not accomplished all of a sudden. [Zhedu thus] goes into the village every day and with great respect teaches others. (Kong 1987, 116-117).

Zhedu's membership in the Liyang literati crowd is confirmed by this account. He is portrayed as the ideal Confucian scholar-gentleman who teaches others and exemplifies what he teaches in his own family life. In fact, the Xie family rules were the basis for Kong's admiration. Kong was particularly impressed with the thoroughness with which they were applied: "In my own household the rules have been passed down from our ancestors, but they are only applied to sons and younger brothers who live outside of the household, and do not extend to those people living within [the household]."[51] One should add that, aside from what we learn about the Xie family in this essay, one of its most interesting aspects is the fact that the Chinese Kong readily identifies a foreigner as a model for his (presumably) Chinese readers—this in a collection that includes other essays where he rants on about the vile behavior of other *semuren* non-Chinese in Liyang!

Xie Zhedu's elevated status both as a career official at the Mongol court and as a member in good standing of the Liyang cultural elite stemmed, ultimately, from his family's past as members of the political and cultural elite both in Uyghuristan and at the Mongol court. The substantial cultural capital that resulted was used by successive generations to sustain their activities in both arenas. For example, at least one of Zhedu's sons, Xie Boliaosun, was known as a poet and a scholar and also served in high office, having been appointed as a scholar in Emperor Tugh Temür's new literature bureau, the Kuizhang Pavilion.[52]

Kara Igach Buyruk

The next example of a member of the Uyghur elite who acted as a technologist of writing and literacy for the Mongols is Kara Igach Buyruk 哈剌亦哈赤北魯[53] He was another Uyghur aristocrat who

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[51] Kong 1987, 117.

[52] On this bureau see Farquhar 1990, 131; Langlois 1978; and Chiang 1981.

[53] No comprehensive study has yet been done on this important Uyghur individual and his family. The most important primary and secondary sources on the subject include biographical entries in *Yuanshi,* 124.3046-47; Tu 1983, 45.1 ff.; poems in Yang 1966, 4, 8, 15; and Qian 1937, 8338 for a diagram of the family

represented Uyghur interests at a foreign court and was employed later by Chinggis Qan as a tutor and adviser. His story is very much like that of Bilge Buqa since his descendants also built on his successes to become prominent members of the *semuren* class in Yuan China. Besides, his story also reveals the role of the Tarim Basin Uyghur state in Central Asian international relations in the late 12th century.

Kara Igach is first recorded in the primary sources in the 1190s, where he is described as being "very intelligent and versed in all customs and affairs of his state and his people."[54] He was assigned by the Uyghur king to be a Judge (*duanshiguan*) in the city-state of Sayram, a tributary of the Uyghur kingdom located in present-day Xinjiang, between Kucha and Aksu.[55] A Judge's duties included acting as a general overseer and representative of the Uyghur court, which gave him wide-ranging authority in state matters. While Sayram was not a major power in Central Asia, Kara Igach's stationing there indicates that the Uyghurs continued to exert de facto political authority over areas that had been brought under Kara Kitay rule. Sometime after his assignment to Sayram, when the Kara Kitay had forced the Uyghurs into a tributary relationship, the Kara Kitay Qan specifically "ordered that Kara Igach go [to his court] and serve as a tutor to his sons."[56]

Kara Igach continued to hold his title and function of Judge in his new posting to the Kara Kitay capital. He was without doubt still considered a representative of the now subordinate Uyghur court, and he may in fact have been a high-level hostage. The presence at the Kara Kitay court of a Uyghur official who had already established a reputation as a man of high learning may also have been intended to provide that nomadic court with some Uyghur culture and learning. Thus, the Kara Kitay had many reasons for requisitioning him to their capital. The sources do not tell us how long he served them, or the exact nature of his duties, but we do know that his family at Kocho was involved in events that led to the Uyghurs' break with the Kara Kitay.

What happened was that the Uyghur king had the Kara Kitay

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tree. We have relied on de Rachewiltz 1983, 298 for a rendering of Kara Igach's name.

[54] Tu 1983, 45.1b.

[55] Golden, 1997; see also Feng 1976, 62; Bretschneider 1867, vol. 2, 94-95.

[56] Tu 1983, 45.2a; *Yuanshi*, 124.3046

overseer at Kocho murdered while Kara Igach was stationed at the Kara Kitay court. Shortly thereafter, Kara Igach's son-in-law (a certain Alin Temür) and three other prominent Uyghurs were sent to the Kara Kitay to serve notice of Uyghur intentions. Kara Igach then accompanied those Uyghurs back to Kocho, after which he submitted to the Mongols along with Barchuk and other representatives of the Uyghur. His son, Ödösh Inal, was then inducted into Chinggis Qan's imperial bodyguard as a hostage, and Kara Igach himself, along with Barchuk and others, accompanied Chinggis in his military campaigns in the western regions—against the Kara Kitay. While traveling through Uyghuristan on his way west, Chinggis Qan assigned Ödösh Inal to the area of Beshbalik, the northern capital, as an Agent (M. *darugachi*) of Mongol authority. His seat was at the city of Dushan, just east of Beshbalik, and he was put in charge of both civilian and military affairs there.

It may seem curious that a Uyghur was assigned as an Agent in his home territory, since the usual practice was to post a Mongol or some other non-native in this capacity over newly conquered territory.[57] This decision illustrates the relative autonomy enjoyed by Uyghuristan under Chinggis Qan and his immediate successors because of the quick, voluntary submission of the Uyghur king in 1209. Further indication of the high status of the Uyghurs in Chinggis's eyes is the fact that Ödösh Inal was also bestowed the highest hereditary titles *dudu* (T. *tutuk*) and *darqan*. His descendants continued to inherit both the position of Agent and the Uyghur royal titles, until Qubilai lost control of Uyghuristan to Qaidu. At that point the family sided with Qubilai's faction and moved to Pingliang Superior Prefecture in Shanxi province.

Kara Igach's descendants continued to build on the successes of their ancestors, staking out claims as high-level administrators in Mongol-controlled China. One of his great-great-great-grandsons, Alin Temür 阿鄰帖木兒 (fl. 1320-30), was known as a *semu* official and a literate Uyghur at the Mongol court. Like numerous other prominent Uyghurs at that court, Alin Temür is lauded in his biography for being extraordinarily learned; he appears to have begun

[57] The Mongols often drafted non-natives, rather than local men, to administer newly conquered areas. For examples of men who served as administrators for the Mongols in North China in the early decades of the Mongol empire see de Rachewiltz 1966.

his official career during Emperor Ayurbarwada's reign (1311-1320) with a posting to the Hanlin Academy as a compiler of the first class (*Hanlin daizhi* 翰林待制). Further proof of his learning is revealed later in the biography:

> During Emperor Yingzong's reign [Shidebala qan, r. 1321-23], he used his classical learning to serve at court daily, explaining the good words and virtuous deeds of the dynastic ancestors and wise kings of old. He translated the classics, recorded ancient precedents, and was given general supervision over court audiences with royal princes and sons-in-law, and with [representatives of] other countries. (*Yuanshi*, 124.3047-48)

When Qoshila was made emperor upon Tugh Temür's abdication in 1329—he only reigned seven months during that year—he retained Alin Temür as his personal tutor, a capacity in which the latter also acted as the director of the emperor's Classics Colloquium (*jingyan* 經筵) in the palace.

Some sense of Alin Temür's reputation as a literate Uyghur who approximated the Chinese ideal of the scholar-official can also be gained by reading the descriptions of his appointments to office and other laudatory comments by the famous Chinese writers Yang Yu 楊瑀 (1285-1361) and Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1316-1350s). Yang Yu reports a remark made to him by Alin Temür about a Tang Dynasty figure that he took as a role model. According to Alin Temür, that man not only did not react when people spit on him, but let it dry by itself and considered this to be a virtuous act.[58] The implication of Yang's story is that Alin Temür was a model of Confucian virtue who, in the same way as the patient Tang Dynasty man, would not react with violence to violent acts done to him. Since Alin Temür was one of Yang Yu's teachers,[59] there is good reason for the latter writing laudatory stories about the former. It does, nonetheless, indicate Alin Temür's acceptance as a Chinese-style literatus among some very famous Chinese writers and thinkers of the time.

Alin Temür had four sons, of whom the eldest, Shalaban 沙剌班, carried on his father's reputation as a prestigious *semuren* official and Chinese-style literatus.[60] Shalaban used the *yin* inheritance privilege

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[58] See Yang Yu 1966, 8a, and Franke 1956, 44-45. The same passage appears in slightly shorter form in *Chuogeng lu*, 2.48-49.

[59] Franke 1956, 44 note 1.

[60] In addition to the primary sources already cited concerning Alin Temür's

accorded to him by virtue of his father's high office to gain admission to the civil bureaucracy—this was one of the more common ways for recruitment to office during the period of Mongol rule in China. When emperor Toghon Temür issued an edict ordering the compilation of the Song, Liao, and Jin dynastic histories, Shalaban was assigned as one of the editors of the *Jinshi*.[61] He was eventually promoted to very high positions in the Yuan bureaucracy: he was a chancellor in the Hanlin Academy (*Hanlin chengzhi* 翰林承旨), a privy councilor in the Central Secretariat (*zhongshu pingzhang* 中書平章), and a commissioner in the Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs (*xuanzheng yuan shi* 宣政院使)—this last office may explain his Tibetan style name.

Shalaban was also a tutor for the last Yuan emperor, Toghon Temür (1333-68), perhaps because of his high literary abilities. We know that he was well versed in Chinese-style poetry and calligraphy.[62] And even though he never adopted a Chinese-style surname, he possessed two Chinese courtesy names (*zi* 字), Weizhong 惟中 and Jingchen 敬臣, and a Chinese literary name (*hao* 號), Shanzhai 山齋, which indicate that he participated in some Chinese literati circles.[63] He would have been a good person to have as a tutor. Interestingly, we have been left with a glimpse of his role in the inner court and of his relationship with the emperor. Yang Yu has recorded a most

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family, see for more detailed information on Shalaban *Xin Yuanshi*, 136.11b-12b, and Ch'en 1966, 166 and 190. Shalaban may be the Chinese rendering of the Tibetan name Šes-rab-dpal: see Franke 1956, 66.

[61] See *Guizhai wenji*, 13.4a-5b.

[62] Shalaban is listed among the Yuan calligraphers of repute in *Shushi huiyao*, 7.19. For a list of *semuren* calligraphers who were included in this book see Ch'en 1966, 186-202.

[63] Courtesy names were usually given once a person had reached adulthood, and were chosen because they reflected and extended the meaning of one's personal name (*ming* 名); a literary name was usually given to or adopted by men who were writers of some sort, and was a sure sign of membership in the literati group. Shalaban's first courtesy name, Weizhong, was also used by two other important Yuan-period persons, the Mongol prince Dorji Bal 朵爾直班 (1314-53) and Li Haowen李好文 (fl. 1321-50s). Both had served in the Hanlin Academy and in the central administration around the same time as Shalaban. His second courtesy name, Jingcheng, was also used by Xu Shijing 許師敬 (fl. 1320s-40s), the fourth son of the famous Yuan thinker Xu Heng 許衡 (1209-1281), who was also an official in the Central Secretariat and the Hanlin Academy. For Dorji Bal, see Wang et al. 1980, 4.2355; for Li Haowen, *ibid.*, 1.518-519; for Xu Shijing, *ibid.*, 2.1234. On naming practices in traditional China, see Wilkinson 2000, 98-105.

interesting encounter between Shalaban and the emperor while Shalaban was carrying out his duties as imperial tutor:

> The learned Shalaban was a tutor to the Emperor and was daily in his presence. One day, because he was tired he lay down in a hall that adjoined the Emperor's private quarters and went fast asleep. The emperor personally came and placed a square pillow on which he had been sitting under [Shalaban's] head. He had also gotten a boil on the left side of his forehead at one point, and the Emperor personally took a gold box that contained fingered citron ointment (*Foshou gao* 佛手膏), wiped some on a piece of paper and applied it to his forehead.[64]

Shalaban's positions as an official at Toghon's court and as a personal tutor to the emperor indicate that he was well respected both as a *semuren* official and as a Chinese-style literatus. Thus, he conformed to the ideal of the scholar-official. His son Śakya-dpal (Shijieban 世傑班) followed in his footsteps, being appointed as an official in the Hanlin Academy and in the Bureau of Ceremonies.[65] He also seems to have continued his father's Tibetan and Buddhist identity.

The family story just outlined provides some interesting insights into the ways *semuren* elites functioned in Mongol China. They did not have to totally accommodate to Chinese modes of social behavior in order to thrive; what mattered most was an individual's proximity to the center of power. Induction into the qan's personal bodyguard was the usual first step, and if a man was fortunate enough, he ended up serving one of the more important members of the Mongol imperial clan. In the present case the first member of the family who served the Mongols did so under Qubilai, and this had important ramifications for the status and success of his descendants as both political and social elites. The case for their political success is self-evident from the sources. Their status as members of the cultural elite is more complex, and their story reveals that success in that realm was not limited to accommodating solely to Chinese culture.

Alin Temür was obviously well schooled in the Chinese cultural tradition since he headed up the emperor's Classics Colloquium. He was also respected by some very eminent Chinese thinkers of his day, who saw him as a model of Confucian virtue. His son Shalaban

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[64] Yang Yu 1966, 18b and Franke 1956, 66. The modern rendition of Shalaban's biography in *Mengwuer shiji*, 45.2b-3a, provides substantial additional information on his role at court, none of which is attested in the Yuan-era sources.

[65] See Franke 1956, 61 n.4.

was, if anything, even more involved in Chinese culture and was respected as a peer by prominent Chinese contemporaries. Not only was he an official in the Confucian-dominated Hanlin Academy, he was also a noted calligrapher and poet, both activities that were essential hallmarks of the traditional Chinese cultural elite. Yet at the same time these Uyghurs were anything but the ideal Chinese type of cultural elite. Their strong affiliation with Tibetan culture can be seen in the names and religious practices of several members of the family. No member of the family ever adopted a Chinese-style surname or personal name, even though some of them did have Chinese courtesy and literary names. Neither did any of them ever participate in the civil service examinations. But this did not prevent them from occupying positions in the most important ideological bureaus at the Mongol court, such as the Hanlin Academy and the Imperial History Bureau, as well as the highest levels of the political administrative apparatus. So they must have felt about as comfortable among the most conservative Chinese as they undoubtedly did among other foreigners.

Mengsus

Our final example of a Uyghur who was involved in transmitting his writing system to the Mongols is that of Mengsus 孟速思 (1206-1267). Mengsus came from a prominent Uyghur clan that lived in the capital city, Beshbaliq, his father serving as a governor (*dutong* 都統) in the region. He was pulled into the Mongol administrative hierarchy because of his skills in the Uyghur writing system.[66] As a young boy Mengsus was known for his precocious abilities, making him just the kind of individual that Chinggis Qan needed in his emerging empire. After 1209 he was put in charge of collecting taxes on the appanage lands of one of the Mongol princes:

> By age 15 he was thoroughly familiar with his native written script (*jintong benguo shu* 盡通本國書). Chinggis Qan heard about him and commanded him to appear before him. Upon first seeing him he was highly pleased. He said, "This young man is full of energy [lit. 'has fire in his eyes'], one day he will be

[66] Sources on the history of this family include two funerary inscriptions for a son of Mengsus written by Cheng Jufu 程鉅夫 (1249-1318). See Cheng 1970a, 6.9a-12b and Cheng 1970b, 7.4a-7a, as well as Mengsus's official biography in *Yuanshi*, 124.3059. Later versions are found in *Xin Yuanshi*, 136, and *Mengwuer shiji*, 45. See also Franke 1978.

> of great use [to us]." Chinggis Qan ordered him to go and serve Prince Tolui; he was put in charge of annual taxation at Zhending. (*Yuanshi*, 124.3059)

Appanage holdings were important sources of revenue for the Mongol imperial princes, and Mengsus's appointment as a manager of tax income on the holdings of Tolui's wife, Sorqaqtani Beki, put him in contact with the highest level of Mongol princes.[67] He became an informal adviser to Qubilai while still under Tolui's employment, and his first wife, Ketelün 怯牒倫, was a younger sister to Qubilai Qan's consort, Čabi: he was, in other words, very well connected with the Mongol imperial house. After his elevation to grand qan, Qubilai wanted to promote Mengsus to the office of chancellor, but Mengsus declined the offer. When he died, Čabi herself donated money for his burial site.

Mengsus had eleven sons and four daughters by two wives and a concubine, and his descendants continued the pattern he had set by serving in positions that utilized their high level of literacy.[68] Thus, several of his sons and grandsons were appointed as officials in the Hanlin Academy. The career of one of his sons, Ašigh Temür 阿失帖木兒 (1249-1309), indeed provides an especially vivid example of the ways in which Uyghurs served the Mongols in a wide variety of capacities in both civil and military spheres.

Conclusion

Bilge Buqa, Kara Igach Buyruq and Mengsus were all members of a larger group of Uyghur aristocrats who submitted to the Mongols along with their king in 1209 and were integrated into the Mongol administrative apparatus because of their mastery of the Uyghur script, of their literacy, and of their knowledge of administrative

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[67] Uyghurs such as Mengsus were often assigned as officials in charge of Mongol appanage holdings because they were literate and could make sure that tax and other income were levied on a regular basis. As the official in charge of annual taxation at Tolui's appanage, Mengsus presumably also exerted effective power over the local population that resided on the appanage lands; he may also have been able to suggest, if not arrange, how that income was to be used by the prince's household. On the Mongol appanage system (C. *touxia* 投下, M. *ayimagh*) see Ratchnevsky 1966, and Farquhar 1990, 17-18, 59 n. 6.

[68] For a summary of Mengsus's family genealogy, see Qian 1937, 8335-8336. We are also fortunate to have a visual representation of several members of the family in a type of family portrait: see von Gabain 1976.

practices. Other Central Asians also served as literary specialists, but the Uyghurs dominated the group of Central Asian advisors to the early Mongols. Most of the members of that early group of literate Uyghurs used their cultural capital accrued as tutors and advisers skillfully to parley themselves into power and integrate into the Mongol administrative hierarchy. This strategy paid off handsomely for themselves and their descendants.

Chinggis Qan's decision to adopt the Uyghur Sogdian phonetic writing system as the official imperial script, instead of Chinese or any other type of writing used in the states that he conquered, involved both practical and ideological reasons. For one thing, the Uyghur script was already widely known among the merchant communities that spanned the overland trade routes. Since the Mongols were always concerned to dominate those routes and the trading networks they supported, it made sense for them to adopt such a script as their official imperial script. Then, unlike Chinese, which requires the knowledge of approximately six thousand characters to be functionally literate, one needs only master twenty to thirty characters to be able to use an alphabetic writing system. Thus, a basic knowledge and working ability in the Uyghur script could be acquired rather easily by anyone not already familiar with it. As already stressed, the acquisition of a writing system does not necessarily mean literacy, and we can be sure that many of the Mongol princes who were taught the Uyghur script were only semi-literate at best. But literacy is easier to acquire with an alphabetic or phonetic writing system than with an ideographic system.

The Uyghur script was also undoubtedly adopted, and continued to be used by and taught to members of the Mongol imperial clan, because of the influence played at the Mongol court by Uyghurs and others who were also familiar with the Uyghur script. Tatar Tongga's knowledge of tax collection methods and his moral character as a loyal subject seem to have secured his powerful position as one of Temujin's early advisors, and once in place at the Mongol court he was asked to teach the imperial clan in the Uyghur script. We have met other examples of influential Uyghurs who were specifically commandeered as tutors to teach their own writing system to members of the imperial clan long after Chinggis Qan's time, and indeed well after Qubilai Qan had changed the official imperial script to the 'Phags-pa system.

Another reason for the adoption of the Uyghur script may have

been a deliberate attempt by Chinggis Qan to legitimize his imperial project to the world and differentiate his new empire from other neighboring empires and states: if he was really going to establish a legitimate world-wide empire—in other words, one that should be seen as the center of civilization and attract people by virtue of the charisma obtained by heavenly mandate—then surely the imperial clan who was vested with that mandate should be able to communicate it to its subjects in its own spoken and written language.[69] Both the Liao and Jin empires had experimented with creating their own imperial scripts (two Khitan scripts and a Jurchen one were created), a precedent surely not lost on Chinggis Qan.

But the adoption of the Uyghur script was also rooted in another aspect of legitimation, the political and spiritual prestige that accrued to a ruler who could attract to his court—voluntarily or otherwise—skilled specialists who commanded technical knowledge and spiritual force.[70] Just as the geography of the steppe constituted a kind of spiritual geography central to Turkic and Mongol political legitimacy, so did distance play a part in the power attributed to technical specialists like the Uyghurs, who came from afar. Cultural distance lent a further level of prestige to men of specialized knowledge.[71] We have already noted the reputation of the Uyghurs as a society of high culture. Without doubt, to have that kingdom voluntarily submit and then to get access to the most talented members of its aristocracy as technical specialists in writing and literacy provided Chinggis Qan with enormous prestige and spiritual power.

Finally, on a more speculative level, let us not forget that any writing system involves a degree of objectification of the word, but that this degree is variable. Non-phonetic systems such as ideographic scripts (like Chinese) imply only a certain level of objectification, since in them at least part of the graphs directly symbolize objects. Fully phonetic writing systems, on the other hand, involve a much more total objectification of the word because written words in them do not represent or symbolize objects or ideas, but sounds. The representation of sounds means, in reality, recalling and setting down the "processes of human interaction in speech," and thus granting access

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[69] See Allsen 1996 for a discussion of the charisma that Chinggis Qan possessed and used as a means of legitimation.

[70] Allsen 1996, citing Helms 1993, 13-27, 69-87.

[71] On this point see Helms 1988.

to the very mind of man.[72] Was, then, a phonetic writing system more amenable to the nomadic Mongols than Chinese because it was somehow closer to their oral culture and experience? While we cannot presume to answer such a complex question here, it seems that both Chinggis Qan and his successors placed a high value on retaining the sounds of their spoken language in whatever script they chose as their official one.[73] One striking example that bears this out is the fact that the version of the *Secret History of the Mongols* that was handed down to us was written using Chinese characters for their phonetic values to represent spoken Mongolian. And anyone who is familiar with Chinese sources from the Yuan period knows about the frustrations involved in reading texts where Chinese transliterations of Mongol names and terms are mixed freely into otherwise standard literary Chinese. (Of course, this also points to the difficulty of drawing a sharp distinction between phonetic and non-phonetic scripts.)

This essay has focused on examples of members of the Uyghur elite used as technical advisers to Chinggis Qan; it has argued that they played essential roles in the development of his empire because their specialized knowledge of writing and literacy was one of the most important tools necessary to a functioning, efficient imperial administration. "Because of the importance of their script, the Uighurs played an important role in the education of the Mongol ruling class... [I]t was the Uighur administrative and cultural skills that the Mongols prized most highly. Uighuristan functioned as a reservoir of trained administrative personnel, which the Mongol khans drew upon extensively."[74] Tatar Tongga, Bilge Buqa, Kara Igach Buyruq and Mengsus are all good examples of that personnel. But the stories of Bilge Buqa, Kara Igach, Mengsus and their families are also important examples of the roles Uyghurs were to play in Mongol China over the long term. Once settled within the Mongol

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[72] See Goody and Watt 1968, 38-39.

[73] One of the reasons Qubilai cited in replacing the Uyghur script with the Tibetan- and Brāhmī-based 'Phags-pa script in 1269 as the official imperial script for state documents was that it represented better both spoken Mongolian and the Chinese sounds of the names, titles, and offices in China: see Rossabi 1988, 155; also Franke 1981, Petech 1983, esp. 187-88, and Wang 1999. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the Khitan and Jurchen scripts combined phonetic and non-phonetic elements.

[74] Allsen 1983, 267.

administrative apparatus as technologists of writing and literacy, the Uyghurs built on that status to create permanent positions of importance for themselves and their descendants. Most of the men from the families we have mentioned held high-level administrative positions and continued to act as and be identified with the Chinese literati in their new communities in China. Yuan sources are filled with other examples of Uyghur families that followed similar paths. One of our implicit goals here has been to open up a discussion of the social history of the Uyghurs and other immigrant groups in Mongol China as participants in both the political and the social elite.[75]

Evaluating the Uyghurs as technologists of literacy also touches on the larger question of the role of conquered and dispersed peoples in Central Asian empires. More specifically, it may be helpful to see the Uyghurs in the early Mongol Empire as a type of "mobilized diaspora": in that process the members of the elite of a conquered state who had been dispersed from their homeland to serve their conquerors and who commanded certain resources, especially linguistic skills, not available to the conquering group, made themselves indispensable to the latter by mobilizing those resources to obtain important advantages within the multiethnic polity within which they were dispersed.[76]

Writing systems and literacy were only a small part of the wide range of skills and resources the Mongols were eager to acquire or put to work for themselves, but they were important tools for maintaining order. This became increasingly true as the conquests expanded and the Mongol polity became more and more polyglot. The Uyghurs were ideally situated to act as go-betweens in the hybrid oral-literate empire, and the fact that they were canny enough to recognize and mobilize their unique skills explains their prominent position in the still-embryonic Mongol administration. The Mongols were certainly not unique in marshaling the resources of their subjects

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[75] Allsen's 1983 article is the most exhaustive study to date of the Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire. The only studies so far that have attempted to take account of the activities and contributions of the entire class of *semuren* in Mongol China are Ch'en 1966 and Hsiao 1966.

[76] See Armstrong 1976. Armstrong proposes two possible types of diaspora groups, one of which is the "mobilized diaspora." He also proposes six characteristics that describe the interactions of the mobilized diaspora with the dominant ethnic group; indeed, his descriptions fit perfectly the situation of the first Uyghurs in the Mongol empire. For an elaboration of this understanding of the Uyghurs as a diaspora group, see Brose 2000a.

to help construct and maintain their own power, but the Uyghur case provides us with an interesting window onto these processes of empire building.[77]

We also have to remember that most diaspora groups in the premodern world were created because of conquest, and that they usually (if not always) ended up as subjects of new masters. Their identity as displaced subjects prompted the mobilization of their resources in order to survive. In the present case, by the early 1200s the Mongols were clearly the new dominant power in the Central Asian steppe area, a fact that was not lost on the ever-practical Uyghurs when they decided to submit voluntarily to them in 1209; thereafter their subordination to the Mongol ruling elite was constantly reinforced by the social class system of Yuan China.

But subordination did not necessarily mean a loss of identity and power. In fact, because they controlled resources of literacy that were necessary and could be mobilized, but which the dominant group lacked, members of the Uyghur diaspora in China were guaranteed places in the administration even while they were themselves subjects.[78] And while that situation was probably only true for the first two generations of Uyghurs in Mongol China, the skillful manipulation of resources by early Uyghurs prepared the way for their descendants to become part of the administrative bureaucracy because of their own skills and learning.

Their knowledge of a writing system, their literacy, and their expertise with tools and technologies needed in the construction and operation of an administrative system were all resources that the aristocratic elite of Uyghuristan drew on, or mobilized, to become

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[77] Armstrong argues that literacy was one of the most highly valued skills or types of knowledge in premodern societies, which literate diaspora peoples 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 ..." (Armstrong 1976, 397; for parallel examples of literacy as a coveted resource in the medieval Islamic world, see Chamberlain 1994).

[78] I have argued elsewhere that the Uyghurs experienced a sense of alterity because of their unique position in China, where they were identified both as members of the conquering elite and as conquered subjects of the Mongols. See Brose 2002.

vital members of the early Mongol imperial order. Those resources, which can also be thought of as a kind of cultural capital, made possible the continuing flourishing of many Uyghurs in the latest Central Asian empire, where they became a kind of "free-floating resource" employed throughout the Mongol realm.[79] The fact that their most valuable resource was a skill, and not some kind of material capital, made their survival and their mobility possible. But the actions of the first Uyghurs in Chinggis Qan's camp also made possible for their descendants something wholly unexpected, their identity as members of the cultural and political elite of China.

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[79] See Allsen 1987, 7.

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