

Organization of the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan

Pax Mongolica

Coined as a parallel to *Pax Romana*, the *Pax Mongolica* (Latin for "Peace of the Mongols") was the term for situation where trade between China and Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries was common and free from profound interference. Although the Mongol system of administration and governance during the brief era was not exactly peaceful,^[1] the Pax Mongolica was a time of relative peace throughout the Old World that led to an increase of trade, as well as an increase in awareness, between distant nations. In essence, the Mongol Empire administered political order over a very large area of land which enabled relative political and economic stability to follow.

In the face of the ethnic, religious and tribal diversity of the civilians and soldiers of the Mongol Empire, which eventually included modern day Persians, Chinese and many Turkic peoples, Genghis Khan insisted on focusing all loyalty on himself as Great Khan and no others. Thus, Genghis Khan had no room for the traditional clan- and kindred-based divisions that were common in central Asian society. Obedience was expected from everyone from the lowest to the highest classes. Any disobedience by a subordinate officer to any order from a superior officer was reason for death.

Genghis Khan revolutionized his military by incorporating the decimal system in his army. He arranged his army into *arbans* (inter-ethnic groups of ten), and the members of an *arban* were commanded to be loyal to one another regardless of ethnic origin.^[2] The military unit's sizes were based on factors of 10: arbans (10 people), zuuns (100), Mingghans (1000) and tumens (10,000). This decimal system organization of Genghis Khan's strong military proved very effective in conquering, by persuasion or force, the many tribes of the central Asian steppe, but it also strengthened Mongol society as a whole.

Law and Governance

The Mongol Empire was governed by a code of law devised by Genghis, called *Yassa*, meaning "order" or "decree". A particular canon of this code was that those of rank shared much the same hardship as the common man. It also imposed severe penalties – e.g., the death penalty if one mounted soldier following another did not pick up something dropped from the mount in front. Penalties were also decreed for rape and to some extent for murder. Any resistance to Mongol rule was met with massive collective punishment. Cities were destroyed and their inhabitants slaughtered if they defied Mongol orders. Under *Yassa*, chiefs and generals were selected based on merit. The empire was governed by a non-democratic, parliamentary-style central assembly, called *kurultai*, in which the Mongol chiefs met with the great khan to discuss domestic and foreign policies. *Kurultais* were also convened for the selection of each new great khan.

Genghis Khan also created a national seal, encouraged the use of a written alphabet in Mongolia, and exempted teachers, lawyers, and artists from taxes.[!]

The Mongols imported Central Asian Muslims to serve as administrators in China and sent Han Chinese and Khitans from China to serve as administrators over the Muslim population in Bukhara in Central Asia, thus using foreigners to curtail the power of the local peoples of both lands. The Mongols were tolerant of other religions, and rarely persecuted people on religious grounds. This was associated with their culture and progressive thought. Some historians of the 20th century thought this was a good military strategy: when Genghis was at war with Sultan Muhammad of Khwarezm, other Islamic leaders did not join the fight, as it was seen as a non-holy war between two individuals.

Government Legacy

Genghis Khan's united Mongol nation formed the foundation of the largest continuous land empire ever known. A wise statesman, Genghis also established Mongolian-style democracy that respected the ethnic and cultural diversity of his Empire. His government left many long-lasting legacies:

- Literacy and official record-keeping began with the first written Mongolian script, created by adapting the alphabet of the Uighur people of western Mongolia.
- Councils of leaders and a “cabinet” of advisers drawn from different tribes and nations were held to establish policies and make decisions.
- Laws and directions, referred to as the Great Yassa, defined Mongol behavior.
- Religious freedom was extended to all denominations in the belief that the support of religious leaders would foster good relations with the people.
- Civil Service appointments were based on merit, regardless of nationality or connections.
- International passports provided protection for the diplomatic representatives of any nation, facilitating safe passage and trade.
- Rapid communication depended upon the Yam, an efficient mounted messenger service.

Meritocracy

Genghis Khan preferred to rule through existing hierarchies, but where he was resisted he destroyed the existing aristocracy. Nevertheless, he created at the same time a rough meritocracy among the Mongols. Positions of honor were given on the basis of bravery in battle or outstanding loyalty, as opposed to the old system of inheritance through families. This was far ahead of any other system in Europe at the time.

Mail system

The Mongol Empire had an ingenious and efficient mail system for the time, often referred to by scholars as the Yam. It had lavishly furnished and well-guarded relay posts known as *örtöö* set up throughout the Empire.^[118] A messenger would typically travel 25 miles (40 km) from one station to the next, either receiving a fresh, rested horse, or relaying the mail to the next rider to ensure the speediest possible delivery. The Mongol riders regularly covered 125 miles (200 km) per day, better than the fastest record set by the Pony Express some 600 years later. The relay stations had attached households to service them. Anyone with a paiza was allowed to stop there for re-mounts and specified rations, while those carrying military identities used the Yam even without a paiza. Many merchants, messengers, and travelers from China, the Middle East, and Europe used the system. When the great khan died in Karakorum, news reached the Mongol forces under Batu Khan in Central Europe within 4–6 weeks thanks to the Yam.^[49]

Genghis and his successor Ögedei built a wide system of roads, one of which carved through the Altai Mountains. After his enthronement, Ögedei further expanded the road system, ordering the Chagatai Khanate and Golden Horde to link up roads in western parts of the Mongol Empire.

Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan dynasty, built special relays for high officials, as well as ordinary relays, that had hostels. During Kublai's reign, the Yuan communication system consisted of some 1,400 postal stations, which used 50,000 horses, 8,400 oxen, 6,700 mules, 4,000 carts, and 6,000 boats.^[citation needed]

In Manchuria and southern Siberia, the Mongols still used dogsled relays for the yam. In the Ilkhanate, Ghazan restored the declining relay system in the Middle East on a restricted scale. He

constructed some hostels and decreed that only imperial envoys could receive a stipend. The Jochids of the Golden Horde financed their relay system by a special yam tax