

### **The Cause for Mongolia's Rapid Imperial Expansion**

In both its history and its present, the vast stretch of land encompassing the cross-section between the European and Asian continents may be characterized as infinitely splintered. A history in the Middle East, in the lands occupied by the former Soviet Union, in Northern and Peninsular Asia and in Central Asia, of battling tribal factions, regions dominated by warlords and dynasties established by family lineage is marked with few examples of true unification, and even these would be won by hard-line and oppressive tactics. In the intercession between the seemingly impossible diplomacy needed to bring a consolidation of power and the military might required to carry out this consolidation, the Mongolian empire would establish the most rapid and far reaching centralization of authority seen either to that point or since in Eurasia. This accomplishment, at the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, would be illustrative of the primacy of strong Mongolian central leadership with a deeply instilled understanding of the need for strong alliance and the fast disbandment of threats to authority.

The land known as Mongolia today had historically been a hotbed for tribal conflict. Its regions and resources had been divided historically along lines maintained by warring clans. More, its relationship with such regional leaders as China would have a considerable impact on the outlook for many Mongolian tribes. This, some historians believe, would be a central factor in the collective need which would incline a fundamental shift by many toward unification. It is not uncommon for the eventual alignment toward imperial expansion to be attributed to “the attempt by Mongolia's neighbors in north and northwest China to reduce the amount of trade with the Mongols.”

(AFE, 1) For the many groups subsisting in Mongolia, priorities had previously rested on familial lines of loyalty rather than on any sense of ethnic unity, political identification or ambition for geographical expansion. Economic imperative would be a considerable catalyst to a change in the intra-regional diplomatic outlook. “During the early thirteenth century . . . Chinggiss Khan (Sometimes spelled ‘Genghis Khan’) forged the various Mongol tribes into a powerful alliance that built the largest empire the world has ever seen.” (Part IV, 4) By adhering to a strategy known as Steppes Diplomacy, so named as the policy approach believed most likely to yield any sort of chance at power centralization in the very diffuse Steppes region of Eurasia, Genghis Khan was uniquely successful at brokering a cooperation between previously segregated Mongolian and Turkic clans.

By orienting these varied warring tribes into a massive force of shared power, Genghis Khan would not only dissolve many of the conditions which had to that juncture instigated violence amongst them, but he had also fashioned a power on a scale theretofore unseen in the region.

Another element of the Steppes Diplomacy practices by Khan would be his extremely militaristic approach to extending the influence of Mongolian rule. It was the defined policy of his dynastic leadership to behave admirably on the battlefield and to lead his warriors by example. An extension of this policy was an extremely aggressive stance on contending with political enemies, military opposition, internal dissent or even disciplinary impropriety. It was this extremity of discipline that would make Khan’s Mongolian warriors unique in their time and in their ranking to the perspective of history.

Their conditioning and training was believed unparalleled, accounting for their uncommon ability to brave the harsh elements of the bitter Eurasian winters, to move quickly and effectively, to mount sieges with few carried provisions and to claim, by the sheer implications of their threat, alliances with countless annexed territories.

These would be among the same conditions though that, while accounting for so remarkable a rate and extent of expansion, would likewise be culpable in the decline and fall of the great Mongolian empire. In no small degree, history will suggest that Genghis Khan was an uncommon conqueror. His capacity to create alliances, his willingness to violate said alliances at his convenience and his might at conquest would together establish a leader and empire driven by the twin imperatives of consensus and the destruction of dissent.

As with all empires, the inherent contradiction in these paired approaches would be an inevitable equation toward gradual decline. The common danger that an empire might spread itself thin was theoretically addressed in the death of Khan, who distributed the enormous land-mass which he had conquered to the ruler-ship of his four sons. This would begin a splintering of the empire's unified leadership, which would itself be hastened by the accommodation which the unprecedented imperial sweep had created for the dissemination of disease. "By facilitating trade and communications throughout Eurasia, the Mongols unwittingly expedited the spread of bubonic plague." (Ch. 18, 475) This would be a force complicit in the widespread economic destabilization of Asia and Europe. Resistance movements in crucial conquered territories such as Persia and China would seize on these colliding opportunities in order to undermine even further the rule

Paper Example – itchybrainscentral.com

of Mongolian foreign invaders. Thus, where unity had been their strength in the prior century of expansion, the Mongolians would spend the fourteenth century in a phase of retraction, returning once again to the splintered decentralization consistent with their region's historical proclivities.

**Bibliography:**

AFE. (2004). The Mongols in World History. *Columbia University: Asia Topics in World History*.

Chapter 18. Nomadic Empires and Eurasian Integration.

Part IV. An Age of Cross-Cultural Interaction.