



BRILL

JOURNAL OF CHINESE HUMANITIES 9 (2023) 61–76



brill.com/joch

On the Issue of Determining the Founding Year of the “Great Mongol Nation”

Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉 | ORCID: 0000-0001-5223-486X

Associate Professor, Department of History, Fudan University,
Shanghai, China

pkuqara@163.com

Abstract

The exact date of creation of the “Great Mongolian Nation” has long been a controversial topic. This article will point out that, according to the history of Mongolia and the Yuan dynasty as described in *The History of the Buddha*, the name “Great Mongol Nation” was first used in the Xinwei year. Since the source of the historical materials used to compile the *Fozu lidai tongzai* most likely were related to manuscripts used in the compilation and revision of *Taizu shilu* earlier in the Yuan dynasty, this should be a fairly trustworthy source. It is therefore possible to infer that Genghis Khan coined the term “Yeke Mongyol Ulus” (i.e., Great Mongol Nation) in 1211. As this was also the year that the Mongols began their war with the Jin dynasty, the creation of the “Great Mongol Nation” was a political move closely related to then ongoing matters of now historical significance and – in terms of the eventual establishment of the Yuan dynasty by the Mongolians – it had both far-reaching political impact and important strategic significance.

Keywords

Great Mongolian Nation – founding of a nation – Yuan dynasty – Chinese history

1 Issues and Their Origins

In the early Yuan (1206–1368), the Confucian scholar Wang Yun 王惲 (1227–1304) came up with the term “Great Yuan” in his treatise *Jianguo hao shizhuang* 建國號事狀 and stated: “ever since ancient times, any ruler who has founded

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill NV | DOI:10.1163/23521341-12340145

© CHEN XIAOWEI, 2023 | ISSN: 2352-1333 (print) 2352-1341 (online)

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 license.

a country has started by determining the official name of his dynasty so that it is clear that this country started from his actions.”¹ That is to say, from the perspective of the Central Plains’ traditional political culture, a country’s name is the primary symbol by which that country’s regime was established.² However, when looking at texts from the same era produced in other languages, we can see that the real situation at the beginning of the establishment of the Yuan dynasty by the Mongols in the Bingyin 丙寅 year (1206) is that, when he was at the source of the Onon River, Genghis Khan 鐵木真 (r. 1206–1227) proclaimed himself emperor, he did not make any particular move towards deriving a name for the lands he ruled over. However, it is well established that the country already had an official appellation. Traveling to the northern deserts of Mongolia in the Xinsi 辛巳 year (1221), Song dynasty (960–1279) native Zhao Gong 趙珙 (fl. 1221) said “the heroic land of the Mongolians has recently come to be known as the Great Mongolian Nation.”³ In the eighth year of his Zhiyuan 至元 era (1271), Kublai Khan 忽必烈 (r. 1260–1294) decreed the name “the Great Yuan dynasty.” Prior to that, all Chinese language diplomatic credentials, government documents and inscribed stelae had used the phrase “Great Mongolian Nation” (*da Menggu guo* 大蒙古國). For example, in 1246, the “Letter from Güyük Khan to Pope Innocent IV” was stamped with a Uighur Mongolian seal which included the phrase “Yeke Mongyol Ulus.” As has been pointed out by Mongolian historians Francis Cleaves (1911–1995) and Antoine Mostaert (1881–1971), this phrase was the official title of the Mongol regime prior to the middle of the 13th century and, when translated into Chinese, it means “Great Mongol Nation.”⁴ Indeed, the official naming of a country is one of the most important events in that country’s political history. However, when and how “Great Mongolian Nation” was established as an official name has always been a confusing matter. The Qing dynasty (1644–1911) scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814) attributed this problem to editorial oversight on the part of the early Ming dynasty (1368–1644) compilation of the *Yuan shi* 元史 in failing

1 Wang Yun 王惲, “Wutai bibu” 烏台筆補, in *Qiu Jian xiansheng daquan wenji* 秋澗先生大全文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 86.9a.

2 Cao Jincheng 曹金成 once criticized one of my articles on the subject. See Cao Jincheng 曹金成, “Da Meng gu guo’ guohao chuangjian shijian zai jiantao” “大蒙古國” 國號創建時間再檢討, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 2 (2002): 219–268.

3 Zhao Gong 趙珙, *Mengda beilu* 蒙鞑備錄, in *Wang Guowei quanji* 王國維全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 11: 339.

4 Antoine Mostaert and Francis W. Cleaves, “Trois Documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952): 485–91.

to record when Mongolia came up with its state name.⁵ This is not an entirely unreasonable way of looking at things.

2 Regarding the Disparate Claims about the Establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation”

It is well established that a lack of historical materials from the early Mongolian and Yuan eras makes it impossible to pinpoint when the “Great Mongol Nation” was founded.⁶ However, the majority of scholars generally concur that Genghis Khan was crowned emperor in the Bingyin 丙寅 year (1206) and that he soon after established a country which was called the “Great Mongol Nation.”⁷ As Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao 蕭啟慶 (1937–2012) has explained, looking at things from the perspective of the historical development of the Mongolians, the term “Yeke Mongyol Ulus” (Great Mongol Nation) was probably first adopted as an appellation in 1206 when Genghis Khan had become the ruler not only of all of Mongolia but also of all of the Mongolian ethnic groups.⁸ However, there is still no corresponding historical evidence to support the above viewpoint. As a result, it seems that the current theory of the “Great Mongol Nation” having been founded in the Bingyin year is still a topic worthy of further discussion by the academic community.

By reviewing both Mongolian and Chinese records, we found that there are three main theories regarding when the Great Mongolian Nation was established: the Jiyou year theory, the Bingyin year theory, and the Jisi year theory. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.1 *The Jiyou Year Theory*

The following statement comes from the late 17th century history book *Erdeniyin Tobči* (On the Source of Mongolia). In the third volume, the author of the

5 Wang Shumin 王樹民, *Nian'er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 29, 651.

6 Hodong Kim 金浩東, “Menggu diguo yu ‘Dayuan’ 蒙古帝國與 ‘大元’,” in *Qinghua Yuan shi* 清華元史, ed. Yao Dali 姚大力 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), 2: 5.

7 Zhou Liangxiao 周良霄 and Gu Juying 顧菊英, *Yuan shi* 元史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003), 108; Han Rulin 韓儒林, ed., *Yuanchao shi, xiuding ben* 元朝史(修訂本) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 1: 76; Chen Dezhi 陳得芝, “Guanyu Yuanchao de guohao, niandai yu jiangyu wenti” 關於元朝的國號、年代與疆域問題, *Beifang minzu daxue xuebao* 北方民族大學學報, no. 3 (2009): 5–7.

8 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao 蕭啟慶, *Nei beiguo er wai Zhongguo – Mengyuan shi yanjiu* 內北國而外中國—蒙元史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1: 72.

book, Saghang Sechen (b. 1604), tells a lengthy story about Genghis Khan's exploits as the founder of the empire:

In the Jiyou 己酉 year (1189), the then only 28 year old Temüjin – the son of Nomoqan – became the Mongolian Khagan (khan of khans) at Ködege aral-a on the banks of the Kerülen River ... According to legend, without action on the part of any person, a boulder suddenly split in half and revealed a rectangular jade seal the length and width of the space from a man's thumb to his index finger, bearing the pattern of two dragon turtles on its back as if intentionally carved. Inked only one time, this seal could stamp one thousand sheets of paper. Immediately afterwards, the white standard with nine tails was erected at the headwaters of the Onon River. People were sent to Deligün-bulaq to raise a black banner with four tails and Temüjin became the lord of the 400,000 Bata people. Then, per the decree of the Great Lord, the country was given the name “the Great Green Mongol Ulus” (Köke Mongyol Ulus).⁹

The Mongolian word “köke” is usually translated into Chinese as the color green (*qing* 青). Xie Zaishan 謝再善 (1903–1977) was convinced of the authenticity of this historical text, and, accordingly, was of the opinion that Genghis Khan adopted “Green Mongolia” as the country's name upon its establishment instead of the “Great Mongol Nation.” In explaining the reasoning behind his beliefs, he stated “The Mongolians' representative color is green, and the first character of *ganzhi* 干支 (Celestial stems and Terrestrial branches) of Mongolian writing uses *qing* instead of the standard *jia* 甲, so the use of ‘Green’ as an appellation for Mongolia ends up meaning ‘the first.’”¹⁰

This viewpoint has many flaws. First, research and analysis by Borjigijin Ulaan of the aforementioned section of *On the Source of Mongolia* finds that it is actually based on a textual conflation of sections 96 “Sending a Leather Coat to Wang Han” and 123 “the Nomination of Genghis Khan as Khan by Altan and Others” of the *Yuanchao mishi* 元朝秘史 (The Secret History of the Mongols). That is to say, two unrelated political events (one from when Genghis Khan was leader of the Qiyian tribal group and the other from the Bingyin year of the

9 The Chinese translation and the Latin transcription of this historical material come from pages 150 and 568–569 of Borjigijin Ulaan 烏蘭, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu* 《蒙古源流》研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2000).

10 Xie Zaishan 謝再善, “Guanyu Halaqidan Mengguren seshang ji Yuanchao guohao laili wenti” 關於哈刺契丹蒙古人色尚及元朝國號來歷問題, *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, April 26, 1956.

Mongolian Khanate) were randomly combined.¹¹ Even though the *The Secret History of the Mongols* does not specifically record the coining by Genghis Khan of the name “Great Mongol Nation” for Mongolia, the historical materials relating to the Mongolian and Yuan dynasties in *On the Source of Mongolia* primarily follow *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Additionally, the idea of this so-called “Great Green Mongol Ulus” is closely related to the concept of “Five Colors and Four Vassals” (*wuse siyi* 五色四夷) as was commonly found in Ming and Qing era documents about the history of Mongolia. Generally speaking, the “five colors” refer to the white Solonga (Solongyos) in the east, the yellow Sartaul (Sartaγul) in the south, the red Kitad in the west, the black Tübed in the north, and the 400,000 green Mongolians in the center, while the “four vassals” refer to the various small states that surrounded Mongolia. Of these, putting the fresh green of the Mongolians at the center of the banner was intended to show that the Yuan dynasty and the Mongolians played a key role in 13th and 14th century world politics. However, the truth of the matter is that, being a concept either influenced by a later era’s Yellow Sect or a political and cultural concept newly born in Mongolian society under the influence of Ming and Qing dynasty Tibetan historiography, neither Mongolian nor Yuan dynasty historical documents speak of the “Five Colors and Four Vassals.”¹² In other words, the idea that the name “the Great Green Mongol Ulus” existed as a title during the 13th century Mongolian and Yuan periods is invented, and the story of the founding of the country during the Jiyou year is a clear fabrication by later Mongolian historians.

2.2 *The Jisi Year Theory*

In Ouyang Xuan’s 歐陽玄 (1283–1358) “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” 高昌偃氏家傳, the Biography of the Uighurs in Gaochang, he retells in great detail the stories of a protagonist named Bilga. The name “Great Mongol Nation” is used when describing how the king of Gaochang was held hostage by Qara Khitai and conspired with Bilga to escape. Bilga offers to kill a young prisoner sent by Qara Khitai: “Lead my subjects in returning to the Great Mongol Nation”

11 Borjigjin Ulaan, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu*, 192–93, n.53.

12 See Hexigtaoktaog 賀希格陶克疏, “Wuse siyi’ kao” “五色四夷”考, *Zhongyang minzu xueyuan xuebao* 中央民族學院學報, no. 4 (1986): 48–54; Borjigjin Ulaan, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu*, 197; Siduryu 希都日古, *Shiqi shiji Menggu biannianshi yu Mengguwen wenshu dang’an yanjiu* 17世紀蒙古編年史與蒙古文書檔案研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2006), 111–13; Borjigidai Oyunbilig 烏云畢力格 and Kong Lingwei 孔令偉, “Lun ‘wu se si fan’ de lai yuan ji qi nei han” 論“五色四藩”的來源及其內涵, *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究, no. 2 (2016): 85–97.

with that plan being successfully implemented in the end.¹³ This material can also be found in the “Yuelin tiemu'er zhuan” 岳璘帖穆爾傳 in the *Yuan shi*,¹⁴ but it is unclear as to when exactly this happened. According to *Shengwu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄, when the spring clouds of the Jisi 己巳 year (1209) came “Genghis Khan’s reputation had spread far and wide, and fearing that the king of the Uighurs had killed the young prisoner sent by Qara Khitai, he made plans to return to Mongolia.”¹⁵ We also see it stated, in the “Taizu ji” 太祖紀 in the *Yuan shi*, that when the spring clouds came in the Jisi year – the fourth year of the reign of the Taizu 太祖 Emperor (Genghis Khan) – “the Uighurs came to surrender.”¹⁶ In the eighth month of year 605 of the Islamic calendar (Spring of the Jisi year of the traditional Chinese calendar), the historical Persian text *Jāmi‘al-tawārikh* (the “Genghis Khan” Chapter of *An Anthology of History*) details the surrender of the Uighurs and the gifts which Genghis Khan gave to King Iduq-qut. There is no doubt that these three documents mutually corroborate each other. The aforementioned “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” also records that “the common people were led back to the Great Mongol Nation” in the Jisi year.¹⁷ Accordingly, some scholars have pointed out that, since Bilga speaks of the “Great Mongolian Nation,” it must mean that, by this time, this appellation was already in use.¹⁸

But, commentators have neglected the crucial issue of the date of the writing of “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan.” It is well established that the author Ouyang Xuan became a presented scholar (*jinsi* 進士) in the second year of the Yanyou 延祐 era of the Yuan Emperor Ayurbarwada Buyantu Khan (1315). Furthermore, he became an edict attendant (*daizhi* 待制) of the Hanlin Academy (*Hanlin yuan* 翰林院) in the first year of the Zhihe 致和 era of the Yuan Emperor Yesūn Temūr (1328), and he later became a compiler (*bianxiuguan* 編修官) of the Historiography Institute (*Guoshiyuan* 國史院).¹⁹ Although “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” which he wrote did not specify the specific eras of the “family stories,” it does go into detail regarding the good works performed by members of the Xie family. The inclusion of “graduated in the Dingmao

13 Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄, “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” 高昌偁氏家傳, in *Guizhai wenji* 圭齋文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 11.5b.

14 *Yuan shi* 元史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 124.3049–3050.

15 Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 and Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉, ed., *Shengwu qinzheng lu, xin jiaoben* 聖武親征錄 (新校本) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), 197.

16 *Yuan shi*, 1.14.

17 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao, *Nei beiguo er wai Zhongguo*, 2: 714.

18 *Ibid.*, 72.

19 For details about Ouyang Xuan, cf. *Yuan shi*, 182.4196–97.

丁卯 year (1327)²⁰ indicates that this work should have been completed no earlier than that. Therefore, we can assert that the so-called “Great Mongol Nation,” rather than having been adopted as the country’s official name prior to the Jisi year, was nothing more than a posthumous name given by Ouyang Xuan to the regime which ruled over Mongolia’s northern deserts in that era.

To sum up, there are three viewpoints regarding the time of the establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation”: in the Jiyou year, the Bingyin year, and the Jisi year. Neither the literary nor historical data on which any of these three views is based is completely credible. According to this, it would seem that the specific year in which this term was coined is still an open question.

3 The Xinwei Year Theory

There are various signs that Genghis Khan was initially crowned emperor at the headwaters of the Onon River, and, not long after this, determined to refer to his country as the “Great Mongol Nation.” Owing to a lack of historical data, the exact date of this appellation being coined is a mystery with the various speculations thus far made by scholars failing to completely convince anyone.

I have discovered a clear record of the establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation” in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 (The History of the Buddha). The book lists the ascension, reformation, and abdication of successive rulers and contains historical materials related to the reign of the Yuan Emperor Taizu, as follows:

In the Yichou 乙丑 year (1205), the Yuan Emperor Taizu conquered the Western Xia empire 西夏. The next year (1206), a meeting was held on the banks of the Onan River, the white standard with nine tails was hoisted, and he was embraced as the Khan and given the title Genghis Khan.

In the Xinwei 辛未 year (1211), the country started to become known as the “Great Mongol Nation.”

In the Renshen 壬申 year (1212), the Mongolian army reached Yanjing 燕京 (modern day Beijing) and, in the eighth month of that year, they attacked the city.

In the Jiaxu 甲戌 year (1214), the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) moved their capital to Bianjing 汴京 (modern day Kaifeng 開封) and sued for peace

20 Ouyang Xuan, “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan,” 11.12b.

with the Mongolians. Not long after Zhang Zhi 張智, the commander of the Jinzhou 錦州 army, surrendered the city, he led a revolt and proclaim himself the King of Liaoxi 遼西王. In the year of Da'an 大安, the Mongolian army once again quelled the rebellion. The city of Yanjing was captured.

In the eighth month of the Yihai 乙亥 year (1215), Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty. That year Mongolian soldiers captured Tongguan 潼關 (the northern part of modern day Shaanxi 陝西 province's Tongguan county).

In the Renwu 壬午 year (1222), Mongolian soldiers came from Uighur and attacked the Western Xia empire.

In the spring of the Bingxu 丙戌 year (1226), Genghis Khan arrived in the lands of the Western Xia empire. Within a year, he had conquered all the cities, and, by the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of the Dinghai 丁亥 year (1227) had destroyed the regime.²¹

All seven of the above quotations are from the “Jinling biao” 金陵表 in *Zhizheng jinling xinzhì* 至正金陵新志. These chronicles contain content such as “the Great Yuan Emperor Taizu’s ascension of the throne” in the Bingyin year, the “establishment of the great dynasty” in the Xinwei year, the “Yuan siege of Yanjing” in the Renshen year, the “Fall of Yanjing to the Yuan” in the Yihai year, and the “Yuan capture of western Xia empire from the Uighur” in the Renwu year.²² Cao Jincheng 曹金成 is of the opinion that the four quotations referencing the Xinwei, Renshen, Yihai, and Renwu years were adapted from the *Dajin guo zhi* 大金國志, and, on account of having been copied from Li Xinchuan’s 李心傳 (1167–1244) work *Dada kuansai* 鞑靼款塞,²³ the Xinwei year quote about the founding of a great empire is of dubious credibility.²⁴ Although the *Fozu lidai tongzai* also uses materials which are found in the *Dajin guo zhi*, most of the historical materials relating to the “Great Mongol Nation” are independent of each other.

The above quote referencing the Yichou year is consistent with the Bingyin year material about the first year of Taizu’s rule in the “Taizu ji” in the

21 Shi Nianchang 釋念常, *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 77: 413b–415a.

22 *Zhizheng jinling xinzhì* 至正金陵新志, ed. Zhang Xuan 張鉉, Jiqinglu Ruxue Lishui-zhouxue yuankeben 集慶路儒學溧水州學元刻本, 3: 96a, 98a, 98b, 100b.

23 Li Xinchuan 李心傳, *Jiyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記, annot. Xu Gui 徐規 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 2: 19.847–52.

24 Cao Jincheng, “Da Menggu guo’ guohao chuangujian shijian zai jiantao,” 219–68.

Yuan shi.²⁵ As noted above, according to the *Fozu lidai tongzai*, Ghenghis Khan conquered all the lands of the Western Xia empire in the Bingxu year.

However, in the “Taizu ji,” it is recorded that, in the 22nd year of Taizu’s reign, on the Jichou 己丑 day of the Seventh month of the Dinghai year: “Genghis Khan died in Sa’ari Ke’er Qala’utu’s camp.”²⁶ As a result, it seems that the two books are markedly different regarding the year of Genghis Khan’s birth and the place of his death.²⁷ It is not a question of right and wrong so much as contradictions caused early in the Yuan dynasty by the different calendars and different methods of marking time which were used when compiling the “Veritable Record of Emperor Taizu.” In other words, the theory provided in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* is, by no means, manufactured out of thin air. In fact, in the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄 it is recorded that: “In the Dinghai year (1227), Genghis Khan conquered the Western Xia empire and returned to his base camp.”²⁸ This is completely consistent with content from the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. Third, although the *Fozu lidai tongzai* content regarding the Jiayu year is unique, the “Taizu ji” reports that in the Jiayu year – the ninth year of the reign of the Emperor Taizu – “Zhang Jing 張鯨, the military commander of Jinzhou, killed the state’s commissioner (*jie du shi* 節度使), named himself the ‘Linhai King’ 臨海王, and sent messengers to express his allegiance to Genghis Khan.” In the following year, when Zhang Jing (d. 1215) plotted to betray and murder him, “Zhang Jing’s younger brother Zhang Zhi once again came to occupy Jinzhou, arrogantly calling him the ‘Han Xing Emperor’ 漢興皇帝, and he replaced the term ‘Yuan dynasty’ with ‘Xinglong’ 興龍.”²⁹ These quotes basically corroborate the content of the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. Although they are not identical, the deeds of Emperor Taizu as recorded in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* are the same as the deeds recorded in the *Yuan shi*. There are also other historical texts which are similar to the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu*.

It is well established that the *Yuan shi* was compiled early during the reign of the Ming Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) and that part of its content was obtained from extant copies of the *Yuan shilu* 元實錄. Therefore, the “Taizu ji” should correspond with the *Taizu shilu* 太祖實錄 that was completed

25 *Yuan shi*, 1.13.

26 *Ibid.*, 1.25.

27 The issue of Genghis Khan’s birthday and whether he died at age 60 or at age 66 is still controversial. Cf. Zhou Qingshu 周清澍, “Chengjisi Han shengnian kao” 成吉思汗生年考, in *Yuanmeng shizha* 元蒙史札 (Hohhot: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 2001), 411–28.

28 Jia Jingyan and Chen Xiaowei, *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, 304–5.

29 *Yuan shi*, 1.18.

in the tenth month of the seventh year of the Dade 大德 era (1303).³⁰ As for the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu*, it was probably written during the period of the Emperor Shizu of Yuan 元世祖 (Kublai Khan), and should be considered a manuscript version of the *shilu* of both Taizu and Taizong 太宗 (Ögedei Khan, r. 1229–1241).³¹ Using historical sources to make further analysis and comparison, it is likely that the aforementioned contents from the *Fozu lidai tongzai* were copied from the original court archives related to the *Taizu shilu*. As for the *Fozu lidai tongzai*, in the third month of the fourth year of the Zhizheng 至正 era (1344) of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong 惠宗 (r. 1333–1370), Jue An's 覺岸 (b. 1286) "Huating meiwu chang chanshi benzhuang tongzai xu" 華亭梅屋常禪師本傳通載序 describes the process of writing the book as: "In the summer of the third year of the Zhizhi 至治 era (1323), Shi Nianchang 釋念常 was called up to the capital city of Dadu 大都 (present day Beijing), to write the Buddhist sutras in golden characters. He decided to imitate the style of Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 and write a history of the Buddha, the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. While writing he often discussed the classics with scholars from the Hanlin Academy."³² Among these scholars was the Hanlin academician and compiler in the Historiography Institute Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348) with whom Shi Nianchang had maintained a long professional relationship.³³ Through this channel, it would have been possible to make inquiries into some of the rare stories about Genghis Khan and the founding of his nation.

In summary, the author of the *Fozu lidai tongzai* – which was written in the Zhizheng era of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong – made the specific choice to include the dates of Genghis Khan's ascension to power, conquest of enemies, coining of a national name, and death. It clearly shares source material with both the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu* and the *Yuan shi*. It refers to the *Taizu shilu* or related manuscripts and records. It is most likely that – rather than personally excerpting the materials which were compiled into his book – the author Shi Nianchang obtained these via scholars from the Hanlin Academy working at the Historiography Institute. There are many examples of such

30 Ibid., 21.455. Cf. Chen Gaohua 陳高華, "Yuan shi zuanxiukao" 《元史》纂修考, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 4 (1990): 115–130.

31 Wang Guowei 王國維, "Shengwu qinzheng lu jiaozhu xu" 聖武親征錄校注序, in *Wang Guowei quanji*, 11: 409–11; Yekeminggadai Irinchin 亦鄰真, "Monacha shan yu jinze" 莫那察山與《金冊》, *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域歷史語言研究集刊 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2009), 2: 23–24.

32 Jue An 覺岸, "Huating meiwu chang chanshi benzhuang tongzai xu" 華亭梅屋常禪師本傳通載序, in *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, Dazheng cangben 大正藏本, 3.

33 Shi Nianchang, *Fozu lidai tongzai*, 3b–4a.

scholarly exchange in the Yuan dynasty. In the first year of the Zhizheng era of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong (1341), Chen Jing 陳桎 (fl. 1361) wrote a chronicle-style history book *Tongjian xubian* 通鑿續編. In section 19 of this book, it is written that in the second year of the Kaixi 開禧 era (1206) of the Reign of the Song Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (r. 1194–1224), “Genghis Khan became emperor at the Onon River” and in section 21, in the third year of the Baoqing 寶慶 era (1227) of the Reign of the Song Emperor Lizong 理宗 (r. 1224–1264) “Genghis Khan died at Liupan 六盤.”³⁴ On account of the deeds of Genghis Khan being described in great detail for the interval between these two events, it is quite likely that the original source text for this may have been the 1303 *Taizu shilu*. Of the officials who are associated with the book’s author Chen Jing, it is most likely that materials were provided by the Hanlin academician and edict attendant Zhou Boqi 周伯琦 (1298–1369) as – owing to his special position in the Hanlin Academy – he had the opportunity to read Yuan court records.³⁵ Of Yuan dynasty records which were preserved by the court, only a few select documents emerged into general circulation among the stories known to the common people near the end of the dynasty, but the Mongolian historical materials contained in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* and *Tongjian xubian* have a clear relationship with the *Taizu shilu*.

The aforementioned historical events relating to the Yuan Emperor Taizu as described in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* are clearly from the *Taizu shilu*. For example, when it says that, in the Xinwei year “Da Menggu guohao shi jian” 大蒙古國號始建, we have an obvious chronological clue regarding when the Yuan dynasty was founded. If we pay careful attention, we can also see similar evidence in Song dynasty documents. In the *Jiyan yan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記, the prosperity of Mongolia during the Jin dynasty is described as follows:

When the Jin dynasty was strong, the Tatars paid an annual tribute, and the government sent envoys to the northeast to govern. After King Wei 衛王 (1209–1213) ascended the throne, Temujin 忒沒貞 began to rebel and claimed the title “Emperor Genghis.” The northern area of the lands ruled by the Jin dynasty (Shandong 山東, Hebei 河北, and Hedong 河東) were ravaged and occupied by Temujin. After the Tatars occupied the Jin empire, they married women from Khitan and Han’er, had mixed blood children, and learned to eat cooked food. At this time, the Tatars called

34 Chen Jing 陳桎, *Tongjian xubian* 通鑿續編, Yuan keben 元刻本, 19–21: 7a–12a.

35 Cf. Huang Shijian 黃時鑿, “*Tongjian xubian* Menggu shiliao kaosuo” 《通鑿續編》蒙古史料考索, in *Huang Shijian wenji* 黃時鑿文集 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2011), 1: 136–37.

themselves the “Great Mongol Nation” and the officials of the border counties called them “Mongols and Tatars” (*meng da* 蒙韃).³⁶

Where the text says “the Tatars occupied the Jin empire,” it is referring specifically to an event which took place in the fourth month of the third year of the Da’an 大安 era (1211) as recorded in the “Weishaowang ji” 衛紹王紀 in the *Jin shi* 金史 “Genghis Khan, the Great Yuan Emperor Taizu, went forth to conquer the Jin dynasty”³⁷ and the *Yuan shi* as “Genghis Khan brought his own troops south to attack the Jin dynasty, defeated the Jin general Ding Xue 定薛 at Yehuling 野狐嶺, and occupied the counties of Dashuiluan 大水灤 and Fengli 豐利” in the second month of the sixth year of the reign of the Yuan Emperor Taizu (1212).³⁸ This can only mean that the Xinwei year was the year in which the Tatar people founded the “Great Mongol Nation.”

Other than giving his country the appellation the “Great Mongol Nation,” nothing else particularly unusual happened in the Xinwei year. In fact, according to the *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, that year was “the year Genghis Khan vowed to march south and conquer the Jin dynasty”³⁹ and was the beginning of what is known as the Mongolian conquest of the Jin. Two conclusions can be drawn about the significance of this move. First, repeatedly attacking the Mongolian grasslands, the Jin had tried to subdue the tribes and make them vassals, but had only inspired hatred towards themselves. We see this in the *Mengda beilu* 蒙韃備錄, which states: “the Jin Emperor Shizong 金世宗 (r. 1161–1189) ordered his men to go deep into the Tatar hinterland and destroy them. Every three years, he sent troops to kill the strongest of their men and decimate their people.”⁴⁰ As a result, revenge may have been one of the reasons behind Mongolia deciding to move southwards.⁴¹ Second, from a strategic perspective, Genghis Khan’s unification of the Mongolian Plateau and the success of his crusade against the Jin dynasty not only meant that he would be able to occupy all of the vast Central Plains area north of the Yellow River, but would also lay

36 Li Xinchuan, *Jiyan yan yilai chaoye zaji*, 19, 848–52.

37 *Jin shi* 金史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 13, 293.

38 *Yuan shi*, 1.15.

39 Jia Jingyan and Chen Xiaowei, *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, 212.

40 Zhao Gong, *Mengda beilu*, 11: 351.

41 Shu Zhenbang 舒振邦, “Chengjisi Han nanzheng de xingzhi he zuoyong” 成吉思汗南征的性質和作用, in *Zhongguo Menggu shixuehui lunwen xuanji* 中國蒙古史學會論文選集, ed. Zhongguo Menggu shixuehui 中國蒙古史學會 (Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1980), 151–64; Buyandelger 寶音德力根, “Chengjisi Han jianguo qian de Jin yu Menggu zhubu” 成吉思汗建國前的金與蒙古諸部, *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 內蒙古社會科學, no. 4 (1990): 58–61.

a solid foundation for the demise of the Southern Song dynasty and the future establishment of the Yuan dynasty.⁴²

The southern expedition in the Xinwei year was very important. Other than the two points mentioned above, the Gengchen 庚辰 year (1220) saw Yelü Chucai's 耶律楚材 (1190–1244) push west to conquer the western regions. The *Xizheng Gengwu yuanli* 西征庚午元曆 produced on the way used astrology to explain how this was significant from the perspective of the mandate of heaven.⁴³ Quoting the *Gengwu yuanli*, the *Yuan shi* said: “The imperial army marched south to fight the Jin and began the task of bringing the world under their control.”⁴⁴ This act of “bringing the world under their control” refers to the events of the twelfth year of the reign of the Taizu Emperor (1217) when the expedition by Mu Huali 木華黎 (1170–1223) in the eighth month of the Dingchou 丁丑 year “led to the establishment of a province (*xingsheng* 行省, the branch secretariats of the Yuan dynasty) in the Yan 燕 area, and the plan to conquer the Central Plains.”⁴⁵ That is to say “the Yuan Emperor Taizu established the province of Dafanfu 大藩府 in Yan specifically to control the Central Plains.”⁴⁶ These remarks by Yelü Chucai come after a decade of subjugating the Jin, and it is clear that he regards this move as endorsed by heaven.

In summary, throughout the political history of the northern dynasties, it was fairly common for the official title of the established regime to become the name of the country as a whole (such as “Great Turk” or “Great Khitan”). But, according to the relevant literature, these terms were originally used primarily in diplomatic situations. For example, in the “Tujue zhuan” 突厥傳 chapter of *Sui shu* 隋書, the envoy which the Turkic leader Ishbara Qaghan (r. 581–587) sent to the emperor of the Sui dynasty (581–618) was referred to as the “Great Turk.”⁴⁷ Also, the “Jin Gaozu ji” 晉高祖紀 chapter of *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 contains an imperial order written by the Liao Emperor Taizong 遼太宗 (r. 927–947) which, in establishing Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭 (892–942) as the emperor of the Jin dynasty, starts with “On the twelfth day of the eleventh month of the ninth year of the Tianxian 天顯 era (Bingshen 丙申 year, 934) of the Liao Emperor Taizong, the Great Khitan Emperor said ...”⁴⁸ Then,

42 Cf. Shu Zhenbang, “Chengjisi Han nanzheng de xingzhi he zuoyong,” 151–64.

43 Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材, *Zhanran jushi wenji* 湛然居士文集, annot. Xie Fang 謝方 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186.

44 *Yuan shi*, 52.1119.

45 *Ibid.*, 119.2932.

46 Ma Zuchang 馬祖常, *Ma Shitian wenji* 馬石田文集, in *Yuanren wenji zhenben congkan* 元人文集珍本叢刊, 6: 631.

47 *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 84.1868.

48 *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 75.986.

based on the above, we can conclude that, in the years prior to and just after 1200, Genghis Khan was gradually unifying the Mongolian Plateau. Prior to his eventually establishing the Mongolian Khanate in 1206, he began in the east from the Hulunbuir grasslands and – marking the formation of the Mongolian people – brought the “tent dwellers” of the vast lands to the west of the Altai Mountains under his control and led to “Mongolia” becoming a collective name for the grasslands’ various tribes.⁴⁹ However, at this time, the country’s official name had not yet been announced and it was referred to (both in Central Plains documents and those from later periods) as just “the great dynasty.”⁵⁰ However, by 1211, when the Mongolians began their subjugation of the Jin, this emerging regime, which – prior to that point had always been a Jin vassal – began to give itself a national status equal to that of the Jin by adopting a national name. As the “Great Mongol Nation,” it then proceeded to declare war on the Jin. In other words, just like “Great Turk” and “Great Khitan,” the “Great Mongol Nation” was originally a clan name which, in use by outsiders, eventually became the name of a state.

Translated by Marian Rosenberg

-
- 49 See Yekeminggadai Irinchin 亦鄰真, “Chengjisi Han yu Menggu minzu gongtongti de xingcheng” 成吉思汗與蒙古民族共同體的形成, in *Yekeminggadai Irinchin Menggu xue wenji* 亦鄰真蒙古學文集 (Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 2001), 387–426.
- 50 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao proposed that “Great Dynasty,” as the appellation which the Mongolian regime used in Han region, is actually an abbreviated translation of the Mongolian phrase “Yeke Monggol Ulus.” Coins, administrative documents, and stone carvings from that era often feature the phrase “Great Dynasty” (*Da chao* 大朝), and it seems to be the official name of the country prior to Kublai Khan establishing the Yuan dynasty. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 (1924–1990) is of the opinion that the original meaning of the “Great Dynasty” was the “Holy Dynasty” or “present dynasty” and was actually a term of respect rather than a term for a specific country. Cf. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏, “Cheng ‘Dachao’ 稱 ‘大朝’”, in *Minzu lishi wenhua cuiyao* 民族歷史文化萃要 (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), 62–63. As is recorded in *Jingshi dadian* 經世大典, the Yuan Emperor Shizu directly changed the name of the country from the Great Mongol State to the Great Yuan dynasty. In the Chinese language, the “Great Dynasty” is never mentioned. A version of Han Daozhao’s 韓道昭 *Gaibing wuyin jiyun* 改並五音集韻, which was published in 1289, has, “Zhiyuan xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 至元新雕改並五音集韻, “Dayuan xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 大元新雕改並五音集韻 and “Dachao xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 大朝新雕改並五音集韻 where it is obvious that the “Dachao” actually refers to the “Yuan dynasty” and not specifically to the “Great Mongol State.”

Works Cited

- Borjigidai, Oyunbilig 烏云畢力格 and Kong Lingwei 孔令偉. "Lun 'wu se si fan' de laiyuan ji qi neihan" 論“五色四藩”的來源及其內涵. *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究, no. 2 (2016): 85–97.
- Buyandelger 寶音德力根. "Chengjisi Han jianguo qian de Jin yu Menggu zhubu" 成吉思汗建國前的金與蒙古諸部. *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 內蒙古社會科學, no. 4 (1990): 58–61.
- Cao, Jincheng 曹金成. "Da Menggu guo' guohao chuangujian shijian zai jiantao" "大蒙古國" 國號創建時間再檢討. *Wenshi* 文史, no. 2 (2020): 219–230.
- Chen, Dezhi 陳得芝. "Guanyu Yuanchao de guohao, niandai yu jiangyu wenti" 關於元朝的國號、年代與疆域問題. *Beifang minzu daxue xuebao* 北方民族大學學報, no. 3 (2009): 5–14.
- Chen, Gaohua 陳高華. "Yuan shi zuanxiukao" 《元史》纂修考. *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 4 (1990): 115–130.
- Chen, Jing 陳桎. *Tongjian xubian* 通鑑續編. Yuan keben 元刻本.
- Han, Rulin 韓儒林, ed. *Yuanchao shi, xiuding ben* 元朝史(修訂本). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008.
- Hexigtaoktaog 賀希格陶七陶. "Wuse siyi' kao" "五色四夷" 考. *Zhongyang minzu xueyuan xuebao* 中央民族學院學報, no. 4 (1986): 48–54.
- Hsiao, Ch'i-ch'ing 蕭啟慶. *Nei beiguó er wai Zhongguó – Mengyuan shi yanjiu* 內北國而外中國—蒙元史研究. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007.
- Huang, Shijian 黃時鑒. *Huang Shijian wenji* 黃時鑒文集. Volume 1. Shanghai: Zhongxi shuji, 2011.
- Irinchin, Yekeminggadai 亦鄰真. "Monacha shan yu jince" 莫那察山與《金冊》. *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域歷史語言研究集刊, 2: 21–24. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2009.
- Irinchin, Yekeminggadai 亦鄰真. *Yekeminggadai Irinchin Menggu xue wenji* 亦鄰真蒙古學文集. Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 2001.
- Jia, Jingyan 賈敬顏. *Minzu lishi wenhua cuiyao* 民族歷史文化萃要. Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990.
- Jia, Jingyan 賈敬顏 and Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉, ed. *Shengwu qinzheng lu, xin jiaoben* 聖武親征錄(新校本). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020.
- Jin shi* 金史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.
- Jiawudai shi* 舊五代史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976.
- Jue An 覺岸. "Huating meiwu chang chanshi benzhuantongzai xu" 華亭梅屋常禪師本傳通載序. In *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, Dazheng cangben 大正藏本.
- Kim, Hodong 金浩東. "Menggu diguo yu 'Dayuan'" 蒙古帝國與“大元”. In *Qinghua Yuan shi* 清華元史, edited by Yao Dali 姚大力, 1: 3–32. Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2013.

- Li, Xinchuan 李心傳. *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記. Annotated by Xu Gui 徐規. Volume 2. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000.
- Ma, Zuchang 馬祖常. *Ma Shitian wenji* 馬石田文集. In *Yuanren wenji zhenben congkan* 元人文集珍本叢刊.
- Mostaert, Antoine and Francis W. Cleaves. "Trois Documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952): 419–506.
- Ouyang, Xuan 歐陽玄. *Guizhai wenji* 圭齋文集. *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊.
- Shi, Nianchang 釋念常. *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載. In *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998.
- Shu, Zhenbang 舒振邦. "Chengjisi Han nanzheng de xingzhi he zuoyong" 成吉思汗南征的性質和作用. In *Zhongguo menggu shixuehui lunwen xuanji* 中國蒙古史學會論文選集, edited by Zhongguo Menggu shixuehui 中國蒙古史學會, 151–64. Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1980.
- Siduryu 希都日古. *Shiqi shiji Menggu biannianshi yu Mengguwen wenshu dang'an yanjiu* 17世紀蒙古編年史與蒙古文書檔案研究. Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2006.
- Sui Shu* 隋書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973.
- Ulaan, Borjigjin. *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu* 《蒙古源流》研究. Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2000.
- Wang, Guowei 王國維. *Wang Guowei quanji* 王國維全集. Volume 11. Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009.
- Wang, Shumin 王樹民. *Nian'er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984.
- Wang, Yun 王惲. *Qiu Jian xiansheng daquan wenji* 秋澗先生大全文集. *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊.
- Xie, Zaishan 謝再善. "Guanyu Halaqidan Mengguren seshang ji Yuanchao guohao laili wenti" 關於哈刺契丹蒙古人色尚及元朝國號來歷問題. *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, April 26, 1956.
- Yelü, Chucai 耶律楚材. *Zhanran jushi wenji* 湛然居士文集. Annotated by Xie Fang 謝方. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
- Yuan shi* 元史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976.
- Zhao, Gong 趙珙. *Mengda beilu* 蒙鞑備錄. In *Wang Guowei quanji* 王國維全集, 11: 333–363. Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009.
- Zhizheng jinling xinshi* 至正金陵新志. Edited by Zhang Xuan 張鉉. Jiqinglu Ruxue Lishuizhouxue yuankeben 集慶路儒學溧水州學元刻本.
- Zhou, Liangxiao 周良霄 and Gu Juying 顧菊英. *Yuan shi* 元史. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003.
- Zhou, Qingshu 周清澍. *Yuanmeng shizha* 元蒙史札. Hohhot: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 2001.