MONGOLIAN TRIBUTARY PRACTICES OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the Mongolian empires of the thirteenth century can be divided into three periods. The first period, which roughly encompasses the political life of Činggis Qan (1206–1227), is the period of the great tribal confederation of which the tribe of Činggis formed the central and ruling nucleus. During this period the confederation grew by the continuous inclusion of new nomadic tribes, Mongolian and Turkic, into an ever greater confederation. The armies of Činggis invaded China, Central Asia and Persia, reaching the banks of the Indus River. However, no permanent occupation of territory resulted, for once the enemy had been destroyed, the invaders retreated back into the steppe. The sedentary societies were regarded as sources of booty and technical specialists such as artisans. As yet, the Mongols did not conceive of any permanent exploitation of the conquered sedentary societies.

The second period begins, more or less, with the destruction of the Chin Empire in North China (1234). For the first time, the Mongols developed concepts of permanent exploitation of conquered territory. Lacking any organized state power for centralized administration, the Mongolian ruler detached whole provinces from the conquered territories and turned them over to members of the ruling Mongolian nobility as their personal appanages. At first, the Mongols thought not in terms of territory, but in terms of people; the ruler gave to the nobility not territory but classes of people; thus, subjection was personal rather than territorial. However, as the attached peoples of the conquered sedentary societies were permanently settled within a given area, this personal thinking soon became transformed into territorial thinking. The second period

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may be considered a period when the ruling Mongols attempted to extend the principles of nomadic confederation to the conquered sedentary areas. Such was the case not only in China, but in Central Asia (the ulus of Čayatai), and in the Dāst-i Qipčaq (the ulus of Joči) as well. This was a period of great confusion, for underneath the Mongolian overlay, the political and social principles of the conquered sedentary societies continued to operate. In China, the bureaucracy still continued to function, and in Central Asia, the Khwarazmian political system still operated in the oases of that region. It was during this period that the Mongols made their final great conquests. China was occupied down to the banks of the Huai River (historically, the conquest of the Southern Sung and the other Far Eastern ventures form a sort of anti-climax). Persia and Mesopotamia were conquered by Hūlegū, and the Il-khanate was established. Russia and the Qipčaq were reduced, and the realm of the Golden Horde was established.

During this second period, the bonds between the component parts of the Mongolian Empire weakened. The khaghanate in China and Mongolia, the ulus of Čayatai in Central Asia, the Golden Horde in the Qipčaq and Russia, and the Il-khanate in Persia each developed into a separate, independent political entity. Thus the time of the next great political transition varied from place to place.

We can think of the third period as one of the resurrection of the traditional state power of the sedentary societies on a grand scale. This period began in China with the rise to power of Qubilai (1260), and in Persia with the enthronement of Ghazan (1294). It never came about in any other ulus, for there a tradition of absolute state power was wanting. The motives for this resurrection of state power sprang not only from a consciousness of the failure of the policy of the extension of the principles of nomadic confederation onto the sedentary societies, and from a desire to overcome the confusion and chaos thus produced, but also from a realization by the ruling Mongols that the traditional state of the conquered sedentary society provided them with a means of power that nomadic confederation could never give them. Partly, this new manner of thinking was brought about by a gradual alienation from the steppe. The civil war between Arī Bēge, who dominated Mongolia, and Qubilai, whose center of power was China, further increased the dependence of the latter on China. Likewise, the continuing hostility of the houses of Čayatai and Joči left the Il-khans with Persia and Mesopotamia as their centers of power. The resurrection of state power not only provided the Mongolian rulers of China and Persia with new means of exploitation, but gave their rule a stability which heretofore it had not enjoyed.

The establishment of state power did not result in the ruling Mongols’ losing their identity and fusing into the native ruling classes. No real Sinicization or Persianization took place. If we take China as an example, we can describe the process as follows: In China the ruling class traditionally consisted of three segments: the gentry (i.e. the land-owners associated with the economic center of power located in Central and South China), the bureaucracy (associated with the political center of power in North China), and the imperial family. The Mongols made no attempt to become a part of the Chinese gentry, nor did they attempt to usurp the property rights of the Chinese gentry (particularly after 1260). In their conquest of South China, they explicitly ordered the invaders to respect all property rights. On the other hand, the traditional Chinese bureaucracy was re-established with greater and more absolute powers than ever before. Mongolian elements were grafted onto this structure, giving it yet more strength and power. Its local basis remained Chinese, but the top was largely Mongolian (or foreign). Between the base and the top was established an intermediary structure (the various “mobile” [hsing