

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Courtly Encounters along the Silk Roads: Diplomats, Diplomatic Gifts and Symbolic Competitions in the Mongol Eurasia

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Abstract

The studies of Mongol diplomacy have been thriving in recent years partly owing to the prevalence of transnational and global history. Scholarly fields like the relations of the Mongol empire with its massive Eurasian neighbors and the internal relations of the Mongol *Uluses* have been examined in an unprecedented way. By contrast, the issue of diplomatic gifts in the Mongol diplomacy is much less discussed especially from a Eurasian scale. One of the main premises that leads to such a deficiency in scholarly attention is that the Mongols have long been held to perform non-negotiation diplomacy; therefore, not only the Mongols would not prepare gifts for their counterparts, but also all the gifts from their counterparts would be regarded exclusively as tributes and lost their original meanings of reciprocity. By jointly using methodologies such as courtly encounters, symbolic communication, and comparative approach, this dissertation attempts to revisit the Mongol protocols and practices of diplomacy and diplomatic gifts based on the various cases of courtly encountering across the Mongol Eurasia and reveal the symbolic competitions between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts behind these diplomatic engagements.

This dissertation is not aimed to provide a holistic overview of the Mongol diplomacy, yet it indeed has a broad perspective both temporally and spatially. The temporal framework is set between the thirteenth century and the fifteenth century to include the Timurid period, therefore the Mongol diplomacy both before and after the Islamization will be discussed. Spatially speaking, although the Mongol Imperial courts in the east at Karakorum and Beijing are still the main focuses of the present study, it draws equal attention to the royal courts of the Mongol *uluses* in the west. This dissertation comprises five parts. The introduction addresses the current research status, sources, and methodology. Three main chapters deal with the foreign envoys in the Mongol imperial court, the Mongol envoys in the foreign royal court, and

the encountering experiences in the Islamic Mongol courts separately. The conclusion revisits the Mongol practices of diplomacy and exchanges of diplomatic gifts from a Eurasian perspective. In the bibliography, the primary sources and secondary literature are listed. The list of the rulers of the Mongol empire and its *Uluses* is prepared as an appendix to this dissertation.

This dissertation argues that in addition to the military battles, the Mongol rulers similarly valued the competitions in symbolic fields like diplomatic rituals and gifts, and they meticulously practiced a well-set protocol regarding the receiving and sending of diplomats and diplomatic gifts. The received wisdom regarding the Mongols, such as their greediness in demanding gifts, their mistreating of foreign envoys, and their clear-cut strategy of submission vis-à-vis devastation, certainly have their supporting evidence, are not necessarily the whole picture and should be reconsidered. As far as the role of diplomacy as statecraft is concerned, the Mongol diplomatic protocols and practices are essentially no alien to their predecessors or counterparts in Eurasia and beyond.

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Budapest is one of the most vibrant academic centers in the CEE region. ELTE, the leading Hungarian public university, has been renowned for its education and research in humanities for centuries. CEU, as a top English-taught international university in this region, has set the academic standards for high education in the CEE countries in many aspects. I am much honored to have a chance to accept the first-ranked graduate-level training in these two institutions. From there, I develop my scholarly interests in CEE and Inner Eurasia regions, in comparative history, and in interdisciplinary medieval studies, and learn to be a scholar with professional skills and good conscience.

In writing this dissertation, I have placed myself in debt to many scholars and specialists. Besides the names acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography, I would like to thank Prof. Patrick Geary, Prof. József Laszlovszky, and Prof. Katalin Szende for being the defense committees and Dr. Zsolt Szilágyi for being the external reader of my MA thesis at CEU. That

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Introduction

In 1245, on the eve of the First Council of Lyons, Innocent IV dispatched four diplomatic corps to the Mongols. One of them was led by the Dominican friar Ascelin of Lombardy. According to the records of his companion Simon of Saint-Quentin, Ascelin of Lombardy ended in severe conflicts with the Mongols in the issues of giving gifts and other ritual matters. Ascelin of Lombardy failed his mission, he did not meet the Great Khan, and his own life was scarcely saved. The reasons for these gifts and ritual conflicts are however highly symbolic as well as illuminative. As stated by Ascelin of Lombardy himself, he had a justification to prepare no gifts for the Mongol Great Khan even at the first formal diplomatic contacts:

Assuredly, we bring nothing to him on behalf of the lord pope for it is not customary for him to send *exennia* to anyone, especially infidels and unknowns. In fact, it is better the case that his believing children, namely Christians, and also many infidels often send him presents and offer *exennia*.¹

Half a century later, on the other side of Eurasia, another episode of gifts and ritual conflicts took place between the Kingdom of Siam and the Yuan Dynasty. The Kingdom of Siam was located in nowadays Thailand, which had become a vassal state with the Yuan Dynasty since 1295. Four years later, the newly enthroned king of Siam wanted to renew the relationship with Yuan emperor. He sent envoys to Beijing and asked the emperor to give certain gifts to him as credentials of their vassal relationship. This negotiation is well recorded by *Yuan Shi* as follows:

大德三年，暹國主上言，其父在位時，朝廷嘗賜鞍轡、白馬及金縷衣，乞循舊例以賜。帝以丞相完澤答剌罕言「彼小國而賜以馬，恐其鄰忻都輩譏議朝廷」，仍賜金縷衣，不賜以馬。²

In the third year of Dade, the king of Siam sent a memorial to the Yuan emperor indicating that when his father was still on the throne, the emperor had granted

¹ This English translation is taken from Stephen Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 41, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020.

² [Lian Song] 宋濂, ed., 元史 [Yuan Shi: official history of the Yuan dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 4664. If not indicated specifically, all the Chinese sources used in this dissertation are translated by myself.

him with saddle and bridle, a white horse, and *nasij* (a kind of brocade woven of gold and silk threads). Now he supplicated the emperor to grant him the same package following the previous example. The grand councilor of the Yuan Dynasty Wanze Tarkhan suggested that Siam is a small country and it is not proper to grant it with horses in case that its Indian neighbors would be sneering at it. The emperor took the advice and granted the king only with *nasij* instead of a horse.

These two sources serve well for illustrating the complex feature of gifts in the transcultural diplomatic contacts between the Mongols and their counterparts, here, the highest spiritual leader of the Christendom and the king of a minor polity in Southeastern Asia separately. These gifts were endowed with distinctive symbolic meanings by all the parties involved in the negotiation. For Ascelin of Lombardy, one of the first papal envoys, the Mongols are infidels and savages, and not deserved to obtain gifts from the Pope as equivalent. The king of Siam, however, wanted to articulate his vassal status by obtaining the same gifts package from the Yuan emperors as his late father did. The responses from the Mongols in the two cases also clearly show that the Mongols had a protocol to receive and give gifts. The gifts during the first diplomatic contact are valued by them and gift-giving is considered from a wide geopolitical context to display and maintain orders. Therefore, Ascelin of Lombardy raised rages of the Mongol governor in West Asia, and the king of Siam only obtained brocades instead of horses for its relatively modest rank in the Mongol diplomatic system. These courtly encounters were never just a process of exchange of diplomatic messages, but should also be considered as an occasion of symbolic completions among the Eurasian political powers.

This dissertation aims to investigate these symbolic competitions in the gifts and ritual matters experienced by envoys in their courtly encounters across Mongol Eurasia. Challenging the traditional scholarship stressing the intransigent Mongolian ideology of worldly military conquest, this dissertation argues the Mongols equally valued the competitions in symbolic matters in gift-giving and court rituals during the diplomatic encounters. The Mongols practiced a well-set protocol regarding the reception of foreign envoys and their gifts in the

imperial court that belongs to the centuries-long Central Eurasian court traditions. Likewise, the Mongols had a full-fledged procedure of selecting and appointing their envoys and not uncommonly of preparing gifts for foreign royal families. These transcultural diplomatic contacts were not always smooth and successful especially during the first ages of the Mongol empire when the mutual understandings between the Mongols and their counterparts were not well developed. Yet, with the expansion and consolidation of the empire especially after the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty, the Great Khan built an effective way to engage with his Asian vassals, the sibling Mongol Khans of the three western *uluses* (domains), and those countries beyond the Mongol world. As we will see, in the fourteenth century even the Supreme Pontiffs accepted that the gifts for the Mongol great khan are reasonable and useful. This dissertation will discuss both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the symbolic competitions between the Mongols and their contemporary polities during the courtly encounters. These symbolic competitions were not always initiated by the Mongols, yet the Mongols certainly belong to the ones who practiced them quite well.

The dissertation includes an introduction, three main chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction aims to situate the examined topic in wider contexts of academic discussions on the patterns of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, and the studies of diplomatic engagements as a domain of symbolic communication. The methodologies and sources used in the present studies will be also addressed in the introductory part. The main methodologies include transcultural encounters, symbolic communication, and comparative approach. The three main chapters will approach the symbolic competitions between the Mongols and their counterparts from three different yet connected perspectives: the experience of foreign envoys in the imperial court of Mongol Great Khan; the experience of Mongol envoys in the foreign royal courts; and the perceptions of the Mongol court culture in comparison, especially after the Islamization, by the contemporary Arabic, Latin and Chinese travelers and envoys.

Some explanations are necessary concerning the temporal and geographic framework of this dissertation. The time framework is roughly set between 1200 and 1500, from the rising of the Mongols in the early thirteenth century to the decline of the Timurid dynasty at the end of the fifteenth century. Timur, or Tamerlane, the founder of the Timurid dynasty, has a Turco-Mongol origin and obtained his legitimacy as the son-in-law of the Chingisid imperial family. The history of his dynasty is therefore by custom included in the history of the Mongol empire. The term of Eurasia or Mongol Eurasia, however, needs more clarifications. Generally, two main definitions have been attached to Eurasia. One of them regards Eurasia as the denomination of the whole continent containing both Europe and Asia in a broad sense. This definition and have been currently more or more widely accepted due to the influence of Global history and a holistic view on the historical development of the entire Eurasian continent is wanted.³ The other definition restricts Eurasia as the linking parts of the two individual continents, Europe and Asia. More specifically, it refers to the regions traditionally influenced by the Russians and their successors. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars tend to equal Eurasia with post-soviet space.⁴ In historical studies of the pre-modern world especially concerning the nomads, Central Eurasia has been quite widely used. This terminology was first elaborated by the renowned scholar Denis Sinor in the 1940s and 1950s. According to Sinor, “Central Eurasia” refers to the immense areas surrounded by Europe, the Semitic civilization, Iran, India, and China, which despite heterogeneity in natural, social and economic, linguistic, and cultural conditions, remains a convergent historical unit in the course of time, therefore presents a basic distinction with its sedentary neighbors.⁵ In this dissertation, the Mongol

³ For instance, a collect volume authored by leading scholars in Late Antiquity defines its research scope as “the Eurasian world stretching from Rome to China in the half-millennium between 250 and 750 CE”: Nicola Di Cosmo, Michael Maas, ed., *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250-750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xv.

⁴ See Mark Bassin, “Eurasia,” in Diana Mishkova and Balázs Trencsényi, ed., *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 210-232.

⁵ Denis Sinor, “Central Eurasia,” in Denis Sinor, ed., *Orientalism, and History*, 2nd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 93-119; reprinted in *Inner Asia and its Contacts with Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977).

Eurasia is defined as a historical region, which was ruled or influenced by the Mongols. The core of this region includes the Mongolian plateau, China, the Transoxiana, Iran, and the Lower Volga region. East Asia, Southeast Asia, Russia, some parts of Eastern and Southeast Europe, and some parts of the Middle East are their sphere of influence.

Connectedness, Mobility and Transcultural Contacts along the Silk Roads

To begin, a short historiographical review of the terminology of the Silk Roads may be necessary. As it is well known, the terms *Seidenstrasse* (Silk Road) and *Seidenstrassen* (Silk Roads) were first coined by the German geographer and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) in the 1870s. Von Richthofen used these terminologies in a very limited way both spatially and temporally. The singular form designates the overland route described by the Ancient Greek geographer Marinus of Tyre that links the Mediterranean and the borders of the land of silk; the plural form is applied to the routes both east and west of Pamirs that links imperial Rome and Han China.⁶ As a widely accepted academic concept, the popularity of the Silk Roads owes to the efforts of the German archaeologist Albert Herrmann (1886-1945) and the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) in the early twentieth century. They published their books on the Silk Roads in 1910 and 1938 separately, and the work of Hedin was translated into English just within two years. Sven Hedin witnessed an international fever of Silk Roads in his age and many European and Japanese adventurers came to China and excavated treasures in Xinjing. Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943) and Paul Pelliot (1878-1845), the great Orientalists in the twentieth century, were the representatives. The second stage period of fascination with the Silk Roads starts in the 1980s with geopolitical transformation

⁶ Daniel C. Waugh, "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads': Toward the Archaeology of a Concept," *The Silk Road* 5 (2007): 1-10.

background. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reform and opening-up policy adopted by the Chinese government made Central Eurasia accessible again for foreign tourists, merchants, and researchers. Meanwhile, the emergence of new historical approaches like the new world history or global history also contributes to the popularity of such a concept of intrinsic transnational nature. The Silk Roads, therefore, becomes a label and research framework not only for general public readers but also for specialists like policymakers and historians.⁷ A more recent revival of the Silk Road can be followed since 2013 when Chinese president Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia separately. The “Belt” is short for “Silk Road Economic Belt”, an overland route starting from northwest China by way of Central Asia to Russia and Europe. The “Road” is short for the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” which is an Indo-Pacific sea passage starting from south China by way of Southeast Asia to South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The impacts of this initiative on global politics remains to be evaluated, yet the booming of publications on the historical Silk Roads in recent years serve as good footnotes for the impulse from non-academic factors.⁸

The Silk Roads is never a pure academic invention yet tangled with the geopolitical transformations. Meanwhile, it has been understood in a more and more generic sense no matter in public or academic use. It became a label of Eurasian connectedness far beyond the temporal scope of late antiquity and the spatial framework of the overland Eurasian trading route. The classic question of singular or plural forms raised by the first generation of scholars seems to lose its relevance from our present perspective. The Silk Roads is never a single road or roads

⁷ See Alfred J. Andrea, “The Silk Road in World History: A Review Essay,” *Asian Review of World Histories* 2, no.1 (2014), 105-127; Szilvia Kovács and Márton Vér, “Mongols and the Silk Roads: An Overview,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 74, no. 1 (2021): 1–10.

⁸ Recent general historical surveys of the Silk Roads, see Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

but a network converged by numberless trading posts, episodic exchanges, and occasionally long-distance commerce. Some new trends in the Silk Roads studies are more worthy to inspect. The first trend is that the Silk Roads is no longer viewed as merely commercial routes, instead, the mobility and exchanges of personnel, objects, ideas, beliefs, arts, technologies, and more generally cultures along the Silk Roads have been examined from various perspectives. Susan Whitfield has been focusing on the life stories of personnel and objects along the Silk Road. She selects twelve individual biographies from Shipmaster, merchant, soldier, horseman, princess, courtesan, pilgrim, writer, officer, nun, widow, and artist and reveals how their daily lives were deeply involved in the Eurasian network.⁹ Through the ten stories of Steppe Earrings, Hellenistic glass bowl, hoards of Kushan coins, Amluk Dara stupa, Bactrian ewer, Khotanese plaque, the Blue Qur'an, Byzantine hunter silk, Chinese almanac, and an unknown slave, Whitfield furtherly presents an unbelievable colorful world of objects as well as the production, negotiation, and transformation of social relations surrounding them.¹⁰ Richard Foltz and Johan Elverskog have otherwise expanded our understandings of the religious encounters and dialogues among Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists along the Silk Roads. Their studies show that the beliefs along the Silk Road were much more flexible and adaptive than what had been established, both in the cross-cultural understandings and in accordance with the dogmas of the dominant system.¹¹ James A. Millward points out the Silk Road is also a road of arts, tales and folklore, musical instruments, visual arts, and decorative arts were exchanged and recreated among different cultures.¹²

⁹ Susan Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, Second Edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Susan Whitfield, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).

¹¹ Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization*, Second Edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹² Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*, 87-109.

The second notable trend is that the scholarly research interests have been somehow partially shifted from the historical players on the two sides of the Silk Roads to the intermediaries in between, that is, from China in the East and Rome-Byzantine and other Mediterranean powers in the West to the Central Eurasian nomadic powers. The significant role of the Mongols and their empire in facilitating the transcontinental mobilization and trans-civilizational exchanges has been particularly rehabilitated. David Christian highlights the steppe dimension of the Silk Roads. He argues that the exchange of goods, technologies, and ideas took place not only between the sedentary societies at the ends of the Silk Roads but also between the pastoralists and agrarian worlds. The pastoralists played a critical and indispensable role in the function of such a system.¹³ Janet L. Abu-Lughod turns her attention to the world system of the thirteenth century. According to her, the system was not dominated by European hegemony but contributed by the Central Eurasian nomads like the Mongols. The Mongols united most parts of the central Eurasian world and directly bridged Europe and China for the first time in the history of humankind, thus it created a favorite environment, which is often named *Pax Mongolica*, for land transit with less risk and lower costs.¹⁴ More recent studies incline to underline the active role of Mongol rulers and elites in operating and sustaining the Silk Roads. In a freshly published collected volume, Michal Biran and her colleagues remark that the Mongol period marked a new stage in the history of the Silk Roads both in volume and scope. The Mongols could mobilize the human, material, and spiritual sources efficiently and had a pragmatic attitude to learn from their subjects, neighbors, visitors, and enemies in both military and civil fields. Thus, the Silk Roads was not only geographically massively expanded under their rule to link the continental and maritime world, but the

¹³ David Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads: The Silk Roads in World History," *Journal of World History* 11, no.1 (2000): 1-26.

¹⁴ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 153-184.

mobility of people, ideas, and artifacts across Eurasia also reached in an unprecedented way.¹⁵

The pivotal role of the Mongols and their empire in the history of Silk Roads is also emphasized by the participants of the international conference titled *The Mongols and the Silk Roads* at University of Szeged of Hungary in 2018.¹⁶

A third notable trend is that the role of royal courts in Medieval Eurasian history has been intensively researched and well-acknowledged in recent decades, which provides promising prospects for us to examine the Mongol court from a broad comparative perspective.

¹⁷ The forming of court history as an academic field very much owes to the contributions of the Jewish German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990). In his seminal work on court society published in 1969, which originated from his habilitation thesis in 1933, Elias provides a socio-political framework on the formation of the court society. His main thesis, as summarized by Jeroen Duindam, is a certain syllogism: 1) the court is an arena of almost entirely worldly status competition, with ceremony and rank as largely secular pre-occupations; 2) the ruler balanced competing groups at court through the careful distribution of graces and honors; and 3) under the increasing pressures of royal power, the nobles adopted patterns of controlled behavior and eventually appreciated them as their own marker of social status.¹⁸ Elias's model

¹⁵ Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, and Francesca Fiaschetti, eds., *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 1-20.

¹⁶ See Szilvia Kovács and Márton Vér, eds., "Special Issue: Mongols and the Silk Roads," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 74, no. 1 (2021).

¹⁷ Recent English publications on the Eurasian royal and princely courts, see Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe, 1270-1380* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Antony J.S. Spawforth, ed., *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan, and Metin Kunt, eds., *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, eds., *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2011); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria Paranié, eds., *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks, eds., *The Key to Power: The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

¹⁸ Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 13-34; Norbert Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie. Mit einer Einleitung: Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Neuwied, 1969).

is nevertheless somewhat Eurocentric and especially Versailles-centric, and lack of a connected perspective to trace the interactions of individual royal courts. Later generations have been engaging with this classic model from various perspectives. One of these efforts, which is also very relevant to this current research, is to take a comparative approach beyond the European experiences. Jean Duindam who was originally trained as a court historian of Vienna and Versailles has been active in promoting the court studies from a wider scale. By including the non-European examples, he hopes to “disentangle the court from the roles attributed to it in the process of European modernization”.¹⁹

Regarding the Central Eurasian counterparts, Jonathan Karam Skaff has made pioneering contributions to the connected history of Sui-Tang China and Turko-Mongols. Skaff argues “the Sinic zone of Chinese textual culture was nested inside a broader ‘Eastern Eurasian’ region of political and diplomatic uniformities, which in turn was contained within a wider ‘Eurasian’ sphere via links with South Asia, West Asia, and Byzantium.”²⁰ According to him, a similar courtly protocol of diplomatic rituals was astonishingly shared among Tang China, Turkic Khanate, Byzantine and Sasanian Persia. The protocol includes 1) gift and correspondence exchanges, 2) creation of splendidly decorated courts, in which audiences, meetings, and banquets took place, 3) display of status ranking of courtiers and diplomats in seating arrangements, 4) paying obedience to the monarch, and 5) lavish feasts.²¹ This tendency to emphasize the general uniformity of courtly practices across the medieval Eurasian world, get positive echoes from scholars working on the western Eurasian part. In the multi-authored chapter titled “courtly cultures” in the fifth volume of *The Cambridge World History*, Patrick

¹⁹ Jeroen Duindam, “Early Modern Court Studies: An Overview and A Proposal,” in Markus Völkel and Arno Strohmeyer, eds., *Historiographie an europäischen Höfen (16.-18. Jahrhundert): Studien zum Hof als Produktionsort von Geschichtsschreibung und historischer Repräsentation* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009), 41.

²⁰ Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power and Connections, 580-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

²¹ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 148-55.

J. Geary and his colleagues propose that the Medieval Eurasian courts were involved in a Eurasian system of exercising and representing power, in which the courts play various roles: centers of intense competition, stages of practicing courtly etiquette, and sites of cultural production, consumption and ritual. Moreover, these Eurasian courts were never isolated from each other, but rather keeping borrowing practices and values from other court cultures, the reception of ambassadors, and the circulations of precious gifts and commodities were the pivotal links to these courts.²²

In this dissertation, particular attention will be devoted to a specific dimension of the courtly encounters between different royal courts along the Silk Roads during the Mongol period, namely the officially diplomatic communication through exchanges of envoys and diplomatic gifts. It aims to present the decisive role of the Mongol rulers in building such a trans-Eurasian network, and their imperial courts as its very hubs. Their royal courts are representational spaces comprised of ample elements such as people, objects, rituals, voices, and symbols. The diplomatic engagements that took place in the space were never routine practices, but meticulously organized events of highly symbolic meanings.

*Communication and Symbolic Communication in the Medieval World*²³

The second task that needs to be elucidated is the usages of communication and symbolic communication in this dissertation. As the flourishing of the Silk Roads studies

²² Patrick J. Geary et al., “Courtly Cultures: Western Europe, Byzantium, the Islamic World, India, China, and Japan, 500-1500,” in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 5: *Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE–1500 CE*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179-205.

²³ Ideally, the symbolism in the Mongol society and beliefs should also be analyzed in the part. The classic work on this topic is from the Russian orientalist Natalia Zhukovskaya, see Natalia Zhukovskaya, *Kategorii i simbolika traditsionnoi kul'tury Mongolov* [*Categories and Symbolism of Mongolian Traditional Culture*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988). I own this reference to Prof. Ágnes Birtalan. Due to the current deficiency of related language skill, the author hopes to include more Russian scholarships in the future.

among historians of Central Eurasia, the studies of communication and its symbolic forms have been well developed especially by historians of Medieval Europe in recent decades. Communication, according to the definition given by Claude Shannon (1916-2001), the father of information theory, comprises of several interconnected stages: (1) a source of information, (2) a sender which encodes the message, (3) a channel which conveys the encoded message from the sender to the receiver, (4) a receiver which decodes the message, (5) the destination of the message, and (6) interference which causes the signal produced by the sender not to be received intact by the receiver.²⁴ Shannon's definition is illustrative and inclusive enough to be applied in various areas of social sciences studies. Yet as commented by Marco Mostert, the forms and contents of the messages *per se* are not highlighted by Shannon,²⁵ which are definitely the most interesting parts that historians want to investigate. For medievalists, examining the issue of medieval communication faces great opportunities and no fewer challenges. As a modern concept, the applicability of communication in the Middle Ages has to be carefully clarified. According to Mostert, one main distinction is that in the Middle Ages "not all forms of communication were available to all medieval men, nor to all medieval societies"; while the written message was only accessible to a small part of the medieval folks due to the low literacy rate, the verbal, audible, and visible forms of communication might enjoy a more privileged role in the daily life.²⁶ Lia Ross furtherly questions the interactions between oral and written communication in the middle ages. She argues that these two kinds of communication are never completely detachable, the influences of orality persist in the process of composition and of written texts. Instead, she suggests a utilitarian categorization of formal/official and informal/personal communication based on their media. The formal/official

²⁴ Quoted from Marco Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" in Marco Mostert, ed., *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, with an Introduction by Michael Clanchy (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 18.

²⁵ Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" 18-19.

²⁶ Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" 19-22.

communication proceeds through charters and legal documents, official letters, public speeches, manuals, and others. The latter one is best represented by genres such as autobiographical narrative, personal letters and conversation, as well as conducting and self-help books.²⁷ The role of human agency as well as the circumstances of the communication are nevertheless largely absent in Ross's approach.

In recent decades, the German medievalist Gerd Althoff has made the most innovative contributions in the studies of medieval communication. Althoff and his Münster School have proposed the concept of symbolic communication, which according to him functions as the third form of communication in medieval society besides the written and oral forms. The contents of symbolic communication are nevertheless quite inclusive. All the activities of communication using signs with specific meaning functions can be regarded as symbolic. Therefore, all the non-oral especially visual and gestural communication as well as oral and written communication mediated through ritualized, habitual, and ceremonial forms fit into the category of symbolic communication. Moreover, as they suggest, symbolic communication acts as the dominant form of communication in the middle ages.²⁸ One of the main innovations of this symbolic communication approach is that it draws our attention to various circumstantial components of communication process. All the spatial arrangements, the performance of rituals and ceremonies, and the presence of objects become meaningful in this regard. In essence, the success of this approach is very much owing to the introduction of anthropological methodologies. The academic influence of Althoff and his Münster School has extended beyond the German-speaking world. Many young researchers have used symbolic

²⁷ Lisa Ross, "Communication in the Middle Ages," in Albrecht Classen, ed., *Handbook of Medieval Culture: Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, vol.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 203-231.

²⁸ See Gerd Althoff, "Zur Bedeutung symbolischer Kommunikation für das Verständnis des Mittelalters," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 31, no.1 (1997): 370-389; Gerd Althoff and Ludwig Sief, "Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme vom Mittelalter bis zur französischen Revolution," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 34, no.1 (2000): 393-412; and Gerd Althoff, "Symbolic Communication and Medieval Order: Strengths and Weaknesses of Ambiguous Signs," in his *Rules and Rituals in Medieval Power Games: A German Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 159-169.

communication in the titles of their works.²⁹ Meanwhile, scholars have challenged and reflected the preciseness of the definition of symbolic communication. One of such critics come from Jacoba van Leeuwen. He argues that in human society, every exchange of information and every human action has a symbolic feature. Therefore, it is better to “speak of communication with symbols and study and to study the use of various communication media and the ways in which they were combined.”³⁰ This critic in my point of view works as a modification rather than a subversion of Althoff’s approach since the symbolic dimension of communication is still confirmed or even more highlighted.

In the field of the studies of the Mongol empire, although scholars have dealt with the communication between the Mongol Khans and foreign rulers from various perspectives for decades, not many works have been specifically devoted to the symbolic dimension of such communication. To my knowledge, Reuven Amitai is one of the pioneers in investigating the Mongol imperial ideological competitions against his counterparts. In his studies on the relations between the Mongols and Mamluks, Amitai notices that along with the military confrontations, the exchange of envoys and letters between the two parties had never completely interrupted. Yet these diplomatic negotiations were neither intended nor expected by the rulers of both sides to solve the real and physical conflicts. Rather they were used as “a form of physiological warfare against the other side and “a form of moral boosting for the military elites of his own kingdom.”³¹ In a word, the exchange of envoys and letters are symbolic actions and serve as indications to proclaim their sovereignty both to internal and external audiences.

²⁹ For instance, see Jacoba van Leeuwen, ed., *Symbolic Communication in Late Medieval Towns* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006) and Dušan Zupka, *Ritual and Symbolic Communication in Medieval Hungary under the Árpád Dynasty (1000-1301)* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

³⁰ Van Leeuwen, “Introduction,” in *Symbolic Communication in Late Medieval Towns*, xi.

³¹ Reuven Amitai-Preiss, “An Exchange of Letters in Arabic between Abaya Ilkhan and Sultan Baybars (A.H. 667 / A.D. 1268-9),” *Central Asiatic Journal* 38 (1994): 11-33, here 33; and “Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks,” in David Morgan and Reuven Amitai-Preiss, ed., *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 57-72.

Anne Broadbridge has so far made the most significant contribution in this regard, although the terminology of symbolic communication does not literally appear in her works. In her groundbreaking book *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, Broadbridge presents a holistic and dynastic view on the struggles over ideology between the Mamluk sultans of Egypt and Syria, and the Mongol world from the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260 to the death of Tamerlane in 1405. According to her, there were five stages of the ideological rivals marked by the conversion of the Ilkhanid elites to Islam, the disintegration of the Ilkhanate, and the restoration of the Tamerlane as the important facts of periodization. Generally, before the Islamization of Ilkhanate, the Mamluks proclaimed as military Guardians of Islam and Muslims to fight against the infidel Ilkhanids. After that, the Mamluks claiming they were more supreme than the Mongols in belief since they accepted Islam first. The Mongols in turn despised the modest origin of the Mamluk Sultans. With the coming of the Timurids, the discourse of the guardians of Islam against infidels recurred in the ideology of the Mamluks.³² A notable merit of Broadbridge's research is that although diplomatic letters still occupy the central place of analysis, many nuanced details concerning the process of diplomatic negotiations are provided. The experience of individual envoys, the exchanged diplomatic gifts, and the material aspects of the chancellery and diplomatic documents are handled in the book at varying levels. Nevertheless, there is still enough space for us to fill in. In a geographically sense, the focus of Broadbridge's research is the western Eurasian side of the Mongol empire. The engagements of Great Khan and Yuan emperors with the East and Southeastern Asian countries are seldom dealt with in the book, which could have provided interesting parallels. In a thematic sense, the role of individual envoys as active agents and channels, and the diplomatic gifts as symbolic and material forms of these diplomatic

³² Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4-5.

communications worthy themselves as topics of a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, as Broadbridge herself modestly admits, subject to inequalities of primary sources her work presents “an abashedly Cairo-centric view of the ideological debate.”³³

Inspired by the works of Gerd Althoff, Anne Broadbridge, and others, this dissertation aims to investigate the diplomatic encountering between the Mongols and their counterparts as a domain of symbolic communication. We will not only focus on customarily accepted components of communication since the age of Claude Shannon, namely, the sender, deliverer, and the receiver of the diplomatic messages, as well as the contents and the decoding of the messages, but also the circumstance of diplomatic engagements through the protocols of receptions and the exchange of diplomatic gifts. The active role of envoys in diplomatic communication is also highlight in this dissertation. They are not treated as simply passive performers of diplomatic orders, rather constructive or deconstructive agency in shaping the mutual relation between the involved parties through their behaviors in the diplomatic occasions, as well as their mutual perceptions presented in the diplomatic reports. Meanwhile, there is a material aspect in these diplomatic engagements. Diplomatic gifts work not only as symbols to show sincerity to hold formal diplomatic dialogues. Gift exchange is also a matter of trust-building. The authenticity and final fruits of these negotiations through the correspondences much be fulfilled by the commuting envoys and confirmed through media like diplomatic gifts, treaties, and rituals. Moreover, gift-giving is also a part of symbolic competitions that displays the status, mightiness, and generosity of the sender against their receiver. It should be noted, once again, that this dissertation does not aim to provide a holistic view of Mongol diplomacy across the whole Eurasia. Rather, it concentrates on the courtly encountering experience of these individual envoys and diplomatic gifts and hopes to shed light

³³ Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, 4.

on the implicit and subtle expressions of symbolic competitions among the involved parties behind the practicing of diplomatic and courtly protocols.

Literature Review, Methodologies and Sources

The studies of Mongol diplomacy have been thriving in recent years. This notable flourish partly owes to the prevalence of transnational and global history, which have influenced the studies of Mongol history in a way that the Mongols now finally have a history of “empire”.³⁴ Scholarly fields like the relations of the Mongol empire with its massive Eurasian neighbors and the internal relations of the four Mongol *Uluses* have been examined in an unprecedented way. Among the pathfinders, Thomas T. Allsen is the most influential scholar. Allsen has expanded our horizon and deepened our understanding of Mongol Eurasia in many different aspects, especially on the political, economic, and cultural relationships between the Yuan Dynasty and the Ilkhanate.³⁵ A notable thematic preference for objects and material culture can also be discerned from his standard works on Islamic textiles, hunting animals, and pearls. Through diplomatic exchange as gifts is one of the most important channels of the mobility of these objects.³⁶ Michal Biran and her school of Mongol studies in Jerusalem have been the most significant contributors to our knowledge of Mongol Eurasia in the past decade. As the title of her ERC-funded project *Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia* indicates, the mobility of people, knowledge, commodities, and

³⁴ Cf. Ya Ning, “The Mongols without Empire: Narrative Strategies surrounding Mongol History in Modern Chinese Historiography,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, vol. 23 (2017): 155-167.

³⁵ Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); *The Steppe and the Sea: Pearls in the Mongol Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

artifacts initiated or facilitated by the Mongols is the central subject under discussion.³⁷ Meanwhile, Biran has many influential publications on Mongol diplomacy especially that of the Chagataid Khanate.³⁸ Francesca Fiaschetti, one of the core members of Biran's research group, was trained as a Sinologist in Italian and German universities. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the concept of foreign land in Yuan China, which is a long-expected forthcoming.³⁹ In recent years, Fiaschetti and her colleagues have organized several international conferences and workshops on Mongol diplomacy. The participants have examined the topic from various perspectives, including chancellery practices, normative regulations, *Realpolitik*, intermediates, material aspects, and so on.⁴⁰

By contrast, the issue of diplomatic gifts in Mongol diplomacy is much less discussed especially from a Eurasian scale. One of the main premises of such deficiency in scholarly attention is that the Mongols have long been held to perform non-negotiation diplomacy⁴¹; therefore, not only the Mongols would not prepare gifts for their counterparts, but also all the gifts from their counterparts would be regarded as tributes and lost their original meanings of reciprocity. Here I will not argue against this classic thesis of the Mongol ideology of world domination, which has been verified by generations of scholars. Instead, the practices of gift-giving in Mongol diplomacy need to be reevaluated. Up to until now, most of the researches on the gift topic have been carried out with a focus on the transcultural contacts between European envoys and the Mongols. The main sources for this research are the diplomatic reports or

³⁷ See the final report of the project, Michal Biran, "Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia (MONGOL)," *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2018):135-154.

³⁸ Michal Biran, "Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate: Some Preliminary Remarks," *Oriente Moderno* 88, no. 2 (2008): 369-93.

³⁹ Francesca Fiaschetti, *Limits of Belonging: The Concept of Foreign Land in Yuan China* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Francesca Fiaschetti, ed., "Diplomacy in the Age of Mongol Globalization (Special Issue)," *Eurasian Studies* vol. 17 (2019); Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, and Francesca Fiaschetti, eds., *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants and Intellectuals* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020).

⁴¹ Eric Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1940-1941): 378-413; Denise Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance: Thoughts on the Diplomatic Exchanges between the Mongols and the Latin West," in Denise Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality. Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 159-198.

travelogues of the Latin missionaries, which often highlight the avarice and excess of the Mongols in demanding gifts.⁴² A.J. Watson argues that the success of Rubruck was largely owing to his good understanding of the Mongol and Inner Asian customs of gift-giving, thus the status of Rubruck was elevated by his appropriate gifts.⁴³ Adriano Duque makes a complicated interpretation of the role of gift-giving in the mission of Carpini based on the model of Derrida and Mauss. A less well-known analyzed source used in the article was the chronicle of Adam of Salimbene, which records that Carpini carried gifts presented by the Mongol great khan to the Pope back to Europe. These gifts included a wooden cup and a capella. Interestingly enough, these gifts did not appear under the pen of Carpini and Benedict.⁴⁴ Geraldine Heng conceptualizes the gift-giving in Mongol court society as a part of the Asiatic gift economy, which acted as the fundamental principle to maintain the unity of different clans in the Mongolian society. Meanwhile, the social hierarchy was represented and negotiated through the deeds of gift-giving.⁴⁵ Claudia Garnier makes an excellent overview of the intercultural gift exchanges between Europeans and Mongols in the thirteenth century. She identifies three forms of gifts in the Mongol court, namely, payment, tribute, and diplomatic gifts in a narrow sense. She concludes that although Carpini and Rubruck could not fully sense the social-political meanings and importance of gifts in the Mongol court, gifts functioned quite well during their intercultural contacts with the Mongols.⁴⁶ Marianna Shreve Simpson provides

⁴² On the avarice of the Mongols and the northern barbarians in general as a *topos*, see Denis Sinor, “The Greed of the Northern Barbarian,” in L. V. Clark and P.A. Draghi, eds., *Aspects of Altaic Civilization II: Proceedings of the XVIII, PIAC, Bloomington, June 29-July 5, 1975* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 171-182; reprinted in *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1997), Chapter XII.

⁴³ A. J. Watson, “Mongol Inhospitability, or How to do More with Less: Gift Giving in William of Rubruck's Itinerarium,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 90–101.

⁴⁴ Adriano Duque, “Gift Giving in the Carpini Expedition to Mongolia, 1246-1248,” in *Remapping Travel Narratives, 1000-1700: To the East and Back Again*, ed. Montserrat Piera (Arc Humanities Press, 2018), 187-200.

⁴⁵ Geraldine Heng, “Mongol Women, the Asiatic Gift Economy, and Mongol Political Alterity,” in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 298-311.

⁴⁶ Claudia Garnier, “Gabe, Macht und Ehre: Zu Formen und Funktionen des Gabentauschs in den Beziehungen zwischen Mongolen und Europäern im 13. Jahrhundert,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 63 (2015): 47-68.

a very interesting case study on the artistic exchange during the Mongol era in general and the Il-Khanid period in particular within the historical context of intercultural gifting and borrowing.⁴⁷ In a recent publication, Jacques Paviot has proposed a new interpretation on the conflicts in ritual and gift issues between Ascelin of Lombardy and the Mongol general Baiju. He argues that Ascelin precisely understood the potential meaning of submission in gifts, and therefore he refused to perform the genuflection and prepare gifts.⁴⁸

A few publications have extended beyond the scope above and focus on the gift diplomacy of the Ilkhanate. Donald P. Little has made a case study on the Ilkhanid embassy arriving at Caro in August 1301 and its following negotiations, as recorded by contemporary Egyptian historian, the Mongol envoys carried beautiful gifts and objects with them. He pointed out that in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, the Ilkhanid rulers offered much more lavish gifts than the Mamluk sultans did.⁴⁹ Leon Volfovsky's MA thesis concentrates on a specific category of the gifts in the Ilkhanid diplomacy, namely animals. He argues that the gift diplomacy of the Mongols had an impact on the movement of animals across Eurasia.⁵⁰ However, noticeable gaps still exist in these researches, and a dynamic and balanced perspective of the gift diplomacy between the Mongols and the foreign rulers has not yet been developed. One of the gaps is that the inner mechanism of gift-giving in the Mongol imperial court and their perception of gifts during the diplomatic contacts has been largely neglected, or simply rendered as tributes. Yihao Qiu's recent contribution and my MA thesis recently defended at CEU have made some efforts in this direction. Qiu argues that in the early thirteenth century, the Mongols indeed prepared diplomatic gifts for their counterparts as a

⁴⁷ Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Manuscripts and Mongols: Some Documented and Speculative Moments in East-West/Muslim-Christian Relations," *French Historical Studies* 30, no. 3 (2007): 351-94.

⁴⁸ Jacques Paviot, "The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols," in Maurits Ebben and Louis Sicking, eds., *Beyond Ambassadors: Consuls, Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 119-136, here 133.

⁴⁹ Donald P. Little, "Diplomatic Missions and Gifts Exchanged by Mamluks and Ilkhans," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 30-42.

⁵⁰ Leon Volfovsky, "Animals in the Gift Exchange Diplomacy of the Ilkhanate (1260-1335)" (MA thesis, University of Hebrew, 2019).

continuation of previous central Eurasian diplomatic tradition. Yet, an abrupt change took place after the Mongol conquest of the Khwarazm Empire resulting in the non-negotiation diplomatic strategy gain the upper hand.⁵¹ By examining the social lives of gifts in the Mongol imperial court from the institutional, gendered, and ideological dimensions, my MA thesis argues that the Mongol court did develop a protocol of gifts in receiving, presenting, reposting, distributing, and consuming.⁵² Another research gap, somehow no less than astonishing, is that these activities of gift exchange were not examined within the tradition of the counterparts of the Mongols. Several key questions are waiting to be answered. How were the Mongol envoys and sometimes their diplomatic gifts received in these foreign courts? Were these Mongol envoys humiliated, detained, even killed or properly treated? What were the considerations of these foreign rulers in taking different measures to deal with the Mongol envoys? If these rulers agreed to submit to the Mongols or built some kind of formal diplomatic relations, what kind of gifts will they present? Were there any ritual and symbolic conflicts in these courtly encountering stories?

This doctoral dissertation works as a natural continuation of my MA thesis. It expands the horizon and scale of my previous studies in several ways. First, it tackles the envoys as one of its central topics rather than only focusing on gifts, and presents not only the experiences of foreign envoys in the Mongol imperial court but also the encountering stories of Mongol envoys in foreign courts. Second, the temporal framework has been expanded into the fifteenth century to include the Timurid period. Third, although the Mongol Imperial courts in the east at Karakorum and Beijing are still the focuses of the present study, the Mongol *ulus*es in the west and the impact of Islamization on their diplomatic practices will be a topic in discussion.

⁵¹ Yihao Qiu, "Gift-Exchange in Diplomatic Practices during the Early Mongol Period," *Eurasian Studies* 17 (2019): 202-227.

⁵² Ya Ning, "The Reception and Management of Gifts in the Imperial Court of the Mongol Great Khan, from the early thirteenth century to 1368", MA thesis, Central European University, 2020. See also Ya Ning, "The Repository and Distribution of Gifts in the Mongol Imperial Court in the Early Thirteenth Century," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 27 (2021, forthcoming).

Correspondingly, whenever capable, more case studies will be provided concerning the Mongol diplomatic engagements both in the directions of east and west, with East and Southeast Asian countries, with Russia, Byzantine, and Latin Europe, and with Eastern Mediterranean areas, Asia Minor, and North Africa.

Methodologically speaking, a combination of courtly encounters, symbolic communication studies, and a comparative approach will be adopted in the dissertation. In addition to transcultural encounters and symbolic communication discussed previously, a notable feature of this dissertation is the extensive use of comparison. There are comparisons in three different yet connected levels. The first is the comparison of narrations provided by different sources. In the field of the studies of the Mongol empire, it frequently happens that there are multiple even completely contradictory sources on a specific event. Whenever capable, different versions of narrations will be provided and analyzed at the same time. For instance, when combining the Mongol protocol of reception of foreign envoys, the evidence in the Latin narrative travelogues and Chinese chancellery archives will be supplementary to each other. When dealing with the Otrar Massacre of Mongol merchants and envoys in 1218, the pertinent passages in the Mongolian, Chinese, Persian, and Arabic sources are compared. The second kind of comparison is thematic. There are comparative cases studies on the foreign visitors in the Mongol court such as John of Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy, Rabban Sauma, Ibn Battuta, Al-'Umarī, Ruy González de Clavijo, and Chen Cheng. When examining the loyalty of Mongol envoys, the cases of Isa Kelemechi and Bolad Aqa are compared. There are also comparisons concerning the Mongol diplomatic practices with foreign countries, vassal states, and within the brotherly or hostile Mongol *uluses*. The whole structure of this dissertation is somehow arranged in a comparative manner. There are comparisons on the courtly encountering experiences of western envoys in the Mongol imperial court, the Mongol envoys in European courts, and the Muslim travelers in the Islamic Mongol courts. Finally, yet

importantly, there are plenty of diachronic parallels, which I hope to situate the Mongol protocols within the central Eurasian traditions as well as the context of his sedentary neighbors. For instance, when discussing the rites of fire purification of foreign envoys and their gifts, the parallels of Western Turkic Khanate and Khazar Khanate will be mentioned. When dealing with the rigid seating orders in the Mongol court ceremonies and banquets, the example of Huns is provided. When examining the Mongol standard of selecting envoys, similar practices in the Turkic Khaganate and Seljuk Empire are explained. When questioning whether the Mongol envoys are allowed to receive personal gifts from local hosts, the cases of Ancient Greek and Early Modern Venice are offered. When introducing the vassal countries of the Mongols make full use of their inferior status to obtain practical interests, the case of the Avars and Byzantine is supplied, and so on so forth. To do this, we will make sense to what degree the Mongol custom is distinguished from its counterparts, or in what sense they share the same tradition.

The novelties this dissertation aims to achieve are threefold. First, it suggests that in addition to the military battles, the Mongol great khans similarly valued the competitions in symbolic fields like diplomatic rituals and gifts, and they meticulously practiced a well-set protocol regarding the receiving and sending of diplomats and diplomatic gifts. The diplomatic correspondences sent by the Mongol rulers were likewise carefully prepared even tailored to cater to the needs of different addressees. The received wisdom regarding the Mongols, such as their greediness in demanding gifts, their mistreating of foreign envoys, and their clear-cut strategy of submission vis-à-vis devastation, certainly have their supporting evidence, are nevertheless not necessary the whole picture. Second, it attempts to sketch the general mechanism of receiving and sending envoys and their gifts in the Mongol imperial court from the perspective of institutional or administrative history. These are the fundamental yet astonishingly largely unrepresented topics in the studies of Mongol diplomatic culture.

Meanwhile, the life stories of individual commuting envoys especially the Mongol envoys, and the gifts in exchange, if applicable, are provided and reconstructed. As part of the symbolic communication between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts, envoys and gifts were usually carefully selected to cater to the needs of both sides. The ethnic backgrounds, cultural identities, political loyalties, and fates of the Mongol envoys in different foreign courts are topics under discussion. Third, as indicated above, a comparative approach is extensively used in this dissertation in order to obtain a more precise evaluation of the generality or particularity in Mongol diplomatic practices. Based on these comparative case studies, this dissertation argues that in many aspects, the Mongol diplomatic protocols and practices are essentially not alien to their predecessors or counterparts.

The primary sources used in the dissertation include written materials principally and visual sources partially. The written sources can be classified into four subcategories. The first type of written sources is the chancellery documents pertaining to the administrative system of the Mongol empire. The collections of statutes like *Yuan Dianzhang* 元典章, *Jingshi Dadian* 經世大典, *Yongle Dadian* 永樂大典 and the chapters of *Zhi* 志 in the *Yuan Shi* are the most important sources of this kind. These documents provided details on the Mongol courtly protocols of receiving and sending envoys and gifts in an objective manner. Those diplomatic letters also belong to the chancellery documents, which nevertheless are loaded with diplomatic speeches and parables and need to be scrutinized. The second category is the narrative sources composed by the participants or witnesses in these diplomatic communications, namely the diplomatic reports and travelogues produced by the emissaries and merchants. The reports written by the Latin Europeans like John of Plano Carpini, Simon of Saint-Quentin, William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, John of Marignolli, and Ruy González de Clavijo, by the Muslim visitor Ibn Battuta, by the Syriac Christian Rabban Sauma, and by Ming Chinese Chen Cheng are the most renowned ones. Since in most cases, these authors had distinctive cultural

backgrounds from the countries they visited, their observations had a quasi-anthropological flavor and possess cultural biases in one way or another. These cultural differences often if not always cause conflicts in these courtly encounters and became perfect entry points for our research. The third type of written sources are the official and semi-official historical works commissioned by the Mongols. The *Secret History of the Mongols*, *History of the World Conqueror* by Juvaini, and the *Jami't-Tawarikh* of Rashīd al-Dīn are the best examples. Despite its relatively late provenance, the Chinese official dynastic history *Yuan Shi*, was based on the court historical records of the Yuan Dynasty. Considering the giant work was finished within least than a year, most of the narrations in *Yuan Shi* follows the original court records. *Yuan Shi* is therefore generally regarded as an authentic source highly in accordance with the official historical awareness of the Yuan Dynasty. These historical works provide valuable inner perspectives and many details on the Mongol political life, especially of its rulers and elites. The biographies of Yuan emperors as well as their diplomatic engagements with other Mongol *uluses* and foreign polities, and the biographies of the Mongol envoys are incredibly relevant for us. They offer not only historical details but also opportunities to reconstruct the whole process of diplomatic negotiation when we compare them with the fourth type of written materials, namely the historical records of the foreign princely courts. These records pose the biggest challenge for our research since they are distributed rather dispersedly and unevenly, and need to be gathered piece by piece. For countries like Korea, Annam, and Japan in the East, and Armenia, Mamluk Egypt, Byzantium, and the Russian principalities in the west, their diplomatic engagement with the Mongols lasts for decades and the relevant records are relatively ample. Yet for countries in central Europe or beyond, even there was occasionally exchange of envoys and gifts, the Mongols was certainly not their diplomatic priority. It should be noted that the availabilities of these sources also depend on the historical writing traditions in these lands, that is, whether they had developed an institution to record these diplomatic

events. If applicable, visual sources concerning the material forms of the diplomatic credentials and diplomatic gifts will be also provided. By making full use of these writing and visual records from various peoples and languages, I hope this dissertation can present a more balanced image of Mongol diplomatic practices to the readers.

Although it seems to be inappropriate for a doctoral dissertation in history to boost what current relevance it may have, I still want to share some points before the main course is served. Certainly, the diplomatic norms and practices between modern sovereign states are quite different from that of the pre-modern period. Nevertheless, some political and cultural stereotypes produced by the early generations of trans-Eurasian travelers endure much longer than the lives of their inventors. Some judgments of these quasi-anthropological observations have been uncritically accepted and incorporated into the modern discourse of civilization. To re-historicize and reexamine these stereotypes may lead to a better understanding of the engagement between modern entities with different diplomatic traditions. Second, the strategic importance of Eurasia has been more and more visible nowadays not only due to the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative proposed by the Chinese government. During its implication, there is certainly a variety of problems that can never be denied. Yet, we must say there is many fake news purportedly created and propagated by those interested parties who have doubts or are hostile to this initiation. It may have a point to retrospect their precedents, to review the courtly encountering stories along the Silk Road in the period of the Mongols, and to see how the images of the Mongols were created. Third, one predictable challenge of our age is the uncertainties generated from the deterioration of the relations between China and the United States. The conflicts in real military engagement may seem to be of low chance, yet the competitions in other fields are omnipresent. In this regard, the symbolic competition between the Mongols and their counterparts might be still fresh and relevant for us, and some misconceptions still trouble us. I hope this research would provide us some clues, not

completely new yet frequently overlooked, of this historical precedent. No matter how symbolic it may seem, to communicate is certainly much wiser than decoupling, especial in the age of uncertainty.

Chapter 1 – Foreign Envoys in the Mongol Imperial Court

The rising and expansion of Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century is a key event that shapes the main course of Eurasian and world history. Since Temüjin was acknowledged as "Genghis Khan" in the *quriltai* (or council of notables) of 1206, within half a century, the Mongols built the largest contiguous empire in world history. Although the united Empire was somehow dissolved after the death of Möngke Khan in 1259, the great khan, who also acted as emperor of the Yuan Dynasty since 1271 held the nominal suzerainty over the three western *uluses*. The communications among these Mongol khanates and with those adjoining non-Mongol powers were never totally interrupted and the court of Great Khan kept acting as the hub of Eurasian political and diplomatic activities. For the first time, from the Western Pacific Ocean to the East Mediterranean Sea, from the South Chinese Sea to the Siberian forest area, a united administrative, communicative and commercial network took shape. It was under such context that many encountering stories in the Mongol imperial courts took place, between the Mongol empire and its neighboring entities, and between the great khan and the khans from three brotherly yet subordinated *uluses* in the west.

The chapter aims to discuss the encountering experience of foreign envoys in the Mongol imperial court. The first question is whether the Mongols had a diplomatic protocol of reception of foreign envoys. If did, what was the content, what agendas had they set behind the protocol, and to what degree the Mongol protocol is similar or different to their counterparts? The scholarly image of Mongols is conventionally associated with the greediness in demanding gifts from visitors. Such an image was primarily manufactured by papal envoys like John of Carpini, and its authenticity was seldom questioned. The second part of this chapter aims to clarify this issue by conducting a comparative case study based on the encountering stories of John of Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy. The tributary system of the Mongol empire was

longly held as unequal, the Mongols exhausted the resources by force as they wished, while their vassal countries were only to be obedient or to be destroyed. The true stories were much complicated and had much to do with loyalty and trust-building. Based on different cases from East Asia, West Asia, and East Europe, the third part of this chapter will show that the Mongols have many policy tools to sustain this system other than military forces, and some of the vassal countries suited themselves well in this system.

The Protocol of Receiving Foreign Envoys and their Gifts in the Mongol Imperial Court

Roughly speaking, there are two typical occasions during which the exchange of diplomats and diplomatic gifts took place in the Mongol imperial court. The first one is the political or diplomatic occasion when the gifts were brought along with the legates discussing alliance and in most cases submission to the Mongols. The second is the ritual occasions when the Mongol khan held ceremonies for specific purposes. Among them, the enthronement of the great khan, the birthday celebration of the great khan, and the New Year's celebration were the most grandiose events. These political and ritual occasions were generally intermingled since after the confirmation of alliance and submission, legates were required to attend important court ritual occasions. Even those countries that had not yet entered into a formal relationship with the Mongol empire would take these chances to obtain intelligence from the Mongols. The official reception of ambassadors and their gifts took place after these ceremonies.

However, the protocol set for the envoys applied as soon as they crossed the border of the Mongol empire. No later than the reign of Ögedei Khan, the Mongols built a postal system to facilitate communications across the empire.⁵³ Once entering the territory of the Mongols,

⁵³ On the origin, operation and function of the postal system in the Mongol empire, see Adam Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141-64; Márton Vér, "The Origins of the Postal System of the Mongol Empire," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 22 (2016): 227-239, and *Old Uyghur Documents Concerning the Postal System of the Mongol Empire* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019);

those formal envoys bearing gifts and tributes would be provided horses, carts, and supplies at these postal stations.⁵⁴ In an edict issued by Ögedei Khan in 1229, the standard provision per capita per diem is half a kilo of meat, half a kilo of flour, one liter of rice, and a bottle of wine.⁵⁵ This protocol was enacted and improved in later periods. For instance, in 1263 Kublai Khan and his Central Secretariat further regulated that those envoys who traveled during the winter should be provided five half-kilo charcoal a day and the companions of the envoys in the embassy should also be provided half a kilo of flour and one liter of rice a day.⁵⁶

In contrast, those envoys from the countries which neither had entered into the Mongol imperial system and nor paid tribute to them were poorly treated with little food and worse clothing provisions.⁵⁷ Carpini, who was not regarded either by himself or by the Mongols as a messenger of a tributary, frequently complained of the inadequate food he received.⁵⁸ The different provision standard is also attested by C. de Bridia (fl. c. 1245) in his *Historia Tatarorum* (now more familiarly known as *Tartar Relation*), the principal informer of which was Benedict the Pole, a companion of Carpini in the mission.⁵⁹ C. de Bridia states that the foreign envoys had access to the horses provided by the postal system, yet they had limited rights to access other provisions so that the five of them were only given food rations for three.⁶⁰

[Baohai Dang] 黨寶海, 蒙元驛站交通研究 [*Studies on the Postal System of the Mongol-Yuan Period*] (Beijing: Kunlun, 2006).

⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, Carpini uses the word “tribute” here, while in the contemporary Yuan Chinese source, the chapter *Zhanchi* 站赤 of *Jingshi Dadian* 經世大典, which is in turn only preserved in the early fifteenth century *Yongle Encyclopedia* 永樂大典, the exact word “gift” appears. See John of Plano Carpini, “History of the Mongols,” in *The Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 27; *Yongle Encyclopedia* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), 7192: “如有送絲線、顏色、物料，並外國使臣將禮物段匹及有急速勾當來者，應付鋪馬。”

⁵⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 2584.

⁵⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 2584.

⁵⁷ John of Plano Carpini, “History of the Mongols”, 27.

⁵⁸ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 56, 66. It is worth noting that Carpini mentions that they were better treated than other envoys in the imperial court of Güyük, see Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 61. Igor de Rachewiltz argued that the missionaries like Carpini got better boarding condition than other envoys, on account of their countries had not yet submitted to the Mongols. This in my opinion went too far, see Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 99.

⁵⁹ Short biographies of Benedict the Pole and C. de Bridia, see Gregory G. Guzman, “Benedict the Pole,” in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler (Routledge: New York, 2000), 57-58 and Charles W. Connell, “C. de Bridia,” *ibid*, 74-75.

⁶⁰ R. A. Skelton, et al., *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 96.

The situation of Ascelin of Lombardy and his companions in the camp of Baiju was even worse. Since they repeatedly disobeyed the Mongols protocols, their provision was significantly affected, for several times they returned to their tent without having eaten or had to drink animal milk to get rid of hunger.⁶¹ As an official envoy, Carpini was at least granted safe conduct and had the right to use the Mongol postal system and its provision. The latecomer William of Rubruck was however caught in a dilemma when he arrived at Sudak, then under the rule of the Mongols. Since originally he denied his identity as the ambassador of Louis IX, Rubruck might lose the travel privilege. Having advised by the merchants from Constantinople, Rubruck yielded to the reality.⁶²

After a long journey of hardships and dangers, if they were lucky, the envoys would safely arrive at the camp of the Mongol khan. Before entering the camp, the envoys were required to dismount and wait within bowshot, while their Mongol guides went to report to their master.⁶³ Then, a special ritual would be held for the guests, that is, the ritual of purification by passing between two fires. John of Plano Carpini, Benedict the Pole, and William of Rubruck all left vivid descriptions of this religious practice. Their accounts have minor discrepancies. Carpini did not bring any gift from the pope but was asked to pass between the fires in case he might bring harm or poison the khan.⁶⁴ Benedict the Pole adds more details. As he notes, both the gifts and the gifts presenters had to be purified. In addition, worship paid to the Mongol royal ancestry (perhaps the image of Genghis Khan) was also part of the first reception:⁶⁵

⁶¹ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*. XXXII, 48 & 49. Accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020.

⁶² *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 66-68.

⁶³ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 56; Rubruck was similarly demanded to wait one bowshot distance from the camp of Möngke, see *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 172. On the custom and implication of bowshot distance in Mongol society, see Hok-lam Chan, "Siting by Bowshot: A Mongolian Custom and Its Sociopolitical and Cultural Implications," *Asia Major*, Third Series 4, no. 2 (1991): 53-78.

⁶⁴ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 56.

⁶⁵ For the studies of the iconographic worship of Genghis Khan, see Isabelle Charleux, "Chinggis Khan: Ancestor, Buddha or Shaman? On the Uses and Abuses of the Portrait of Chinggis Khan," *Mongolian Studies* 31 (2009): 207-258.

The attendants of Bati [Batu] having asked for and received presents, consisting of forty beaver skins and eighty badger skins, these presents were carried between two consecrated fires; and the Friars were obliged to follow the presents, for it is a custom among the Tartars to purify ambassadors and gifts by fire. Beyond the fires there was a cart with a golden statue of the Emperor, which it is likewise customary to worship. But the Friars refusing positively to worship it, were nevertheless obliged to bow their heads (before it).⁶⁶

William of Rubruck gives an insight into the motives behind the ritual. He believes it is the gifts that make purification necessary. Since the gifts had been prepared for the late Great Khan Güyük, they had to be purified before being brought to the new Great Khan Möngke:

This constituted, therefore, a twofold reason why Friar Andrew and his colleagues had to pass between fires: firstly, inasmuch as they were bringing gifts and, in the second place, because these were destined for someone who was already dead, namely Keu Chan. No such requirement was made of me, because I brought nothing. If some creature, or anything else, drops to the ground while they are being taken between the fires like this, it is the property of the soothsayers.⁶⁷

In fact, this purification ritual is never exclusive to the Mongols. On the other side of Eurasian Steppes, the Byzantine historian Menander describes the reception of Zemarchus, the ambassador from Constantinople in the imperial court of the Turkic Khan Sizabul in the year 569. Zemarchus was led through the fire after some shamanic rituals had been performed, with chants, bells and drums, and sorcerer's dance to drive away the evil spirits.⁶⁸ Fire was also used for purification in the Khazar Khanate. According to the tenth-century Arab traveler Ibn Faḍlān, the deputy of *Khagan* (or great khan) could only enter into the presence of the *Khagan* being barefoot and with a piece of firewood in hands, he could not sit by the side of the *Khagan* until the firewood burned up.⁶⁹ In all, this shamanic ritual with fire is shared by Turkic-

⁶⁶ Benedict the Pole, "History of the Mongols," in *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55, as Narrated by Himself, with Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John of Plan de Carpine*, ed. and trans. W. W. Rockhill (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900), 35.

⁶⁷ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 241.

⁶⁸ Roger C. Blockley, ed. and trans., *The History of Menander the Guardsman* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), 119.

⁶⁹ Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, ed. and trans. James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 255.

Mongolian nomadic societies and reflects their animist beliefs: all objects including the gifts are believed to have spirits and fire has the very power to purify them.⁷⁰

The envoys usually were not granted an audience with the great khan immediately. On this occasion, the envoys with their gifts would be hosted in individual tents and wait for further indications. Since during the enthronement ceremony many envoys were waiting, it took a long time before they could finally reach the khan. Carpini for instance was waiting for at least four weeks. For Carpini, another cause for his long waiting was that Güyük was not yet officially enthroned as the great khan. Therefore, he was first led to the tent of the Queen Mother, Töregene Khatun, the regent of the Mongol empire.⁷¹ During his stay, Carpini had the opportunity to observe the details of Mongol court life. He described the space designated for envoys and their gifts, the procedure by which the envoys were called into the pavilion of the khan, and the various kinds of gifts.

According to Carpini, the pavilion of the khan was heavily fenced and guarded with two gates in the palisade. The western gate was reserved for the use of the khan only. The eastern gate was for those who were granted admittance. The envoys had to wait a long way away outside the palisade. Anyone who stepped over the fixed limits was to be severely punished.⁷² In that designated area, Carpini met his fellow ambassadors with their gifts from Russia, China, Georgia, Abbasid Caliphate and other countries:

Outside were Duke Jerozlaus of Susdal in Russia and several chiefs of the Kitayans and Solangi, also two sons of the King of Georgia, the ambassador of the Caliph of Baghdad, who was a Sultan, and more than ten other Sultans of the Saracens, so I believe and so we were told by the stewards. There were more than four thousand envoys there, counting those who were carrying tribute, those who were bringing gifts, the Sultans and other chiefs who were coming to

⁷⁰ J. A. Boyle, "Turkish and Mongol Shamanism in the Middle Ages," *Folklore* 83, no. 3 (1972): 182-84; Sinor, "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," 344; Pohl, "The *Regia* and the *Hring*: Barbarian Places of Power," 439-466. The classic literature on the cult of fire and shamanism in general among the Mongols still belongs to the nineteenth century Buryat scholar Dorji Banzarov (1822-1855), see Dorji Banzarov, "The Black Faith or Shamanism among the Mongols," trans. Jan Nattier and John P. Kruger, *Mongolian Studies* 7 (1981-82): 53-91. I own this reference to Dr. Dorottya Uhrin.

⁷¹ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 61.

⁷² Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 61-62.

submit to them, those summoned by the Tartars and the governors of territories. All these were put together outside the palisade.⁷³

In the meantime, some personnel would be sent by the Khan to take care of the envoys waiting outside the palisade. They got food and drinks. A more important protocol was for the chief secretary of the khan to register the name of the envoys, the name of their sender, and probably also the list of the gifts.⁷⁴ Then, the chief secretary read out the names aloud and the envoys were required to go down on the left knee four times. After security check again, they were led into the palisade through the eastern gate.⁷⁵ Not everyone had the honor to get inside the imperial tent. Carpini and Rubruck were definitely among the luckiest, who met the Mongol Khan Güyük and Möngke, respectively. Their granted audiences also prove that the Mongols valued the possible diplomatic contacts with Europe.

As part of the procedures in the audience, these foreign envoys were required to genuflect three times to the Mongol lords as a sign of respect and forbidden to trample on the threshold of the tent. These requirements became not rarely the points of conflict. Some of these envoys unfortunately paid bitterly even their life for them. The papal envoy Ascelin of Lombardy was almost executed in the camp of the Mongol governor Baiju for denying the Mongol protocols. The Russian prince Mikhail of Chernigov was killed by Batu Khan, for he refused to bow to the image of Genghis Khan. And his contemporary Yaroslav II of Vladimir was poised by order of the Mongol regent Töregene and died thereafter because he had broken the Mongol taboo of threshold. All of these three cases will be discussed in the next subchapters. As it will show, these punishments were actually more politically driven than they appeared, yet the tensions on rituals were perceived by all parties involved and therefore recorded repeatedly by contemporary sources. Some of the envoys wisely complied with these rules or

⁷³ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 61-62.

⁷⁴ Carpini did not mention that gifts should be registered, but he was asked by the Mongolian officer what kind of gifts he could offer. In Chinese sources, especially the biographies of the Mongol great khans and Yuan emperors in *Yuan Shi*, the content of the gift packages were often registered.

⁷⁵ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 63-64.

at least made some compromises. Carpini and his companion agreed to genuflection three times on the left knee in a court of a Mongol commander named Corenza and repeated the same ritual four times in the court of Güyük.⁷⁶ The experience of Rubruck was more dramatical. He was at first exempted from the duty of genuflection in the courts of Sartaq, but was required to do so in the court of Batu and Möngke. In the court of Batu, we are told that Rubruck and his companions were required to genuflect three times on both knees.⁷⁷ Scholars like W.W. Rockhill, Peter Jackson, and David Morgan noticed some nuances in these ritual engagements. As they have suggested, religious men were generally exempted from genuflections in the Mongol court as the cases of the Taoist Ch'ang Ch'un in the court of Genghis Khan and the Armenian Christian Vardan Arawelc'i in the court of Hülegü. Rubruck was at first accepted as a churchman and late as a formal envoy, therefore he was receipted differently.⁷⁸ It is worth mentioning that these ritual conflicts or negotiations in the diplomatic engagements of European envoys and East Asian monarchs happened repeatedly in the next centuries. One of the most renowned examples is the British Macartney Embassy to Qing emperor Qianlong in 1793. The negotiated result was that Macartney was allowed to genuflect on a single knee instead of kowtowing, that is, to kneel with both knees and bow to touch their forehead to the ground.⁷⁹

The gifts presented to the Mongol great khan were both enormous in quantity and valuable in quality. Carpini and Rubruck marveled at the treasures they saw in the camp:

[Carpini:] So many gifts were bestowed by the envoys there that it was marvelous to behold gifts of silk, samite, velvet, brocade, girdles of silk threaded with gold, choice furs and other presents. The Emperor was also given a sunshade or little awning such as is carried over his head, and it was all

⁷⁶ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 54, 63.

⁷⁷ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter A. Jackson, and D. O. Morgan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 117, 132-133, 179.

⁷⁸ *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the world, 1253-55, with two Accounts of the Eastern Journey of John of Plan de Carpine*, trans. W. W. Rockhill (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900), 124, n. 2; *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 117, n.1.

⁷⁹ See James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 79-80.

decorated with precious stones. A certain governor of a province brought a number of camels for him, decked with brocade and with saddles on them having some kind of contrivance inside which men could sit, and there were, I should think, forty or fifty of them; he also brought many horses and mules covered with trappings or armour made of leather or of iron.⁸⁰

[Rubruck:] At this time I saw there the ambassador of the Caliph of Baldach: he used to have himself carried to court in a litter between two mules, and caused some to claim that he had made peace with them [the Mo'als] on the basis that they be furnished with ten thousand horsemen for their army. I also saw there the envoys of a sultan of India, who had brought eight leopards and ten greyhounds which had been trained to sit on a horse's back just like leopards do... I saw there as well envoys from the sultan of Turkia, who brought him [the Chan] costly gifts: he told them in response, so I heard, that what he needed was not gold or silver but men, by which he meant that they should furnish him with troops.⁸¹

The observation of Carpini and Rubruck reveals that the Mongols inherited and practiced several prevailing patterns of gift-giving in the Eurasian court customs. First, fabrics, costumes, weapons and armors, gems, precious metals, and animals are typical gifts in the Eurasian diplomatic missions. Animals as gifts have different functions: horses for warfare, mules and camels as beasts of burden, leopards, cheetahs, and greyhounds as hunting animals, exotic animals for display and pleasure.⁸² Secondly, the gifts had to correspond both to the status of the giver and recipient, and to the status of their relationship. The gift-presenters also had to behave in a proper way. Thirdly, the gift-giving process is also the very occasion to communicate diplomatic messages. The troops Möngke asked from the Abbasid Caliphate and the Sultanate of Rum should be regarded as a demand of submission, at that time (1254), the total conquest of the Mongols in West Asia has not been accomplished yet. The gifts and gift-giving process are always highly symbolic, as well in the Mongol imperial court as in other courts.

⁸⁰ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 63-64.

⁸¹ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 246-247.

⁸² Cf. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 17-25.

Most of these gifts received during the seasons of enthronement would be distributed by the order of Great Khan ad hoc.⁸³ Carpini noticed that in the camp there was a designated area to deposit and distribute these gifts:

There up on a hill a good distance away from the tents were stationed more than five hundred carts, which were all filled with gold and silver and silken garments, and these things were shared out among the Emperor and the chiefs. Each chief divided his share among his men, but according to his own good pleasure.⁸⁴

These large-scale activities of gift distribution in the Mongol court had ideological and political grounds. First, the Mongol imperial family held the attitude that the imperial property was the public wealth in circulation. The whole empire was regarded as the shared property of the Chinggisid family, and the great khan was readily praised for his generosity. As Marie Favereau in a recent publication reveals, in the Mongol ideological world, “the circle of redistribution brought happiness,” and “the ultimate purpose of the Mongol Great Khan was not to retain but to circulate wealth.”⁸⁵ Second, the distribution of wealth functioned as one of the underpinning mechanisms of the Mongol Empire as a political entity. A notable example is the allocation of the extensive lands of Genghis Khan to his four sons, which finally paved the road for the formation of the four individual *uluses*.⁸⁶ In accordance with the territorial allocation, taxation, captives, spoils, ideas, and technologies were also the subjects of distribution.⁸⁷ Third, the role of gifts became more important from the end of the thirteenth century onwards. Since the storming period of the Mongol expansion had almost ended by this time and the income from booty significantly decreased, diplomatic gifts comprised the

⁸³ More about the repository and distribution of Gifts in the Mongol imperial court, see Ya Ning, “The Repository and Distribution of Gifts in the Mongol Imperial Court in the Early Thirteenth Century,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, vol. 27, 2021 (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 64.

⁸⁵ Marie Favereau, “The Mongol Peace and Global Medieval Eurasia,” *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 28, no. 4 (2018): 57.

⁸⁶ Peter Jackson, “From Ulus to Khanate: The making of the Mongol states c. 1220-c. 1290,” in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, ed. R. Amitai-Preiss and D. O. Morgan (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 31.

⁸⁷ Thomas T. Allsen, “Ever Closer Encounters: The Appropriation of Culture and the Apportionment of Peoples in the Mongol Empire,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1 (1997): 6.

majority of the redistributed items in the imperial court.⁸⁸ Last, gift-giving took up a great part of the policy toolkits of the great khan and *khatuns* to secure loyalty, especially during the succession intrigues. Since theoretically, every male relative of the Chingisid imperial clans had the right to claim the throne, the competition was usually rather fierce and bloody. In these court struggles, gift-giving acted as an effective way to gain support and secure loyalty. The succession of Güyük was largely owing to the efforts of his mother Töregene Khatun, who not only had distinguished diplomatic skills but also was adept at winning over supporters by giving gifts.⁸⁹

The distribution of gifts also had its own protocols. In 1246, Güyük was elected as the new Mongol great khan during the *quriltai* convened by his mother. The first order he issued was to open the treasury and to distribute wealth as Ögedei had done many years ago:

When they had done with feasting, he ordered the doors of the old and new treasuries to be opened and every sort of jewels money and clothes to be got ready and the direction of this business, that is, the distribution of these valuables he entrusted to the counsel and discretion of Sorgotani Beki, who had the greatest authority in that *quriltai*. The first to receive their share were the princes and princesses that were present of the race and lineage of Chingiz-Khan; as also all their servants and attendants, noble and base, greybeard and suckling; and then in due order the *noyans*, the commanders of *tümen*, thousands, hundreds and tens, according to the census, the sultans, *maliks*, scribes, officials and the dependents. And everyone else who was present, whoever he was, did not go portionless, nay everyone received his full share and appointed lot.⁹⁰

The distribution of gifts by Güyük reveals the rigid rule of social ranking in the Mongol imperial court; the sequence of distribution had to be strictly observed, ranging from the Chingisid imperial clans to the Mongol military dignitaries, and then to the leaders of the client states. The identity of the distributor is pertinent here.⁹¹ The person customarily in charge of

⁸⁸ Favereau, "The Mongol Peace and Global Medieval Eurasia," 57.

⁸⁹ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, 240–241. A similar passage appeared from the pen of Rashīd al-Dīn, see Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. J. A. Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 176.

⁹⁰ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, 254–255.

⁹¹ This ceremonious occasion of gift distribution was also noticed by John of Carpini, yet as a foreigner, Carpini was not capable of discerning the inner rules of Mongol gift distribution, let alone the role of the Tolui house in the enthronement of Güyük, see John of Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia: Narratives*

distribution had to be the highest sovereign of the empire, that is, the great khan himself, but Güyük entrusted his right to Sorgotani Beki, the elderly female leader of the Toluid house.⁹² This can be explained by the fact that the support of the Toluid house was decisive in enabling the election of Güyük. Güyük had been at odds with the Jochid house leader Batu since the western campaign of 1236 and the latter would be the last to support Güyük's claim for the throne. Meanwhile, Temüge Otchigin, the youngest brother of Genghis Khan and leader of the eastern realm of the empire, posed an imminent and geographically proximate danger to Güyük. Right after the death of Ögedei, Temüge Otchigin marched to Karakorum with his huge army only to be persuaded by Töregene to retreat. It was the decision of Sorgotani Beki and the Toluid house to stand by Güyük that changed the course of this *quriltai*.⁹³

A notable aspect of the Mongol protocols of diplomatic reception would be the significant role played by the *khatuns*. Normally, during the formal audience by the Great Khan, the Chief Khatun will present by his side. In 1254, Rubruck was received by Möngke Khan and his first wife.⁹⁴ After the formal audience, the visitors also had chances to visit other royal members of the Great Khan. Rubruck, for instance, visited Möngke's oldest son and other wives.⁹⁵ There were also exceptions. In 1246, when Carpini and his companions arrived at Karakorum, they were first granted an audience by Töregene Khatun, which we have pointed out that since Güyük was not yet officially enthroned as the great khan, Töregene Khatun the regent of the empire was still the nominal head of the state. This specific role of the Mongol royal females, as Anne F. Broadbridge has suggested, is part of their political responsibilities;

and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, trans. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 64.

⁹² Sorgotani was similarly well known for using gifts to win over supporters, which turned out to be very helpful in the succession of his son Möngke after the death of Güyük, see Rashīd, *The successors of Genghis Khan*, 199–200.

⁹³ For a revaluation of Güyük Khan and his short-term reign, see Kim Hodong, "A Reappraisal of Güyük Khan," in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 309–338.

⁹⁴ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 190.

⁹⁵ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 194–195.

to provide hospitality for their guests served as a perfect way to promote the public reputation of their husband or son, especially when they are not available.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, since the Great Khan normally hosted the envoys with banquets in his wives' *Ordo*, these *khatuns* were also involved with the issue of the management of the gifts brought by envoys. William of Rubruck gave us a vivid account of how such a reception took place:

As he has more than one wife, the one with whom he is sleeping at night sits by his side during the day, and all the rest must come that day to her dwelling to drink: there the court [*curia*] is held for that day, and the gifts presented to the master that day are stored in the lady's treasury.⁹⁷

Persian sources furtherly confirm that these gifts would not just be stored in the lady's treasury, they actually become the income of the *khatuns*, which constituted a significant proportion of the *Ordo*'s finance. In *Jami't-Tawarikh*, Rashīd al-Dīn lists the various financial sources of the *Ordo*:

During the time of Hulagu Khan and Abaqa Khan, funds for meals in the *ordus* and for the ladies were in accordance with Mongol custom, and not too much expenditure was involved here. When booty was brought from enemy territory, a part of it was given to them. Each [of the ladies] also had an *ortaq*, and they brought in something in the name of *asigh* [profit], or someone would present a gift. They also had some herds and there were the profits from their increase. Funds for their meals and necessities came from those sources, and they were satisfied with that.⁹⁸

Based on the records of William of Rubruck and Rashīd al-Dīn, it is reasonable to infer that the *khatuns* had a right to dispose these diplomatic gifts. Very likely, these gifts were regarded as the compensation and benefits for the *khatuns* for hosting the reception of the khan's visitors.

The Mongol courtly protocols were also reflected by the spatial arrangement of the imperial camps. As Carpini observed, there were at least three circle layers before finally

⁹⁶ See Anne F. Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 24-25.

⁹⁷ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson, and with introduction, notes, and appendices by Peter Jackson with David Morgan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 76. For the original Latin text in a critical edition, see A. Van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Florence: Collegium Sancti Bonaventurae, 1929), 479-480: "Quatuor magna festa in anno iste Imperator facit, scilicet festum circumcisionis, eiusque nativitatis diem, et sic de aliis reliquis."

⁹⁸ Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 745-746.

reaching the great khan. The first circle was in a bowshot distance from the imperial camp where the envoys had to dismount and wait for further indications, the second circle was outside of the fence of the great khan's palisade, and those envoys who would be granted audience had to wait at the eastern gate of the palisade. The third circle was in the royal palisade. Carpini gives a vivid description of the grand tent where the great khan hosted the banquet:

A lofty platform of boards had been erected, on which the Emperor's throne was placed. The throne, which was of ivory, was wonderfully carved and there was also gold on it, and precious stones, if I remember rightly, and pearls. Steps led up to it and it was rounded behind. Benches were also placed round the throne, and here the ladies sat in their seats on the left; nobody, however, sat on the right, but the chiefs were on benches in the middle and the rest of the people sat beyond them.⁹⁹

This rigid rule of seating orders is a shared practice of many Central Eurasian polities. In 449, the Roman diplomat Priscus also noticed that in the court of Attila, Attila sat on a couch in the middle while his two sides were full of seats for others, and those on his right hand were for the honorable persons.¹⁰⁰ As for Carpini and his companions, they were given seats on the left side of the court. Yet after delivered the diplomatic letter and fulfilled the mission, Carpini was always seated by the Mongols on the right side during their return journey.¹⁰¹

In addition to the seating orders, the hierarchy in the Mongol imperial court also manifests itself in the sequence of expressing felicitation to the Great Khan during the ceremonies such as the birthday celebration of the Great Khan and the New Year's celebration. Marco Polo, who served in the imperial court of Kublai for decades, had a lively description of this sequence of ranking:

I must add, too, that, on the morning of that feast, before the tables are set out, all the kings and all the dukes, marquesses, counts, barons, knights, astrologers, leeches, and falconers, together with many more officers and rulers of peoples, lands, and armies, all gather together in the presence of the Great Kaan... And this is how they are disposed. First there are the Kaan's sons, his grandsons, and

⁹⁹ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 64-65.

¹⁰⁰ Roger C. Blockley, ed. and trans., *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, vol. 2 (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983), 284-285.

¹⁰¹ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 57.

his kinsfolk of the Imperial lineage. Then there are the kings; then the dukes; then all the other ranks, one after the other, in the proper order...¹⁰²

The observation of Marco Polo can be complemented by Chinese sources. In the chapter *liyue* 禮樂 (or etiquette and music) of *Yuan Shi*, the order of felicitation recorded in *Yuan Shi* is slightly different than that of Marco Polo, as it is narrated in the sequence of royal wives, sons, sons-in-laws, grand chancellor and other officers, monks, and finally the foreign guests.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the seniority in orders is likewise highlighted.

Another distinctive feature of the early Mongol diplomatic protocol is that they tended to grant relative greater liberty for foreign envoys in their camps than many others did. In Tang China (618-907), for instance, foreign envoys were lodged in an isolated place and were forbidden to contact with the general populace or impertinent government officials, with a clear purpose of intelligence security.¹⁰⁴ In Byzantine, we know from the memoir of Liudprand of Cremona, a tenth-century Italian envoy in Constantinople, that he and his companions were housed in a big mansion with armed soldiers stationed as guards, allowing no one to leave and no one to enter.¹⁰⁵ In the Latin West, to take late Medieval England for example, the King would assign his messages to accompany these foreign envoys and checked their movements and contacts; Venice likewise implied various restrictions to foreign envoys to prevent their possible spying.¹⁰⁶ In Mamluk Egypt, court officer *mihmandār* was responsible for receiving the envoys, accommodating them in individual guesthouses, and isolating them from the local population.¹⁰⁷ In the Mongol camps, however, Carpini, Rubruck, and other envoys were

¹⁰² Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Aldo Ricci and L. F. Benedetto, with an Introduction and Index by E. Denison Ross (London: Routledge, 2014), 134-136.

¹⁰³ [Lian Song] 宋濂, ed., 元史 [*Yuan Shi: Official History of the Yuan Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 1667-1668.

¹⁰⁴ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 136.

¹⁰⁵ Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. Paolo Squatriti (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 238-239.

¹⁰⁶ Donald E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 92.

¹⁰⁷ Yehoshua Frenkel, "Embassies and Ambassadors in Mamluk Cairo," in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 254-255.

granted freedom to move freely and were allowed to converse with each other and local persons. Carpini, for instance, met a Russian goldsmith by the name of Cosmas, who not only share food with Carpini and his companions but also showed them the throne and seal he made for the elected Güyük Khan.¹⁰⁸ From the companions of other foreign envoys, and from the Russians and Hungarians who lived in the Mongol empire for decades, Carpini obtained much private information about the Great Khan.¹⁰⁹ In the camp of Batu, Rubruck was treated by a French woman Pascha and her family. This French woman came from Lorraine and was captured by the Mongols in Hungary. She cooked a meal for Rubruck and his companions and gave them a name of her acquaintance in Karakorum, a Parisian goldsmith named William Buchier, who might help them.¹¹⁰ In the camp of Möngke, Rubruck found this master goldsmith and made friends with him. The Buchier invited them to dinner, manufactured an iron for them to make wafers, and gave his own vestments to Rubruck.¹¹¹ He also asked his adopted son to interpret for Rubruck in the theological debates with the Buddhists and Muslims.¹¹²

The free mobility of foreign envoys became under restriction after the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty in 1271. With the governing system became more and more institutionalized and standardized, specialized agencies were set up to cater to the needs of diplomatic receptions. One of the most relevant institutions was the Huitong Guan 會同館. The system of guesthouses for foreign envoys had a long history in China and can be dated back to Qin and Han period around the second century BC. Yet the appellation Huitong Guan was first used in the Liao and Jin period from the tenth century. The envoys of Song and Tangut were recorded to be accommodated by the Jin emperor in this institution. The institution was already very well

¹⁰⁸ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 66.

¹¹⁰ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 182-183.

¹¹¹ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 212, 215-216.

¹¹² *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 232.

established at that time. There were specific personals guarding the doors, supervising the kitchen, preparing drinks and food, cooks, waiters, receptionists, patrol guards, and those responsible for the horses of these envoys.¹¹³ In 1273 by the order of Kublai, the Mongols also founded theirs. Between 1288 and 1292, Huitong Guan was replaced by another institution Sijin Ku 四寶庫 yet was restored soon. For the administration, before 1295, this institution was in charge by the officers of Hanlin Academy 翰林院, whose members were elite Confucius literati. After that, it came under the leadership of the Ministry of Rites 禮部 with a more practical rather than just ideological function. The general personnel composition was as follows: the minister of Rites as the director, two ambassadors, two vice-ambassadors, a chief scribe, four scribes, an interpreter in Mongolian, and eight supporting staff. There was also an associated treasury with three officers, which seems to work as a temporary storing place for the gifts brought by those foreign envoys. In addition, as indicated clearly in *Yuan Shi*, the services of this institution can only be offered to envoys from the vassal countries. Not every envoys or foreigners were entitled to use them.¹¹⁴ Huitong Guan as the prescribed accommodated places for foreign envoys facilitated the administration. We can scarcely say that there was no intelligence consideration. However, such consideration is bidirectional. The Mongols also took it as a chance to collect intelligence from these envoys. The officers from the Ministry of Rites had suggested that when the foreign envoys arrive at Huitong Guan, it would be wise to follow the convention of *Portraits of Periodical Offering* 職貢圖 to record and visualize the intelligence inquired from these envoys such as the customs, local products, and distance. This advice was readily taken by Kublai.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ [Jing Wang] 王靜, 中國古代中央客館制度研究 [Studies on the Ancient Chinese Central System of Guest Houses] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang Education Press, 2012), 151-162.

¹¹⁴ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 2140, 151, 222; [Jing Wang] 王靜, 元代會同館論考 [Study on the Huitong Guan of Yuan dynasty], *Journal of Northwest University (Social Science)*/ 西北大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 32, no.3 (2002): 130-133.

¹¹⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 310: “禮部言:「會同館蕃夷使者時至,宜令有司仿古《職貢圖》,繪而為圖,及詢其風俗、土產、去國里程,籍而錄之,實一代之盛事。」從之。” More on the artistic form of *Portraits of Periodical*



Figure 1 [Ren Bowen] 任伯溫, [Zhi Gong Tu] 職貢圖 or "Tribute bearers", dated the first half of the fourteenth century. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 34.9 x 221.6 cm. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, USA. Source: Linda Komaroff, ed., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), 116-117.

Nevertheless, the standard of boarding and lodging were much better secured. The fourteenth-century Papal envoy John of Marignolli and his companions, for instance, were quite well treated in the imperial court of Toghon Temür (r. 1333-1370). As narrated by himself, they were granted “with the greatest honor”. The great khan accommodated Marignolli and his companions in one of his imperial apartments, sent servants from his court to wait upon them, additionally, two princes were appointed to take care of their needs. Not only meat and drinks were provided endlessly as they wished, but also the Chinese paper. Marignolli and his companions enjoyed such bountiful treatments for nearly four years until they set out on a return journey.¹¹⁶ Although, Marignolli was apparently erroneous to take the Huitong Guan for

Offering 職貢圖 and its visual representation of the traditional Chinese world system, see Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, “Imagining a Universal Empire: a Study of the *Illustrations of the Tributary States of the Myriad Regions* Attributed to Li Gonglin,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 5 (2019): 124-148.

¹¹⁶ Marignolli, “John de' Marignolli's Recollections of Eastern Travel,” 214.

the imperial apartment of the great khan. Almost at the same time, the Arabic traveler Ibn Battuta also arrived in China. He otherwise recorded a somehow exotic episode of the Yuan protocols of diplomatic reception, which may be worthy to be provided here:

One of the remarkable things I saw in this connection is that if I visited one of their cities, and then came back to it, I always saw portraits of me and my companions painted on the walls and on paper in the bazaars... the resemblance was correct in all respects. I was told the Sultan had ordered them to do this, and that they had come to the palace while we were there and had begun observing and painting us without our being aware of it. It is their custom to paint everyone who comes among them. They go so far in this that if a foreigner does something that obliges him to flee from them, they circulate his portrait throughout the country and a search is made for him. When someone resembling the portrait is found, he is arrested...¹¹⁷

This Mongol-Yuan custom of portraying foreigners narrated by Ibn Battuta seems very bizarre. Even it had existed, it would be rather unlikely applicable to envoys. Besides, we cannot find other sources especially Chinese sources to confirm it. It may however be an indication that the Yuan officers became more precautious towards foreign envoys than their nomadic predecessors did, as perceived by the party involved like Ibn Battuta.

Another agency was the Shiyi Si 侍儀司. This institution was not exclusively responsible for the reception of foreign envoys, rather for general courtly ceremonies. In 1271, Kublai issued an edict to establish this new department to manage all the ceremonies regarding the New Year, the birthday of the emperor, and the reception of envoys.¹¹⁸ A relevant part is its role in the procedure for presenting diplomatic gifts. The procedure proceeds as follows. First, officers of the Ministry of Rites would bring diplomatic letters and gifts in front of the emperor. Then liwu sheren 禮物舍人, literally, the officer in charge of receiving gifts, would read out the gift lists to the public. After it, this officer would be led out by the director of Shiyi

¹¹⁷ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 4, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham (Ashgate: Surrey, 1994), 891-892.

¹¹⁸ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 134.

Si 侍儀司 from the right side of the palace, while the gifts would be taken out from the left side of the palace and handed over to the state treasury.¹¹⁹

In sum, the set protocol regarding the reception of envoys and diplomatic gifts is well attested in the Mongol empire. It includes the differentiated boarding standard based on the status of the mutual relationship, the purification of the envoys and their gifts through fire, the obligation of genuflection, the etiquettes of the eventual meeting, and the conspicuous scene of gift distribution. A great focus of these courtly encounters is gift-giving, which is highly symbolic both in the selecting of the gift packages and in the ritualized process of gift-giving. Most of these gifts would be distributed ad hoc following certain protocols, due to the unique ideology of imperial property as well as the practical political considerations. Meanwhile, all of these events during the ceremony took place in meticulously arranged spaces. The whole camp of Great Khan was organized in rigid spatial layers as well as the orders of seating and expressing felicitation. These spatial patterns symbolize the differentiation of power and status between the Great Khan and his counterparts. The Mongol protocol of receiving foreign envoys also had its own features. The foreign envoys enjoyed greater liberty in the Mongol camps. They could walk around and talk freely with other envoys as well as local people. The relatively deeper involvement of the *khatuns* in these diplomatic occasions also makes the Mongol protocol different from others. After the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty in 1271, this system became more institutionalized and standardized. Some practices in the earlier period like the free mobility of foreign envoys also went through changes. Huitong Guan 會同館 became the prescribed place to host and administrate these guests and gather intelligence from them.

¹¹⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 1668.

*John of Plano Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy: Two Cases of Encountering Politics of Gifts*¹²⁰

After tracing the protocol and pattern of reception of foreign envoys in the Mongol Imperial Court, two case studies of papal envoys will be provided in the following part. In 1245, on the eve of the First Council of Lyons, Innocent IV dispatched four diplomatic corps to the Mongols led by the Franciscan friar John of Plano Carpini, the Dominican friar Ascelin of Lombardy, the Dominican friar Andrew of Longjumeau, and the Franciscan friar Lawrence of Portugal separately. Among them, the missions of John of Plano Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy are quite well recorded by Carpini himself and Simon of Saint-Quentin separately.¹²¹ Yet, these two missionaries met remarkably different outcomes. Carpini successfully arrived at Karakorum and was granted an audience by Güyük, while Ascelin of Lombardy ended into severely conflicts with the Mongols in the issues of giving gifts and ways of showing reverence to the Mongol lords. Ascelin of Lombardy did not meet the Great Khan and his own life was scarcely saved. Some scholars have noticed the distinctive results of these two missions and have given different explanations. Yet the issue of conflicts in gifts has not been given duly attentions.¹²² Then we may ask, what factors could explain these two contrastive outcomes?

First, let us look back to the preparation phase of these two missionaries. Since John of Plano Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy were the first envoys sent by Pope to the Mongols,

¹²⁰ The original idea of this part was conceived in my MA thesis prepared at CEU during the academia year of 2018-19. This draft was also presented at the international conference “The Mongols in Central Europe: The Profile and Impact of their Thirteenth-Century Invasions” organized by the department of Medieval and Early Modern history at Eötvös Loránd University in 26-27th November 2020.

¹²¹ See Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 87-92; Gregory G. Guzman, “Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal,” *Speculum* 46, no. 2 (1971): 232-249.

¹²² Antti Ruotsala has noticed that Ascelin arrived with empty hands may annoyed the Mongol governor, yet he has not provided further elucidation, see Antti Ruotsala, *Europeans and Mongols in the Middle of the Thirteenth Century* (Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2001), 83; A recent contribution from the perspective of the conflicts in emotion, see Mirko Sardelić, “John of Plano Carpini vs Simon of Saint-Quentin: 13th-century Emotions in the Eurasian Steppe,” *Golden Horde Review* 5, no. 3 (2017): 494-508.

very limited information of the Mongols and their diplomatic protocols was available and known to them. Both of them might not obtain the information brought by the refugees from newly Mongol-occupied territories. Although renowned scholars like Felicitas Schmieder have suggested that Carpini arranged his book chapters in a resemble way to the questions put to the Russian Archbishop Peter at the First Council of Lyon, we have no confirmative sources to prove that Peter acted as the direct informant of Carpini and his peer missionaries.¹²³ The chronological sequence of the exact dates concerning the arrival of Russian Archbishop Peter and the Italian prelate Master Roger at Lyon and the departure of the papal missionaries has not yet been solved. Nevertheless, Carpini was more luckily in the sense that he chose the northeast way of passing Poland and Russia, the princesses of these countries had already some experience with the Mongols. He mentions the intelligence and helps he obtained from these central and eastern European royal courts in his *Ystoria Mongalorum*:

When we had planned, as has already been told in another chapter, to set out for the Tartars, we first came to the King of the Bohemians. As this lord was a friend of ours from of old we sought his advice concerning the best route to follow, and he replied that it seemed to him it would be best to go through Poland and Russia, for he had relations in Poland by whose aid we would be able to enter Russia. He gave us a letter and safe conduct for the journey so that we could cross Poland and he also arranged for victuals to be supplied to us throughout his country and cities, until we should reach his nephew Boleslaus, Duke of Silesia, who was also a friend and acquaintance of ours. The latter likewise gave us a letter, safe-conduct and supplies in his towns and cities until we should come to Conrad, Duke of Lenczy. We were favoured by the grace of God, for at that time the Lord Vasilko, Duke of Russia, was there and from him we did in fact learn a good deal about the Tartars, for he had sent envoys to them and they had returned to him and his brother Daniel, bringing a safe-conduct for the Lord Daniel to go to Bati. He told us that if we wished to go to them we ought to have valuable gifts to present to them, for they asked for such things with the most pressing importunity, and if they were not given them (as is indeed true) an envoy could not properly fulfil his mission, nay rather he would be held of no account.

We did not wish the business of the Lord Pope and the Church to be hindered on that score, so out of the money which had been given to us as alms to help

¹²³ See Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 199, n. 8; and Peter Jackson, "The Testimony of the Russian 'Archbishop' Peter Concerning the Mongols (1244-5): Precious Intelligence or Timely Disinformation," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Series 3*, 26, no. 1-2 (2016): 65–77, here 70.

us on our way so that we should not be in want, we bought some beaver pelts and also the skins of various other animals. Duke Conrad, the Duchess of Cracow, certain knights and the Bishop of Cracow, learning of this, also presented us with a number of skins of this kind. Duke Conrad and his son and the Bishop of Cracow most earnestly begged the aforementioned Duke Vasilko to do all in his power to help us make the journey to the Tartars, and he replied that he would gladly do this. And so he took us with him to his own country, and after he had kept us for some days as his guests so that we could rest a little.¹²⁴

This passage clearly shows that, under the suggestion of a Russian prince, Carpini purchased some beaver pelts and other precious furs as gifts for the Mongols. At the same time, the secular and ecclesiastical leaders in Cracow also sponsored him with the same kind of things. These gifts indeed smoothed their trips in the Mongol territories, although when they finally arrived at the imperial court of Güyük, the gifts they had prepared already ran out.¹²⁵ In contrast, Ascelin and his companions who bypassed the route of the Near East prepared no gifts. They encountered huge difficulties at the Mongol camp in Asia Minor. According to Simon of Saint-Quentin, the companion of Ascelin, Ascelin not only refused to give gifts but also gave reasons why he should do this:

Assuredly, we bring nothing to him on behalf of the lord pope for it is not customary for him to send *exennia* to anyone, especially infidels and unknowns. In fact, it is better the case that his believing children, namely Christians, and also many infidels often send him presents and offer *exennia*.¹²⁶

In addition, when the Mongol principal counselor and interpreters refuted that giving gifts is indispensable when delivering diplomatic letters, Ascelin responded as follows:

Though it is customary anywhere and especially among Christians that any envoy bearing the letter of his lord should come before the one to whom he was sent to deliver it, see him, and deliver it to him with one's own hands, if it is not permitted to come before your lord without presents and this is not pleasing to you, we will commit the letter of the lord pope to all of you, if it is pleasing, to hand it over to your lord, Baiju Noyan, on his behalf.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ John of Plano Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 50-51.

¹²⁵ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 54, 56, 64.

¹²⁶ This English translation is taken from Stephen Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 41, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020.

¹²⁷ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 41, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020

This arrogance of not respecting the Mongol protocol and treating them equally irritated the Mongols greatly. In addition to refusing to give gifts, Ascelin of Lombardy and his companions were in further conflicts with the Mongols. They were at odds in the issues of showing reverence to the Mongol lord by kneeling and the methods of adoration. Ascelin of Lombardy also refused to present himself at the imperial court of the Great Khan in the East. In the end, predictably, they were not granted an audience by the Mongol general Baiju, and their own life was barely spared partly thanks to the persuasion from one of the wives of Baiju.¹²⁸

It can be fairly argued that the routes these two papal envoys took and the intelligence information they obtained *en route* do matter here. Carpini crossed the lands of Central and Eastern Europe whose countries after the Mongol invasions in the 1230s and 1240s had already some diplomatic contacts with the Mongols. The key informer of Carpini is “Lord Vasilko, Duke of Russia”, whom we know is Vasilko Romanovich, Prince of Volhynia and the younger brother of Daniel of Galicia. The Romanovich brothers had very close and complicated relations with the Polish and Hungarian kings and dukes ever since their early exile life during childhood.¹²⁹ The appearance of Vasilko in the court of Duke Konrad of Masovia in 1245 might have something to do with the recently defeated campaign of Rostislav Mikhailovich, who attempted to conquer Halych with supports from Béla IV of Hungary and Bolesław V the Chaste.¹³⁰ It could also be possibly related with the Mongols since it was in the same year that a Mongol envoy arrived at the camp of Daniel of Galicia and summoned him to Sarai, the

¹²⁸ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 44, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020.

¹²⁹ On the relations of the Rus' Principality of Galicia-Volhynia and beyond with its western neighboring countries, see Márta Font, “Ungarn, Polen und Halic-Volhynien im 13. Jh.,” *Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 38, no. 1-2 (1993): 27-39; “Prince Rostislav in the Court of Béla IV,” *Russian History* 44 (2017): 486-504.

¹³⁰ George A. Perfecky, trans., *The Hypatian Codex, Part II: The Galician-Volynian Chronicle* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973), 55-57.

capital of the Golden Horde to submit to the Mongols.¹³¹ It would be necessary for the Galicia-Volhynia princes to inform their Polish allies of their decision. Daniel of Galicia accepted the ultimatum and had a very interesting encountering story in the court of Batu, which I will return to later. Carpini was lucky enough to meet Vasilko and obtained the very first-hand intelligence information of the Mongols from him.

The ecclesiastical network also functions well in these Central and Eastern European countries, which have been incorporated in the Latin Christendom since the eleventh century. We know that in Breslau a monk named Benedict the Pole joined Carpini and acted as his interpreter of the Old East Slavic language. Christopher Dawson even suggests that these Christian princes of Eastern Europe were Benedict's contacts,¹³² though Stephen of Bohemia, another companion of Carpini set out from Lyon with him yet stopped by Kiev due to illness, may likewise play a role in it. The text quoted above also shows the Bishop of Cracow partly sponsored Carpini's further journey by giving him many precious gifts.¹³³

Another convenience Carpini enjoyed was the internal connections among Central and Eastern European dynasties, which fascinate the travels of Carpini from one court to another. Besides the above-mentioned connection of Romanovich brothers with the Duke Konrad of Masovia, family connections existed among these kings and dukes. Carpini might be wrong to indicate that Bolesław V the Chaste was the nephew of Wenceslaus I of Bohemia, yet Duke Konrad of Masovia was indeed the paternal uncle of Bolesław V the Chaste. These dynastic connections act as a network of patronage for Carpini, who could expect warmly receptions and useful help in these courts. In fact, such networks are crucial for long-distance travelers in the Medieval Eurasian world. An interesting parallel can be found in Eastern Eurasia in the seventh century. Xuanzang 玄奘, a Chinese Buddhist monk who was on his pilgrimage to India

¹³¹ Perfeky, trans., *The Hypatian Codex, Part II*, 57.

¹³² *The Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson, xv.

¹³³ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia*, 51.

received similar assistance during his stay in Gaochang 高昌, present-day Turpan. Although Xuanzang was not an official envoy sent by Tang China, the local ruler Wentai Ju 鞠文泰 treated him with rather high standards and gave him so many gifts which would cover traveling expenses for twenty years. More importantly, Wentai Ju sent his own envoy to introduce Xuanzang to the Western Turkic Khan, who then held the hegemony over Inner Asian countries, and gave Xuanzang twenty-four letters with silken textiles as gifts addressed to the rulers of those countries Xuanzang might plan to travel across. It was under their patronage that Xuanzang finally arrived in India safely.¹³⁴

As for Ascelin of Lombardy, Gregory G. Guzman has carefully reconstructed his travel routes in the Middle East. According to Guzman, Ascelin and his companions firstly disembarked at Arce, then headed for central Turkey, and passed through the city of Sebaste, then had a stop at Tiflis and finally arrived at the camp of Baiju in the territory of Sitens.¹³⁵ At that time, the mendicant orders had already established several posts in the Middle East since the early of the thirteenth century. For the Dominicans, their Holy Land Province was established in 1228.¹³⁶ Presumably, Ascelin could get some help from his brethren there. We know that in Tiflis Guichardus of Cremona, who had been lived there for seven years, joined him. Guichardus must be a very important source of information for Ascelin since later he reminded Ascelin that genuflecting to the Mongol lords is not concerning idolatry, rather it is customary for envoys to show reverence, although Ascelin in the end did not follow his advice.¹³⁷ Then how could we interpret such decisions of Ascelin? Guzman has suggested that

¹³⁴ See [Xinjiang Rong] 榮新江, “高昌王國與中西交通” [The kingdom of Gaochang and the Sino-western communications], 歐亞學刊 [*International Journal of Eurasian Studies*] 2 (2000): 73-84.

¹³⁵ Gregory G. Guzman, “Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal,” *Speculum* 46, no. 2 (1971): 232-249.

¹³⁶ Rita George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo Da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 11-13.

¹³⁷ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 42, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020

it concerns the personality that Ascelin lacks in tactic and diplomacy.¹³⁸ While in a very recent article, Jacques Paviot has proposed that Ascelin precisely understood the potential meaning of submission in gifts, and therefore he refused to perform the genuflection and prepare gifts.¹³⁹ Both argumentations have its points. As it is well known, Latin Christians could only genuflect in front of the pope or the kings, any other cases might be condemned as idolatry. Ascelin had a reason to convince himself to behave as a devout Christian if he ignored his new identity as the pope's envoy. Concerning the gifts, it would be relevant here to retrospect briefly the attitude of the mendicants towards properties and poverty.¹⁴⁰ A great change of the religious life in thirteenth-century Europe is the rising of the mendicant orders, with the Franciscan and Dominican as their representatives. Central to their new way of life is the idea of voluntary poverty, and these mendicants did not own their personal properties. Therefore, it can easily be understood that mendicants like Carpini and Ascelin themselves could not afford to buy gifts for the Mongols. However, it does not mean that they could figure it out in another way. When Carpini learned of the gift-giving protocols, he readily accepted the donations of the Polish lords and prepared gifts for the Mongol rulers. Following the rule of Francis can only explain why the mendicants were not willing to accept precious gifts from the Mongol rulers, rather vice versa.

There is however another possibility. My own proposal is that compared to Daniel of Galicia and other Eastern European princes Carpini had come across, the Mendicant monks in the Middle East were not in the position to access the diplomatic details with the Mongols, at least at the high level. It is highly likely that they did not quite well understand the place of

¹³⁸ Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju," 249.

¹³⁹ Jacques Paviot, "The Mendicant Friars: Actors in Diplomatic Encounters with the Mongols," in Maurits Ebben and Louis Sicking, eds., *Beyond Ambassadors: Consuls, Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 119-136, here 133.

¹⁴⁰ More on this topic see Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and the articles in Constant J. Mews, and Anna Welch, eds., *Poverty and Devotion in Mendicant Cultures 1200-1450* (London: Routledge, 2016). I would like to thank Dr. Dorottya Uhrin for drawing my attentions on this issue.

gifts in the general Mongol diplomatic protocol. Besides, Ascelin might underestimate the importance of the information provided by Guichardus of Cremona, just as his stubbornness or arrogance in denying the Mongol protocols almost costed his own life in Mongol court. We could approach this personality of Ascelin from another perspective. Concerning the goals of Ascelin's corps, he stated several times that he was commanded to deliver the letter of the Pope to the first Mongol army he could find rather, and to meet the Great Khan personally in the east was not his obligation.¹⁴¹ This assertion could be somehow questioned. We do not have the original letter delivered by Ascelin, yet the two letters carried by Laurence of Portugal and Carpini do exist, which were clearly addressed to the emperor of the Mongols and with a double purpose of conversion and intelligence.¹⁴² It may not unreasonable to argue that Ascelin had the same tasks, since they were dispatched at the same time. It is hard to imagine that there is a better way to fulfill this mission except entering into the heartland of the Mongols and meeting their highest ruler. A piece of circumstantial evidence can also be found in the biography of Innocent IV authored by the Italian Franciscans and bishop of Assisi Nicholas of Calvi (?-1273). In the texts related to the eastern missionaries sent by Innocent IV, Calvi commented that although many of them had attempted to reach the Mongol emperor, only Carpini succeeded, since the distance was too far, the emperor was on the extreme part of his army, and the army itself stretched in endless length.¹⁴³ It seems that Ascelin was among the few who did not give a try.

A further question is that Ascelin of Lombardy claimed the pope would not prepare gifts for the Mongols since they were infidels. Then should the papal envoys bring gifts for the

¹⁴¹ Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 46, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, April 15, 2020.

¹⁴² See "Two Bulls of Pope Innocent IV addressed to the Emperor of the Tartars," in *The Mission to Asia*, 73-76.

¹⁴³ Niccolò da Calvi, "Vita Innocentii IV," in F. Pagnotti, ed., *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria*, XXI (Rome: Biblioteca Vallicelliana, 1898), 92: "Hic solus ad ipsorum regem pervenit, cum plurimi hoc temptassent, nec unquam ipsum attingere potuissent, et propter ipsius distantiam, qui erat in ultima parte sui exercitus constitutus, qui quidem exercitus in longum nimium tendebatur." Also see Paul Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté, II," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 24, (1924): 270-271.

Mongol Great Khan and lords? Is Ascelin's declaration really justified if we examine it with the practice of papal diplomacy and proselytism with infidel rulers during the previous and following periods? I have not investigated thoroughly on this topic. Yet some sporadic yet illuminating cases I have come across show that gifts had played a role in these transcultural contacts on the periphery of Latin Christendom. In the fifth century, the catholic missionary Maewyn Succat, later known as Saint Patrick, sometimes made his proselytizing easier by giving gifts to the local Irish chiefs.¹⁴⁴ In 1120s, Otto of Bamberg, a German Bishop of Bamberg, carried many gifts during his missionary among the Pomeranians, which contributed to his peaceful and successful work. The gift package he presented to the Duke of Pomeranian was recorded by contemporary sources, a walking stick was among it.¹⁴⁵ In the early thirteenth century, in the Baltic region, a Livonia leader Caupo of Turaida was given generous gifts by the Pope Innocent III. This gift-giving strategy worked so well that Caupo became a faithful Christian and reliable alliance in that region.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, it is much more assured that in the following period, both the Pope and secular rulers of Western Europe recognized the importance of gifts and even used them positively to approach the Mongol rulers. Some of them are religious gifts, which possess distinctive transcultural features in these encounters.¹⁴⁷ These gifts could be the Bible, Cross, and tent-chapel in their material forms. Perhaps the most well-known gift package of such was

¹⁴⁴ J. B. Bury, *St. Patrick: The Life and World of Ireland's Saint* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010), 139-140. Also see the article in Hungarian by Mónika Belucz, "Szent Patrik térítőútjának anyagi háttere: Ajándékozás az 5. századi Írországbán [The Financial Background of Saint Patrick's Mission: Gift-giving in the 5th-Century Ireland]," in Belucz Mónika, et. al., eds., *Magister historiae. Válogatott tanulmányok a 2012-ben és 2013-ban megrendezett középkorral foglalkozó, mesterszakos hallgatói konferenciák előadásaiból* (Budapest: ELTE BTK Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola, 2014), 13-30. I am grateful to Dr. Dorottya Uhrin for this last cited reference.

¹⁴⁵ Ebo and Herbordus, *The Life of Otto, Apostle of Pomerania, 1060-1139*, ed. Charles Henry Robinson (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 40. See also Robert Bartlett, "The Conversion of a Pagan Society in the Middle Ages," *History* 70, no. 229 (1985): 185-201.

¹⁴⁶ Marek Tamm, Linda Kaljundi, Carsten Selch Jensen, eds., *Crusading and Chronicle Writing on the Medieval Baltic frontier: A Companion to the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* (London: Routledge, 2016), 215-216.

¹⁴⁷ Religious gifts, Islamic items in this context much more frequently appeared in the gifts package of the western Mongols Khanates with their Islamic peers (mainly the Mamuluk Egypt) after their own conversion to Islam, the Ilkhanate in 1295, the Golden Horde and Chagatai Khanate in the next decades.

sent by Louis IX to the Mongol rulers in 1250, which included a lavishly ornamented portable chapel and many other religious items. Through the hands of the Dominican missionary Andrew of Longjumeau, this tent-chapel came to Oghul Qaimish, the widow of Güyük Khan.¹⁴⁸ It is arguable that three years later William of Rubruck saw it again near Karakorum.¹⁴⁹ In the letter written to Louis IX in 1262, Hülegü likewise referred a special chapel.¹⁵⁰ Some scholars disagree with this interpretation of provenance. According to Marianna Shreve Simpson, Louis IX's gifts were presented not to Güyük but to his widow Oghul Qaimish, then serving as regent after the death of Güyük, and may not have been passed on to Güyük's successor, Möngke. It seems unlikely that the chapel in the court of Möngke was "the" one sent by Louis IX.¹⁵¹

William of Rubruck, who acted as the envoy of the French King Louis the IX to the Mongols in the 1250s, took along with himself many objects during his journey. Some of them were originally arranged as gifts to give, some others were not but ended as gifts.¹⁵² Among them, there were many books including a Bible presented as a gift from Louis IX of France and a beautifully illuminated psalter from his Queen. The psalter has a very interesting afterlife. When Rubruck arrived at the camp of Sartaq, the son of Batu, in July of 1253, these Christian objects interested Sartaq who himself was a Christian a lot. Upon departure for Batu's headquarters, many belongings of Rubruck were forced to leave behind, the psalter was among them.¹⁵³ One year later during the return journey, Rubruck came to Sartaq again and claimed most of his belongings, except the Queen's psalter, which Sartaq had been very much attracted

¹⁴⁸ Jean de Joinville, *The History of Saint Louis*, trans. Joan Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 40, 142.

¹⁴⁹ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter A. Jackson, and D. O. Morgan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 173-174.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter of Hülagü, Il-Khan of Persia, to King Louis of France," *Viator* 11 (1980): 245-259, here 257.

¹⁵¹ Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Manuscripts and Mongols: Some Documented and Speculative Moments in East-West/Muslim-Christian Relations," *French Historical Studies* 30, no. 3 (2007): 351-394, esp. 361-367.

¹⁵² A recent interesting study on these Christian objects, see Jana Valtrová, "Christian Material Culture and the Mongols: The Case of William of Rubruck," *Eurasian Studies* 17 (2019): 228-243.

¹⁵³ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 117-118.

by it. Rubruck decided to give it as a gift to Sartaq.¹⁵⁴ A similar scene repeated decades later. Marco Polo mentions that in 1266 Kublai Khan asked the two brothers Niccolò and Maffeo Polo to bring holy oil from the lamp at Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem for him, for Kublai's mother Sorghaghtani was a Christian, and the Great Khan rejoiced very much over this gift when he finally revived it in 1274.¹⁵⁵

Such gift exchange also took place during the mission of Rabban Sauma in the 1280s. Sauma, perhaps the most famous Mongol envoy in Europe, was sent to Europe by the Ilkhan Arghun and intended to negotiate a potential alliance against the Mamluk Egypt. There he was granted audiences by the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus, Pope Nicholas IV, King Philip the Fair of France, and King Edward I of England. The Nestorian monk brought precious gifts provided both by the Ilkhan Arghun and by Yahballaha III, his former student and then the Patriarch of the Church of the East for the Latin rulers. Arghun prepared gifts for the Byzantine emperor, the King of France, and the King of England, while Yahballaha III presented suitable gifts for the Roman Pope. The content of the gifts package was unfortunately not provided in the texts.¹⁵⁶ On the other side, Sauma and his Mongol lords also received return gifts. The most symbolic ones among these were the relics given by Pope Nicholas IV to Patriarch Yahballaha III, which includes a small piece of the apparel of Lord Christ, a piece of kerchief of Lady Mary, and some small fragments of the saints buried in Rome.¹⁵⁷

A late famous example is a horse that arrived at Khanbaliq in 1342 sent by Pope Benedict XII. This horse was brought to China by the Franciscan John of Marignolli.¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵⁴ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 258.

¹⁵⁵ *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 7-12.

¹⁵⁶ E.A. Wallis Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1928), 166.

¹⁵⁷ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 195-196.

¹⁵⁸ On the mission of John of Marignolli and the horse gift, see Paul Pelliot, "Chrétien d'Asie Centrale et d'Extrême-Orient," *T'oung Pao* 15 (1914): 623-644; Herbert Franke, "Das 'himmlische Pferd' des Johann von Marignola," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 50 (1968): 33-40; [Ting Wang] 王頌, "'天馬'詩文與馬黎諾里出使元廷" [The Poems of the Heavenly Horse and the Mission of John of Marignolli to Yuan Court], in 駕澤搏雲: 中外關係史地研究[*Historical and Geographical Studies of the Sino-foreign Relations*] (Haikou, 2003): 92-110., On the way to Khanbaliq, Marignolli stationed at the court of the Jochid Khan Uzbek, see Denis Sinor, "Some

mission was a continuation of century-long communications between the Mongol great khans and the popes. Yet the direct impetus was as a return visit for the envoys sent by the Yuan emperor Toghon Temür arrived at Avignon in 1338, the aim of which was to ask the Pope to send a new archbishop for the catholic archdiocese of Khanbaliq. This archdiocese was previously established by Pope Clement VI in 1307 with the Franciscan John of Montecorvino as its first archbishop, yet Montecorvino passed away in 1328 and the position remained vacant since then.¹⁵⁹ Pope Benedict XII readily prepared letters and gifts and appointed his legates, and John of Marignolli was one of them. Marignolli and his companions arrived at Khanbaliq in 1342 and Toghon Temür welcomed them warmly. The emperor rejoiced greatly when he saw the horses brought for him, according to *Yuan Shi*, one of the horses was so special that it was 11 feet 6 inches in length, 6 feet 8 inches high, with a pure black color skin and two white hind hooves.¹⁶⁰ The horse enjoyed a shining afterlife. Toghon Temür order his courtiers and court painters to immortalize this horse in their works.¹⁶¹ Clearly, the Yuan emperor was very satisfied with this horse for its symbolic meaning of compliance and submission, which nevertheless might not be the intention of the gift giver. Concerning the motivation of Pope Benedict XII to send horses, we have no direct evidence. Yet, one historical parallel might be useful to be provided here. In 1229, Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily signed a peace treaty with and Al-Kamil, the Ayyubid Sultan (r. 1218-1238), which marked the end of the Sixth Crusade. As with the diplomatic negation, these two rulers agree to

Latin Sources on the Khanate of Uzbek,” in *Essays on Uzbek History, Culture, and Language*, ed. Bakhtiyar A. Nazarov and Denis Sinor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 110-119. On the late life of Marignolli after the mission, see Irene Malfatto, “John of Marignolli and the Historiographical Project of Charles IV,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis* 15 (2017): 131-140.

¹⁵⁹ Good introductions to these missionaries, see Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (London: Routledge, 2005), 256-260; A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London: 1930), 252-264. The letters written by John of Montecorvino during his tenure were published in A. Van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol.1, 335-355; English translations in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Henry Yule (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), 3-27.

¹⁶⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 865.

¹⁶¹ Herbert Franke translated one of these poems into German, see Herbert Franke, “Das ‚himmlische Pferd‘ des Johann von Marignola,” 37-38.

exchange gifts. The gifts Frederick II prepared included his own horse with luscious decorations.¹⁶² If it was the same case, then we may guess that the Rome Pope intended to use these horses to impress the Mongol Great Khan exactly in the items the Mongols were renowned to have.

In sum, based on the case studies of John of Plano Carpini and Ascelin of Lombardy, as well as the social lives of the famous gifts such as tent-chapel and horse from the west, we can fairly argue that the traditional scholarship stressing the avarice and excess of the Mongols in demanding gifts should also be reconsidered. Gift-giving in the diplomatic contacts is more or less a Eurasian phenomenon which the Roman papacy likewise practiced even with the infidels. The Mongol imperial court has a protocol of reception of envoys and their gifts, which during the latter period was also recognized by the western secular and spiritual rulers like French King Louis IX and Pope Benedict XII. A transformation to a much more positive strategy of gift-giving can be identified in the western diplomatic policy towards the Mongols in the following periods. Good and well prepared gifts could certainly smooth the engagements between the western envoys and the Mongols which is not different compared to our contemporary society. The symbolic meanings of the gifts, however, could be understood differently from the two parties, which in my perspective form as a part of the symbolic competitions in the Mongols Eurasia, a competing area other than the military conflicts.

¹⁶² Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 31-32.

Submission, Loyalty, and Trust-building: The Experience of Envoys from Vassal Countries in the Mongol Imperial Court

As with the territorial expansion, a set of rules regarding the status and mutual obligations between the Mongols and their conquered states took shape. Essentially, the Mongols took different measures to govern these lands depending on their relations with the central government. Scholars have well studied the hierarchical nature of the Mongol imperial network. Byong-ik Koh addresses that there were three patterns of conquest and rule by the Mongols, namely the direct rule on the lands conquered from the Jurchen, the Song Dynasty, Uyghurs, and Khwarezmia by the central government, the indirect rule on the lands which were later conferred to the members of the Chinggisid house, and the tributary subordinate nations.¹⁶³ Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao provides a more nuanced fourfold classification based on the historical sociology of Max Webber. According to him, the Mongol domination in Jurchen, the Song Dynasty, Uyghurs, and Khwarezmia was a centralized bureaucratic rule; the lands of the Chinggisid family was a form of patrimonial-feudal rule; the indirect rule was applied in the Goryeo Korea and the lands of Uyghurs before the rising of Qaidu; and those lands submitted to the Mongols before the military conquest can be counted as tributary states.¹⁶⁴ In fact, Hsiao makes a more nuanced division of the lands submitted to the Mongols peacefully or not, yet regarding their status after incorporated into the Mongol diplomatic network, such an epistemological division is not very relevant for us. In this subchapter, the experience of envoys from the tributary states in the Mongol imperial court will be under investigation with a focus on the issue of loyalty and trust-building.

¹⁶³ Byong-ik Koh, "Patterns of Conquest and Control by the Mongols of the 13th Century," in *Proceedings of the Third East Asian Altaistic Conference, August 17-24, 1969, Taipei, China*, ed. Chieh-hsien Ch'en and Jagchid Sechin (Taipei: The Third East Asian Altaistic Conference, 1970), 154-163.

¹⁶⁴ [Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao] 蕭啟慶, 內北國而外中國: 蒙元史研究 [*Studies on Mongol-Yuan History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 769, footnote 3.

The Mongols issued the conditions of submission first and most in their ultimatums. The Mongol ideology of world conquest, the causes of offense, and several specific articles of submission are the conventional components of these edicts.¹⁶⁵ These ultimatums were expected to be strictly observed by the addressees, otherwise, they would face bloody conquest and punishment. The first recorded ultimatum sent by a Mongol Great Khan, according to Peter Jackson, was from Ögödei to the Seljuk sultan of Rūm in 1236. In this letter, the Mongols claim that the whole earth's face is granted to the Mongols by God, anyone who violates this and resists surrendering peacefully shall be severely punished by the impending Mongol armies.¹⁶⁶ In Europe, Dominican Julian of Hungary obtained the first precise information on the Mongols in 1237. He was then on a mission of seeking *Magna Hungaria*, the homeland of the Magyars. In this ultimatum, the Mongol ruler blames the Hungarians for killing their envoys and providing asylum for the Cuman refugees.¹⁶⁷ The most widely circulated letter from the Mongol Great Khan in Europe was the ultimatum carried back by John of Plano Carpini in 1247, as a reply to the letters from Pope Innocent IV. Güyük Khan demands the submission of Pope, the head of all European princes as understood by the Mongols, by personally coming

¹⁶⁵ For the ultimatums of the Mongol empire, see Eric Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1940-1941): 378-413; Jean Richard, "Ultimatums mongols et lettres apocryphes: l'Occident et les motifs de guerre des Tartares," *Central Asiatic Journal* 17 (1973): 212-222; Peter Jackson, "World-Conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy," in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods*, ed. J. Pfeiffer and Sh. A. Quinn, in collaboration with E. Tucker (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 2006), 3-22; Denise Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance: Thoughts on the Diplomatic Exchanges between the Mongols and the Latin West," in *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality. Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 159-198.

¹⁶⁶ Jackson, "World-Conquest and Local Accommodation," 6–7; Herbert W. Duda, *Die Seltschukengeschichte des Ibn Bībī* (Kopenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959): 194-195.

¹⁶⁷ Scholars have not reached consent with the authorship of this letter. Denis Sinor argues for Batu, Peter Jackson considers Ögödei, while Denise Aigle holds that it was promulgated by Ögödei but relayed by Batu, see the discussion in Denise Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance," 162. Latin text of the letter in Heinrich Dörrie, "Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen: Die Missionsreisen des fr. Julian OP. ins Uralgebiet (1234/5) und nach Rutland (1237) und der Bericht des Erzbischofs Peter über die Tartaren," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* 6 (1956): 178. English translation in Denis Sinor, "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," in *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times. Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, eds. C.E. Bosworth, Ch. Issawi and R. Savory (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1989), 344; and Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 60–61.

and serving in the imperial court.¹⁶⁸ In a letter carried back by Andrew of Longjumeau in 1251, Oghul Qaimish, the regent and wife of the late Güyük, likewise ordered Louis IX to send gold and silver as tribute annually.¹⁶⁹

The obligations imposed by the Mongols on their vassal polities are most explicitly expressed in the ultimatum issued by Kublai in 1267 to Annam, a state based on today's Vietnam. These articles are: (1) the ruler must come personally to the Mongol imperial court, (2) sons or younger brothers must be offered as hostages in the court, (3) the population must be registered, (4) military units are to be raised, (5) taxes must be sent in, and (6) a Mongol *darughachi* (or governor) must be appointed to take charge of all affairs.¹⁷⁰ If the first two demands should be better understood as the obligation of political subordination, then last four demands are definitely the core of the Mongol client system. As Thomas Allsen rightfully points out, what the Mongols desired is not only an acknowledgment of military defeat and political subordination but also to put all the sources of client states at their disposal for further expansion.¹⁷¹ All of the polities entering the Mongol system have to fulfill all the obligations. The leaders of the vassal polities had to visit the court of the Great Khan regularly with tributes or gifts, and the succession in these client states had to be confirmed by the Great Khan. Meanwhile, when the Mongol Khan waged wars against new lands, these rulers must lead their own troops in aid.

Since the rulers of the vassal states were obligated to visit the court of the Mongol Great Khan regularly, it means that in most cases these rulers themselves acted as the leader of their

¹⁶⁸ Latin translation of this letter was transmitted by Benedict the Pole, the companion of Carpini, see A. Van den Wyngaert ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Florence: Collegium Sancti Bonaventurae, 1929), 142-43. English translation in *The Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 85-86. Persian copy was identified by the famous French Orientalist Paul Pelliot in the Vatican archives in 1920, see Paul Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la Papauté," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 23 (1922-3): 3-30.

¹⁶⁹ The original text is preserved in fragmentary in Jean de Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, ed. Jacques Monfrin (Paris: Garnier, 1995), 425. English translation in Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality*, 179.

¹⁷⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 2196; Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 114.

¹⁷¹ Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism*, 124.

diplomatic corps to the Mongols. Some of them, like the Christian King of Lesser Armenia Het'um I (r. 1226-70) achieved greatly during his mission while the King of the Kingdom of Siam mentioned at the very beginning partly fulfilled his goals. Some others were not so lucky, the Ayyubid ruler of Syria al-Nāṣir Yūsuf (r. 1236-60) miscalculated the situation and hedged his bets, while the Prince of Rus' Mikhail of Chernigov (c.1185-1246) annoyed the Mongols by violating the Mongolian taboo of trampling the thread, both of them met a miserable end. The reasons for these confrontations and conflicts are multifold. The consideration from *Realpolitik* certainly matters. Meanwhile, the role of gifts, or tributes in the vassal relationships, and ritual issues in courtly encounters should not be underestimated.

The Hethumid was the ruling house of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia formed by groups of refugees from the invasions of Seljuks in Armenia in the later eleventh century. In the battle of Köse Dağ of 1243, the Mongol army led by Baiju won a decisive victory against the sultan of the Seljuks of Rum Kaykhusraw II and captured a large part of East Anatolia. After that, the Hethumid king decided to negotiate with the Mongols directly.¹⁷² In 1246, Het'um I sent his brother Sempad the Constable (d. 1276) with gifts to Karakorum and conveyed submission to Güyük Khan. In 1254, Het'um I visited the court of Möngke Khan personally. His story of preparing gifts during this journey was recorded by the contemporary Armenian historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi:

And fearing him [Batu Khan] he set out in secret having disguised himself for dread of the Turks, who were his neighbours because they bore a grudge against him for his having given aid to the Tat'ar. And hurrying through his territory he came in twelve days to the town of Kars [...] he halted in Aragacotn opposite Mount Aray in a village called Vardenis [...] [Here he remained] until there were brought him from his house the goods to be used as gifts and presents, which were sent by his father the prince of princes Kostandin, then an old man, and his sons Leon and Toros, whom he had left as his vice-gerent.¹⁷³

¹⁷² For the relation between the Mongol Empire and the Kingdom of Armenia, see Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220-1335)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹⁷³ J. A. Boyle, "The Journey of Het'um I, King of Little Armenia, to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke," *Central Asiatic Journal* 9 (1964): 175–189, here 178-179. On the life and activities of Kirakos Gandzaketsi, see Dashdondog Bayarsaikhan, "Kirakos Gandzakets'i, as a Mongol Prisoner," *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 22 (2018): 155–163.

In case that the neighboring Seljuks would loot their corps, Het'um I decided to depart first until arrived at a safe place he ordered the gifts to be sent to him. No information of the content of this gift package was provided, but from the same source, we know that these gifts and the personal presence of Het'um I pleased Möngke Khan, and the great khan granted rare privileges to Het'um I which included the relief of obligation of quartering Mongol garrison forces and the census and tax.¹⁷⁴ In the later period, the Medieval Armenian kings repeatedly referred to these privileges to boost the status of Armenia on the grand chessboard of Middle East.¹⁷⁵ Het'um I also kept good relationships with other Mongol Khans. In 1259, he and his son-in-law Prince of Antioch Bohemond VI went together to the court of Ilkhan Hülegü (r. 1256-65) to express their submission.¹⁷⁶ Then after, the father and son-in-law participated in the Mongol conquest of Syria and received abundant rewards including territories after the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260.¹⁷⁷

The matter of gifts also had a place within the relations between the Medieval Kingdom of Georgia and the Mongols. Carpini narrated a very interesting story of the succession competition between the two sons of the King of Georgia. According to him, a legitimate son called Melic and another son born by a concubine named David went to the emperor of the Tatars and sought arbitration in their disputes. David prepared a huge amount of precious gifts for the emperor, while Melic brought even more both in qualities and in quantities, and accompanied by his mother the former queen of Georgia, who unfortunately passed away during the journey. In the end, the gifts of Melic did not work and David won the favor of the Mongols

¹⁷⁴ Boyle, "The Journey of Het'um I," 181; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 253.

¹⁷⁵ See David D. Bundy, "Het'um's *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*: A Study in Medieval Armenian Historiography and Propaganda," *Revue des Etudes Armeniennes* 20 (1986–7): 223–235.

¹⁷⁶ Robert P. Blake and Richard N. Frye trans., "History of the Nation of the Archers (the Mongols) by Grigor of Akanc," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12 (1949): 269–399, here 341.

¹⁷⁷ Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, 257.

by calming that in the Mongol custom there is no distinction between the sons of a wife and those of a concubine as well.¹⁷⁸

We know now that Carpini referred to the events of 1243 and his records have some errors in historical facts. There were indeed two Davids: one of them was David Narin, the son of the Queen Rusudan, another was David Ulu, the illegitimate son of the former King of Georgia Lasha Giorgi and the nephew of Queen Rusudan. In 1223, Lasha Giorgi passed away and his sister Queen Rusudan inherited the throne. In fear of his nephew's aspiration, she asked his son-in-law Kaykhusraw II, the Sultan of the Seljuks of Rum, to detain him in his court for nearly seven years until the Sultan was defeated by the Mongols in 1242-1243. David Ulu was released by the Mongols and then went to the Great Khan Güyük to claim his throne. There he met his cousin David Narin. In addition, the queen herself actually was not on the journey with his son and did not live to see the return of his son. The epilogue of the story was that Güyük Khan supported the claim of both candidates and assigned them as co-rulers with David Ulu as the senior king and the other as the junior.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, this episode is still illuminative in the sense that it reveals both candidates knew well the protocols of Mongol imperial court and prepared gifts for their overlords. These vassal rulers respected the Mongol custom, here the status of Mongol royal and illegitimate sons, and won trust from the Mongols by quoting even imitating it.

The kings of Armenia and Georgia were definitely deftly enough to know how to handle their Mongol overlords well. If their experience demonstrates that carefully prepared gifts and related speeches could promote one's own status before the Mongol Great Khan, then our next case will show that those princes who brought no gifts would very likely end in misfortune. That is the case of Sultan al-Nāṣir Yūsuf, the principal Ayyubid ruler of Syria, and his conflicts

¹⁷⁸ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia*, 40-41.

¹⁷⁹ For more details on this event, see A.C.S. Peacock, "Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries," *Anatolian Studies* 56 (2006): 127-146; Cyrill Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia," in J.M. Hussey, ed., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 593-637.

with Hülegü.¹⁸⁰ As early as in 1244, al-Nāṣir had contacted the Mongol civil governor of Persia Arghun Aqa and paid tributes to him since the following year. In 1245-46 and 1250, al-Nāṣir dispatched diplomatic corps twice to Karakorum who were received by Güyük Khan and Möngke Khan separately, and his vassal status with the Mongol empire was also formally confirmed. Meanwhile, al-Nāṣir kept offering tributes to Baiju, the Mongol military leader in Near East. However, when Hülegü authorized by his brother Möngke Khan commanded a great army for a new western campaign in 1253, al-Nāṣir swayed his mind. Until the fall of Baghdad in 1258, he had never shown himself in front of either the Great Khan or now his highest representative Hülegü, al-Nāṣir even did not send an envoy and proper gifts to the latter. According to the Ayyubid chronicler Ibn al- 'Amīd, the misbehavior that al-Nāṣir did not prepare gifts for Hülegü yet kept sending to Baiju made Hülegü furious.¹⁸¹ Although al-Nāṣir made several attempts after 1258 to reconcile the relationship, it was already too late. He was taken prisoner by the Mongols and died at their hands shortly after the battle of Ain Jalut.

To the northeast, the principalities of Rus' had entered in a similar relationship with the Mongols in the 1240s and a more institutionalized communication was established after the foundation of the Golden Horde in the Lower Volga area.¹⁸² As a symbol of submission, these Russian princes have to visit the court of the Horde at Sarai regularly. John Fennell carefully reconstructed the numbers of these travels from various sources: between 1242 and 1252, the Suzdalian princes visited Sarai at least nineteen times and Karakorum four times, two of the Rostov princes went to Sarai for three times in the years 1242-1250, three southern princes

¹⁸⁰ The case has been discussed in R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1260* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977), 333-363; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānīd War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19-24; Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World*, 130-131.

¹⁸¹ Al-Makīn Ibn al-'Amīd, *Chronique des Ayyoubides (602-658/1205-6-1259-60)*, trans. Anne-Marie Eddé and Françoise Micheau (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1994), 163, 167-168, quoted from Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, 21.

¹⁸² There are huge amounts of literature as well as debates on the relations between the Golden Horde and the Rus', a recent synthesis, see Charles J. Halperin, "Interrelations of Rus' with the Jochid Ulus," in Rafael Khakimov and Marie Favereau, eds., *The Golden Horde in World History* (Kazan: Sh. Marjani Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, 2017), 193-202.

went to Sarai and one of them continued his journey to Karakorum, and the grand princes of Vladimir also regularly appeared in the Mongol court.¹⁸³

Among these Russian princes, the story of Mikhail of Chernigov was quite well known through the centuries partly due to his own tragedy, or heroic deeds in the court of Batu, partly thanks to the transmission and propagation of various contemporary and subsequent sources. These sources which include the Russian Chronicle like Hypatian Chronicle, the Laurentian Chronicle, the Novgorod First Chronicle, and the Latin travelogue of Carpini and some other genre of miracles, a relatively united discourse can be identified that highlights the conflicts in ritual and belief between the Christian Mikhail of Chernigov and the infidel Mongols. Mikhail of Chernigov purportedly refused to bow to the idol of Genghis Khan and was killed for that.¹⁸⁴ Modern Scholars have been contradictory to each other on the real motivation of the Mongols to execute Mikhail of Chernigov for a long time. Christopher Dawson argues that Batu had no trust in the loyalty of Mikhail of Chernigov since he had been a refuge in the West and had a marriage connection with those dynasties.¹⁸⁵ Martin Dimnik has suggested that the question of loyalty hits the wrong target since Daniel of Galicia, Prince of Galicia and Volhynia, had much more deeply involved with the central European powers and was half-hearted towards his new overlord, Batu still accepted his submission at the very beginning. Instead, Dimnik proposes that as the senior Prince of Rus', Mikhail of Chernigov still forms a great threat to the rule of the Batu. It was also unbearable to the Mongols that Mikhail of Chernigov had killed the Mongol envoys before. Moreover, Mikhail of Chernigov was the very last Prince of Rus' to submit to the Mongols.¹⁸⁶ In a recent article, Alexander Maiorov using the newly discovered sources has challenged these old schools. He puts forward a very novel and somehow

¹⁸³ John Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia, 1200-1304* (London: Routledge, 1983), 99.

¹⁸⁴ Martin Dimnik, *The Dynasty of Chernigov, 1146-1246* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 368-370.

¹⁸⁵ *The Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson, 10, footnote 1.

¹⁸⁶ Dimnik, *Mikhail, The Dynasty of Chernigov, 1146-1246*, 372.

psychological explanation: the maneuver of the half-hearted Mikhail of Chernigov was revealed to Batu by a Galician prince (possibly Daniel) arrived before him; having realized the disclosure, Mikhail of Chernigov chose to act defiantly and died for that.¹⁸⁷ In my opinion, the issue of rituals does not always decisively matter in these diplomatic encounters. The previously discussed case of Ascelin of Lombardy has shown that if there was still has a diplomatic value, the life of an arrogant envoy might be spared. At the time, the Mongols had not yet enough information as well as the intention of conquest over the papal state and the Latin West. For Mikhail of Chernigov, since Batu had put almost all of the lands of Rus' under his control, he could now set Mikhail of Chernigov as an example of the disloyalty to warn off other potential repels.

On the other side of the Eurasian world, the Yuan Dynasty held the same hegemony over his East Asian and Southeast Asian neighboring countries, whose rulers were required to visit the imperial court personally. The case of Wang Jeon 王儆, the prince and later King of Goryeo Korea will be discussed here. Compared to Annan, Champa, and Siam, Goryeo Korea has been more deeply influenced by Chinese culture and developed a high literacy writing tradition in Chinese to write their own history. It is possible to reconstruct the journey of Wang Jeon in China both based on the Yuan Chinese sources and Goryeo Korea sources.¹⁸⁸ The Mongol wars against the Koreans started during the period of Genghis Khan. In 1218, Genghis Khan sent his armies into Korea in the name of pursuing the Khitan rebels and fugitives. The Koreans were defeated and forced to pay tributes to the Mongols. Yet, in the later decades, the

¹⁸⁷ Alexander Maiorov, "Prince Mikhail of Chernigov: From Maneuverer to Martyr," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 18, no. 2 (2017): 237-256.

¹⁸⁸ The main source of the history of Goryeo Korea is the *Goryeosa*, or *History of Goryeo* 高麗史 finished in 1451, which takes after the model of the official histories Chinese dynasties. This book contains 139 volumes and covers the whole history of the Goryeo dynasty from 918 to 1392. For Annan, the contemporary histories are recorded in *Annan Zhiliue* 安南志略, which is written by a Vietnamese officer likewise in Chinese. The case of the conflicts between Yuan dynasty and Annan will be addressed in Chapter 2. The general back of the mission of Wang Jeon in China, see [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*] (Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 2011), 63-65.

Koreans rebelled several times to fight for their independence even resulting in the slaughter of a Mongol envoy.¹⁸⁹ The wars continued during the reign of Ögedei Khan, Güyük Khan, and Möngke Khan. In 1258, the King of Goryeo Korea finally surrendered and sent his son Wang Jeon as a hostage in the Mongol imperial court.¹⁹⁰

Wang Jeon intended to visit the camp of Möngke Khan directly who was then on the battlefield against the Southern Song in Sichuan. Yet, before Wang Jeon could arrive there, he received the news of the sudden death of Möngke Khan. At that time, the throne of the Mongol Great Khan was not decided and two of the main candidates, Kublai and Ariq Böke, both little brothers of Möngke were at daggers drawn. Wang Jeon made a wise decision to pledge his loyalty to Kublai. According to the *History of Goryeo*, Wang Jeon and his companions went to Henan and waited upon Kublai there. Wang Jeon worn ceremonious costumes, an official violet robe with wide cuffs, official black headwear, and belt made of rhinoceros hide, and with jade tablet on his hands and with all of his companions behind him in a sequence of hierarchy.¹⁹¹ This was a typical Chinese ritual to receive one's superiors. The response from the Kublai side was likewise very positive. Kublai was overjoyed and said the Kingdom of Korea was so remote that it could not be conquered since the period of Tang Taizong's personal expedition, and now it was by the will of Heaven that the Prince came and submitted to him.¹⁹² Under the suggestion of Zhao Liangbi 趙良弼, one of Kublai's intimate counselors and reliable envoys we will turn to later, Kublai raised the reception standard of Wang Jeon to the level as a foreigner king and treated him very hospitably.¹⁹³ Hereafter, Kublai gave his full supports on Wang Jeon, sent armies to company Wang Jeon to claim the throne of Goryeo and even crashed

¹⁸⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4607-4608.

¹⁹⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4610.

¹⁹¹ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*] (Taipei: Shihuo Press, 1983), 454-455.

¹⁹² [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 455.

¹⁹³ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 455.

the rebellions and coups in Korea to help his restoration. Wang Jenō also personally or sent envoys with gifts to the court of Kublai thirty-six times through Kublai's reign.¹⁹⁴ As it turned out, Wang Jenō chose the right side and won the trust of Kublai through his symbolic and ritualized acts. He also built a good personal relationship with his overlord, which contributed to the stability of the bilateral relationship between these two countries.

In addition to these vassal states, the relationships with the khans of the three western *uluses* were even more vital for the Great khan. Certainly, these Mongol khans and their envoys in the west were not received and treated as foreigners in the imperial court. For a good purpose to make a comparison, their relationships will be short addressed here. The main feature of their relations, to put simply, all the four *uluses* regarded themselves as brothers in the family of Genghis Khan and kept the notion of imperial unity even after the disintegration of the united empire.¹⁹⁵ A frequently cited source by historians is the letter sent by the Ilkhan Öljeitü to the European Christian princes in 1305, in which Öljeitü proudly declared that after decades of discords and disputes, all the brothers in the Chinggisid family had reached a mutual accord, their lands was joined together and the postal systems was connected again.¹⁹⁶ This brotherly relationship is reflected in the mutual military assistance and sharing of the conquered lands. A notable example of mutual military assistance took place in the 1270s between the Yuan Dynasty and Ilkhanate when the armies of Kublai were stuck under the walls of Xiangyang. Xiangyang was highly fortified and had a strategic location at the bank of Hanshui, the northern tributary of the Yangtze River. Before this, Xiangyang had already survived twice from the attacks during the reign of Ögedei and Möngke. In 1271 after five years of siege, Kublai decided to seek assistance from Abaqa, who ruled Ilkhanate succeeding his father Hülegü.

¹⁹⁴ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4610-4616.

¹⁹⁵ See Hodong Kim, "The Unity of the Mongol Empire and Continental Exchanges over Eurasia," *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 1 (2009): 15-42.

¹⁹⁶ The original letter is preserved in Mongolian and published by Francis W. Cleaves and Antoine Mostaert, *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arjun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 55-56; English translation see Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance," 194.

Abaqa sent his military engineers Ismail and Al al-Din to China to build siege machines for Kublai.¹⁹⁷ According to *Yuan Shi*, Ismail set the mangonels in a strategic location to the southeast from the city. The stone the machine threw weighed around 150 catties (or 75 kilograms), they were so powerful that the sky and grounds trembled, and every shot left a crater in the depth of three Chinese feet (or 1 meter). Shocked by this machine, the Song general of Xiangyang decided to turn in his city.¹⁹⁸

Besides mutual military assistance, there were extensively diplomatic communications between these Mongol khans. Even during the civil wars in the late thirteenth century, when Yuan and Ilkhanate formed some kind of alliance against the Golden horde and Chagataid Khanate, these communications had never been terminated. Michal Biran masterfully studies the diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chagataid Khanate, which were largely shared by other Mongol *uluses*. As Biran states, these diplomatic had two main functions, political and formal: “the political embassies were sent primarily to discuss alliances or submission, ask for military help, and pray; the formal embassies were sent to pay honors and express friendship or submission and to facilitate trade relations between states.”¹⁹⁹ The envoy sent to Ilkhanate by Kublai before the siege of Xiangyang is certainly the political one, and it was mostly applicable between the Mongol khans in friendly relationships. The formal embassies sent between the great khan and the Mongol khans, otherwise overall functioned identically to those of the foreign submissive states. The succession in the three western *uluses* had to be acknowledged by the great khan, and the latter would confirm this by holding a formal investiture. The only distinction is that these Mongol Khans in the west did not need to present themselves in the court of great khan personally while their envoys undertook this obligation.

¹⁹⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn gave different names of these Muslim engineers in his *Compendium of Chronicles*: Talib and his sons Abubakr, Ibrahim, and Muhammad, see Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī'at-Tawarikh*, Part II, 450.

¹⁹⁸ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4544.

¹⁹⁹ Michal Biran, “Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate: Some Preliminary Remarks,” *Oriente Moderno* 88, no. 2 (2008): 369-393, here 373.

The formal investitures of these Mongol Khans in the west were usually hosted by the envoys sent by the Great Khan in their own royal courts. The previously mentioned Ilkhan Abaqa was enthroned in 1265 after the death of his father Hülegü, but his formal investiture took place five years later. In November of 1270, the representatives of Kublai arrived at Persia and brought a writ, crown, and robe of honor for Abaqa, and Abaqa had his second enthronement soon after.²⁰⁰

The identities of the envoys of these Mongol khans in the west were diverse, yet the majorities of them were sons, sons-in-law, brothers, and other relatives of the khans.²⁰¹ These envoys were generally treated in a higher standard than those from the vassal states. As stated above, in the Mongol courtly ceremonies, as kinsfolk of the imperial lineage, the representatives of Mongol ruling houses in the west enjoyed a senior rank than the noblemen, courtiers, and rulers of foreign lands, only inferior to the royal sons and grandsons. The privileges of these envoys can be also perceived from the use of the postal systems. Compared to those foreign envoys, the Mongols envoys had the right to use the better horses provided by the postal station and choose them firstly, as Rubruck puts it in his reports.²⁰² These privileges were not limited to horses or food supply and accommodations. The local officers also took it as an opportunity to make friends with these royal family members and the consumption and waste there were conspicuous. These privileges were so often misused by these envoys from Mongol Khans or clan Kings that through the Yuan Dynasty the central authority had to issue repeatedly to regulate it.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī'at-Tawārīkh*, Part III, 535. Thomas T. Allsen states that these envoys of Kublai arrived at October of 1270, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

²⁰¹ Biran, "Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate," 377-379.

²⁰² *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 140.

²⁰³ See [Zhian Li] 李治安, 元代分封制度研究 [*Studies on the Enfeoffment System of Yuan Dynasty*] (Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Press, 1992), 290-295.

In sum, due to the obligation to visit the Mongol imperial court personally, many interesting encountering stories of the submissive rulers took place in Mongol Eurasia. These travels were generally more challengeable and dangerous than the missions dispatched by a nonbelligerent power like the Roman Pontiff. Yet, this could also serve as an opportunity to negotiate with the Mongols, which requires some political insights and diplomatic skills. In this regard, the Armenian King Het'um I and the Korean King Wang Jeon were much more successful than the Ayyubid ruler of Syria al-Nāṣir Yūsuf and the Prince of Rus' Mikhail of Chernigov. So far, scholars have not paid attention to this positive aspect in addition to the submission. The Mongols also have their own agendas and considerations to deal with these vassal polities differently. The execution of Mikhail of Chernigov was not only a result of ritual conflicts but also a political warning for other potential rebels.

Summary

Based on the analysis in this chapter, several preliminary conclusions can be drawn. The Mongol imperial court developed a full-fledge protocol regarding the reception of foreign envoys and their gifts. The postal system, the purified rituals, and the rigid spatial arrangements of court events were the most essential parts of it. For the first diplomatic contacts, preparing gifts and following the protocol of genuflection were important. At least for the first mentioned of two, it belongs to a part of Eurasian diplomatic phenomenon. Even from the perspective of the missionary activity of Latin Christendom, giving gifts to an infidel ruler was not abnormal or unprecedented. These gifts should not be confused with tributes that were more applicable in the formal suzerain-vassal relations of the late period. It should be likewise noted that the Mongols were pragmatically enough to be not caught in a deadlock on these issues compared to their Latin counterparts. As the cases of Ascelin of Lombardy and Mikhail of Chernigov

show, there were always complex considerations and motivations for the Mongols to choose a way of response. After the establishment of vassalage relationship with the Mongols, the issue of loyalties and trust became the focus. Certainly, the obligations the Mongols imposed on their vassals were never righteous and should not be glorified. Yet as the cases of the Armenian King Het'um I and the Korean King Wang Jeon have demonstrated, the situation of their countries were much better than many other polities due to their acute insight of politics, thus made the right choice and won the trust from their Mongol overlords.

However, this was one side of the entire encountering story in the Mongol Eurasia. The Mongols also sent their own envoys to their foreign counterparts. Is there any rules for the Mongols to appoint their envoys? What would be the ethnic and cultural identities of these personnel? What were their perceptions of foreign court ceremonies and cultures? Were there similar symbolic competitions during these transcultural encounters? Were their missions similar or even more dangerous than their counterparts? These will be the main topics for the next chapter.

Chapter 2 – Mongol Envoys in the Foreign Royal Courts

This chapter focuses on the Mongol envoys and their experience in the courts of foreign monarchies. Compared to the first chapter on the foreign envoys in the Mongol imperial court, this chapter will rely on the administrative sources of the Mongol empire as much as that of the involved foreign countries. The space the journeys of the Mongol envoys covered, as we will see, is much larger than what had been held before. To the west, they had traveled as far as Rome, the Latin west, and Byzantine. To the east, they appeared frequently in the court of Annam, Korea, and Japan; to the northwest, they were actively engaged with the Rus' principalities and eastern European countries. To the southwest, the Mongol envoys were recurrent guests of the Mamluk Egyptian Sultans; and there are even pieces of evidence showing the Mongol envoys had arrived at East Africa. These sources often existed sparsely and unevenly and have to be collected one piece after another. Very often, these passages related to the presence of the Mongol envoys in their courts are also brief and sketchy and have to be processed in a historicized manner such as compared to the sources from the side of the Mongols, if we are lucky enough to have them.

Correspondingly, there was also a ranking of priority in the Mongol diplomatic system. For the Yuan Dynasty, their diplomatic engagements focused on the eastern and southeastern Asian countries, and much more relevant primary sources exist. Meanwhile, as the Great Khan and the nominal head of the empire, the Yuan emperors also attached importance to the inner relations with the other Mongol *uluses* as well as with the Rome Pope, who was believed as the head of entire Europe. The supreme status of the Yuan emperor among the Mongols was likewise sensed by foreign powers. Establishing a direct relationship with the Yuan

emperor was one of the main diplomatic aims of Rome curia. The Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde, due to the geographic approximation, had much more intense relations with the Mediterranean world. The Ilkhanate proposed an alliance with the European rulers to fight against the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt, which although came to no fruit in the end generated intensive exchanges of envoys between the European rulers and the Ilkhans lasting decades. Rabban Sauma is one of the most representative Mongol envoys sent to Europe. The Golden Horde much more concerned about their interests in the lands of the Rus', but also intervened in the inner affairs in Eastern Europe and the Balkan peninsular. Byzantium, a power in decline in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whose ruling house established marriage alliance both with the Ilkhanate and with the Golden Horde. The Mamluk Sultanate was also a key player in the Mongol diplomatic world. The Ilkhanate had fought with them for many decades since the 1250s. After the civil war between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde was broken in the 1260s, the Golden Horde came closer and closer with the Mamluk Sultanate and finally came into a military alliance. There is also evidence showing that the Mamluk Sultans had communications with the Chagatai rulers in Central Asia. Through the activities of these envoys and the exchange of diplomatic correspondences, a big network of diplomacy functioned across the Mongol Eurasian world. In that, many interesting courtly encountering stories of the Mongols envoys took place. And some of them were luckily recorded in contemporary writings.

As a somehow comparison to the subchapters arranged in Chapter 1, this chapter consists of three subchapters. The protocols of selecting envoys in the Mongol imperial court, covering stages from the preparation, the implementation to the assessment of a certain embassy, will be addressed in the first subchapter. In the second part, a case study of Rabban Sauma will be served as an example of those Mongol envoys in Europe. The third subchapter will be devoted to various kinds of encountering stories of the Mongol envoys in foreign

courts, especially in vassal countries. One main purpose of this chapter is to show that in addition to the physical competitions on the battlefields, the Mongols likewise concerned the symbolic competitions in the diplomatic fields. These diplomatic corps functioned well to display the imperial aspiration of the Mongols and maintained their hegemony over the Eurasian continent.

The Protocol of Sending Envoys in the Mongol Imperial Court

The studies of Mongol diplomatic practices have experienced a flourish in recent decades. This notable phenomenon partly owns to the prevalence of transnational and global history, which have influenced the studies of Mongol history in a way that the Mongols now finally have a history of “empire”.²⁰⁴ Other impetuses include the critical use of multilingual sources, especially Chinese and Muslim ones, which have been widely applied in the studies of the Mongol empire. Recently excavated objects or edited Mongol administrative documents also shed new light on much more details than ever before.²⁰⁵ Thanks to these new progresses, we are now able to draft a general picture of the mechanism of the Mongol diplomatic system. In this subchapter, topics to be addressed include the qualifications and identities of the Mongol envoys, the functions and size of the embassies, the credential and rights of the envoys in travel, the prepared diplomatic gifts, the obligations, and other follow-ups after returning from the mission.

²⁰⁴ See Ya Ning, “The Mongols without Empire: Narrative Strategies surrounding Mongol History in Modern Chinese Historiography,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, vol. 23 (2017): 155-167.

²⁰⁵ For Chinese sources, now we have critical editions of the *Yuan Dianzhang* 元典章. In the western academic world, Bettine Birge is among the first to use *Yuan Dianzhang*, see her *Marriage and the Law in the Age of Khubilai Khan: Cases from the Yuan Dianzhang* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). The sources from the Yuan China’s neighboring kingdom like Đại Việt and Goryeo Korea, which were written in Chinese, have been exploited by Francesca Fiaschetti. Michal Biran, Dai Matsui and Márton Vér contribute important researches based on the Middle Mongolian, Old Uyghur and Chagatai sources.

As in the sedentary societies, the nomadic polities have their own mechanism of appointing envoys.²⁰⁶ To be qualified as a good envoy, the person should possess many extraordinary characteristics. The eleventh-century eastern Turkic author Yūsuf Balasaguni stated in his famous mirror *Kutadgu Bilig* that the envoy should be the choicest of humankind, wise, intelligent, and courageous, a good interpreter of words, upright, and loyal to his lord.²⁰⁷ In the contemporary Western Turkic world, Nizām al-Mulk similarly suggested to his Seljuk princes that for an embassy a man is required to be eloquent, experienced, learned, and have a good memory and appearance.²⁰⁸ These criteria are generally applicable for the Mongols. As Michal Biran has demonstrated, eloquence, intelligence, and reliability would be the most demanding qualification among the Mongol envoys. Followed is courage.²⁰⁹ Additionally, in some specific missions to the hostile, the personal relation with the addressed ruler was also considered as an asset. This was very typical in the occasions that envoys sent by the Mongol Great Khan to Qaidu, the rebellious leader of the House of Ögedei in Central Asia in the late thirteenth century. According to Biran, three of these envoys, the Han Chinese Shi Tianlin 石天麟, Xiban 昔班 and Tie Lian 鐵連 all had a personal relationship with the Mongol ruling houses in the west. Shi Tianlin once served as the royal guard of Ögedei, Xiban was a teacher of Qaidu's father, and Tie Lian, who undertook the mission to Qaidu and the Golden Horde at the same time, his grandfather was the teacher and personal guard of Batu.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ For an overview of the Medieval Central Eurasian diplomatic practices, see Denis Sinor, “Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia,” in *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. C. E. Bosworth, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 337-355. A recent examination on the Mongol diplomacy, see the special issue “Diplomacy in the Age of Mongol Globalization” edited by Francesca Fiaschetti in *Eurasian Studies* 17, no. 2 (2019). The contributors to this special issue include Francesca Fiaschetti, Márton Vér, Qiu Yihao, Jana Valtrová, Marco Ciocchetti, Na’ama O. Arom, Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, and Konstantin Golev.

²⁰⁷ Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory (Kutadgu Bilig): A Turko-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, ed. and trans. Robert Dankoff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 125-126.

²⁰⁸ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: the Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk*, trans. Hubert Darke (London: Routledge: 2002), 98.

²⁰⁹ Biran, “Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate”, 380-381.

²¹⁰ Biran, “Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate”, 381-382.

In the early period of the Mongol empire, however, the Mongol diplomatic protocol was not well formalized and was slowly developed as the empire itself evolved. The most notable feature was that the diplomatic jobs were usually undertaken by the close servants in the court of Great Khan rather than those with professional linguistic or diplomatic skills. Based on the information provided by *the Secret History of the Mongols*, Dong Miao has pointed out Arqai Qasar, Taqai, Sükegei, and Ca'urqan were the most representative envoys of Genghis Khan and all of them were his royal guards or courtiers.²¹¹ The very first mission after Temüjin had been elected as the Khan was actually undertaken by these four people, namely, to inform his main enemies To'oril Khan of the Kereyit and Jamukha of his enthronement.²¹² Other notable features, as Miao has sketched, included that most of these missions were loaded with military purpose and these diplomatic messages were delivered only orally.²¹³ It is quite understandable since in the early years the main task for the Mongols was to unite their divisive tribes. Then there were limited missions sent to foreign rulers.

Another possible candidate for envoys would be the merchants. The merchants had a long history of serving the Central Eurasian imperial courts. Denis Sinor observed that in the central Eurasian world, it was always difficult to distinguish between a commercial and a political mission, and it was common that merchants usually disguised themselves as diplomats in order to enjoy their privilege.²¹⁴ As early as the late antiquity, the Sogdian traders were deeply involved in the diplomatic activities of the Western Turkic Khanate with its sedentary neighbors, amongst the Byzantium. These Sogdians acted as merchants, interpreters, and

²¹¹ Miao, "Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty", 23-25.

²¹² Igor de. Rachewiltz, ed. and trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, vol.1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 51-53.

²¹³ Miao, "Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty", 25-27. The orally tradition in the diplomatic communication of the Mongols was not completely replaced by the written records in the late periods, see Biran, "Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate," 385-386; Márton Vér, "Chancellery and Diplomatic Practices in Central Asia during the Mongol Period as Shown in Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian Documents," *Eurasian Studies* 17 (2019): 182-201, here 192-193.

²¹⁴ Sinor, "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," 342-343.

ambassadors, sometimes for one side, sometimes for both sides.²¹⁵ The merchants, in this case mostly Muslims, also had a prominent place in the court of the Mongols. The Mongols had a system called *Ortoq* 斡托, literally partner. Through the hands of these merchants, the Mongol khans, *khatuns*, and other members of the imperial family invested their money on the lucrative trades of luxuries as well as the field like usuries.²¹⁶ The functions of such merchant corps could be multiple. In addition to doing business, they could sometimes act as spies to obtain economic, military, and political intelligence in those foreign lands. This makes their circumstance rather delicate since normally a diplomatic corps enjoyed the right of immunity, while a business corps although welcomed almost by all the central Eurasian rulers would not be spared for being a spy.²¹⁷ The most famous case was the massacre of Otrar conducted by the Khwarazmians in 1218, which was generally believed to trigger the massive Mongol western military campaigns in the following decades.²¹⁸

With the expansion of the Mongol empire and its imperial system, an unprecedented exchange in persons, commodities, objects, ideas, and techniques took place across the Eurasian world with the Mongol imperial court as its very hub.²¹⁹ The Mongols also had more choices in selecting and appointing their envoys. What was notable at this stage was that they tended to choose the persons sharing the same cultural, religious or ethnic background with the addressed countries to act as the envoys. These persons could be religious figures like Rabban

²¹⁵ See Etienne de la Vaissiere, *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 227-258.

²¹⁶ Studies on this *Ortoq* system, see Thomas T. Allsen, "Mongolian Princes and Their Merchant Partners, 1200-1260," *Asia Major*, Third Series, 2, no. 2 (1989): 83-126; Elizabeth Endicott-West, "Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The 'Ortoq'," *ibid.*, 127-154.

²¹⁷ On the immunity of envoys in Medieval Central Eurasia, see Sinor, "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," 339-341; in Medieval Europe, see Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle*, 175-208.

²¹⁸ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, vol.1, 181; Ch'ang Chun, "Si Yu Ki," in Emil Bretschneider, ed. and trans., *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century*, vol.1 (London, 1910), 20; *Yuan Shi*, 20; *The History of the World Conqueror*, 79-81; *Jami't-Tawarikh*, Part I, 233-235.

²¹⁹ See Michal Biran, "The Mongol Transformation: From the Steppe to Eurasian Empire," in *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances*, ed. Johann P. Arnason and Bjorn Wittrock (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 339-61; and "The Mongol Empire and Inter- civilizational Exchange," in *Cambridge World History*, V. *Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE - 1500 CE*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry E. Wiesner- Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 534-58.

Sauma. He was sent to Europe by the Ilkhan Arghun and intended to negotiate a potential alliance to confront Mamluk Egypt. Sauma was entrusted with this mission under the recommendation of his pupil Mar Yahballaha III, who saw that no one except Sauma knew the language.²²⁰ From Sauma's own point of view, as he later responded to the questions of the Roman cardinals, he was sent because as a Christian his word would be taken by westerners.²²¹ The secular literati from the recently conquered lands would be another good option as represented by the missions dispatched by the Mongols to their East Asian neighbors. Many Mongol envoys sent to the Southern Song were actually ethnic Chinese who lived under the ruler of Jurchen Jin. Li Bangrui 李邦瑞, Wang Ji 王楫, Zhao Bi 趙璧, and Hao Jing 郝经 were among them.²²² The persons who originated from the former Southern Song region were in return appointed as envoys to Vietnam, a country deeply influenced by the Chinese Confucian culture. CHEU Fu 陳孚, a native to Zhenjiang province located at the ruling center of the former Southern Song, was such an example. Other known envoys sent to Vietnam like LIANG Zeng 梁曾 and ZHANG Lidao 張立道 were ethnic Chinese of the north China.²²³

It was common alike that those travelers and merchants, here mostly Italians, in the Mongol court could be appointed as envoys to Europe. This was most typical in the court of the Great Khan in China and the Ilkhanid Iran but also the Golden Horde. Indebted to scholars like Luciano Petech, Jean Richard, and Peter Jackson, some names of these European origin Mongol envoys are known to us. In the Ilkhanid court, we have the Genoese Buscarello de' Ghisolfi and the Pisan Isolo di Anastasio, the Florentine Guiscardo de' Bastari, the English Dominican David of Ashbly and a certain John of Hungarian; in the imperial court, we have

²²⁰ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 165-166.

²²¹ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 174.

²²² See their biographies in *Yuan Shi*: 3620-3621 (LI Bangrui 李邦瑞), 3611-3613 (WANG Ji 王楫), 3747-3749 (ZHAO Bi 趙璧), 3698-3709 (HAO Jing 郝经); and Miao, "Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty", 180-194.

²²³ See their biographies in *Yuan Shi*: 4338-4339 (CHEU Fu 陳孚), 4133-4135 (LIANG Zeng 梁曾), 3915-3919 (ZHANG Lidao 張立道); and Miao, "Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty", 203-208.

two Genoese Andrea di Nascio and Andalò di Savignone.²²⁴ In the court of the Golden Horde, we have only known one of such an embassy. In 1340, two Genoese nobles Petrano dell'Orto and a certain Alberto, and the Franciscan Elia from Hungary acted as envoys of Uzbek Khan (1313-1341) to Pope Benedict XII in Avignon.²²⁵ As for Marco Polo, though his appearance in China has been recent convincingly confirmed by studies of Hans Ulrich Vogel,²²⁶ his actual position in the Yuan bureaucracy is still in debate. It seems that he had never achieved a high position as the Governor of Yangzhou as claimed by himself, yet he was very likely appointed as envoys of Kublai to visit many places including Southeast Asia, India, and Persia.²²⁷ Those Muslim merchants also had a role in Mongol diplomacy with the west Asian countries. The Mongol envoy Shams al-Dīn 'Umar Qazwīnī, who brought the ultimatum to the Seljuk Sultan of Rum Kayqubad II (r.1237-1246) and successfully convinced him to accept the suzerainty of the Mongols, was originally a trader in precious stones.²²⁸

On the other side, the same group also prepared most of the diplomatic documents addressed to foreign rulers.²²⁹ Many clerks who know Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Russian, and

²²⁴ Luciano Petech, "Les marchands italiens dans l'empire mongol," *Journal Asiatique* 250 (1962): 549-74; English translation of the article is now available in James D. Ryan, ed., *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions* (London: Routledge, 2013), 165-187; Jean Richard, "Isol le Pisan: un aventurier franc gouverneur d'une province mongole," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 14, no. 1/3 (1970): 186-194; "Une ambassade mongole à Paris en 1262?", *Journal des savants* 4 (1979): 295-303; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 314.

²²⁵ Roman Hautala, "Catholic Missions in the Golden Horde Territory," in Ovidiu Cristea and Liviu Pilat, eds., *From Pax Mongolica to Pax Ottomanica: War, Religion and Trade in the Northwestern Black Sea Region (14th-16th Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 61-62.

²²⁶ Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). In Chinese scholarship, this issue was solved by Zhijiu Yang 楊志玖 as early as in 1941, See [Zhijiu Yang] 楊志玖, "有關馬可波羅離華的一段漢文記載" [A Chinese reference to the departure of Marco Polo from China], *文史雜誌* [*Periodical for Literature and History*], vol. 1, no. 12 (1941); reprinted in his, *元史三論* [*Three studies on the history of Yuan dynasty*] (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1985), 89-104. Also see Francis Woodman Cleaves, "A Chinese Source bearing on Marco Polo's Departure from China and a Persian Source on his Arrival in Persia," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 36 (1976): 181-203.

²²⁷ See the discussion in Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, 68-74.

²²⁸ Herbert W. Duda, trans., *Die Seltenschukengeschichte des Ibn Bibī* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959): 194-195; Also see Peter Jackson, "World-conquest and Local Accommodation: Threat and Blandishment in Mongol Diplomacy," in Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn, eds., *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006): 3-22, here 17.

²²⁹ Peter Jackson, "Hülegü Khan and the Christians: the Making of a Myth", in *The Experience of Crusading*, vol. 2: *Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, ed. Edbury Peter and Phillips Jonathan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 211-212; Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance," 168-171.

Latin served in the Mongol courts, either as captives through wars or voluntarily, and not less of them were directly involved in the diplomatic activities. Chinese and Persian were especially important in the sense that they were used as the intermediate diplomatic languages or *Lingua Franca* between the Mongols and their counterparts in the Eastern and Western Eurasia separately.²³⁰ Many of the letters addressed to the Pope and European rulers were also composed or translated on the spot in Latin tailored to the needs of the addressees. Carpini narrated how the reply to Innocent IV by Güyük Khan was in preparation. At first, the Mongol side asked if anyone in the Carpini's group knew Russian, Persian, or Mongolian. After receiving the negative answer, a solution in Latin was put forward. On the side of Carpini, their interpreter was a certain Temer, the knight of the Grand Prince of Vladimir Yaroslav II (r. 1238-1246) who was then in Karakorum and later murdered with poison by the Mongols.²³¹ On the Mongol side, as Denise Aigle has shown, the leading role in the translation of these diplomatic correspondences to European rulers was undertaken by the Christians from the Eastern churches in their courts.²³² In East Asia, those letters addressed to the rulers of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan were composed in Chinese by the Chinese literati.²³³ It is worth noting that these documents were not merely translations rather adopted specific rhetoric in order to be better comprehensible by the targeted countries. In the letter addressed to the French King Louis IX in 1248, Eljigidei, the Mongol governor in the Middle East, stressed how the lives and beliefs of the Christians were protected in the territories ruled by the Mongols. In the letters

²³⁰ On the use of Persian in the Mongol empire and more generally in the Eurasian world, see David Morgan, "Persian as a *Lingua Franca* in the Mongol Empire," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 160-170; Nile Green ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019).

²³¹ Carpini, "History of the Mongols", 65-67, 70. This reply by Güyük Khan also exists in a Persian form, which is preserved in the Secret Archives of the Vatican and was published by Paul Pelliot in the 1920s, see Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la Papauté, I," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 23 (1923): 3-30.

²³² Denise Aigle, "The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü and Abaqa: Mongol overtures or Christian Ventriloquism?" *Inner Asia* 7, no.2 (2005): 143-162.

²³³ See Gari Ledyard, "Two Mongol Documents from the Koryŏ sa," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83, no. 2 (1963): 225-239; Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4634-4635; Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4625-4626.

addressed to Pope Urban IV by the Ilkhan Hülegü and to Pope Gregory X by the Ilkhan Abaqa in 1262 and 1274 separately, the Mongol ideology of worldly domination was expressed exactly by using the quotations from the Bible.²³⁴ Similar situations took place in the East. In the letters addressed to Vietnam and Japan in 1261 and 1266 separately, the Mongols turned to emphasize that they were the inheritors to the political and cultural legacy of the former Chinese dynasties and their tributary system with Vietnam and Japan, and urged them to submit peacefully as Korea had done.²³⁵

This Mongol custom to appoint foreigners as envoys and scribes was rather different from its counterparts. In the Latin west, nobles and clergy were traditionally chosen for being envoys, with the significance of the latter dramatically increased from the late fifth century, due to the better education they received especially in rhetoric.²³⁶ In Byzantium, the emperor often appointed the ambassadors from the noble elites in close relations with him, for they represented the dignitaries of the sovereign abroad.²³⁷ In Imperial China, the Confucius literati selected through the imperial examination system played a significant role in the bureaucrat system with the diplomatic one as a part of it. As for the Mamluks in Egypt, Anne F. Broadbridge has recently demonstrated, they “overwhelmingly” chose the chief ambassadors from the modest rank of the military commanders.²³⁸ All of these show that a more tolerant or pragmatic culture prevailed in the Mongol empire. The Mongols knew how to make full use of

²³⁴ See Paul Pelliot, “Les Mongols et la Papauté, III,” *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 28 (1931-1932): 23-26; Paul Meyvaert, “An unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France,” *Viator* 11, (1980): 245-260; Karl-Ernst Lupprian, ed., *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1981), 228-230. Also see Aigle, “The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü and Abaqa,” 149, 153. The translator for these Ilkhanid letters was a certain Richard the notary who served in the court.

²³⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4634-4635; Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4625-4626. Also see Francesca Fiaschetti, “Tradition, Innovation and the Construction of Qubilai’s Diplomacy,” *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 18 (2013-2014): 65-96.

²³⁶ Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231-238.

²³⁷ Nicolas Drocourt, “Byzantine Diplomacy,” *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, First published: 27 February 2018, Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0039>, accessed December 15, 2020. More generally on the Byzantine diplomacy, see Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin, eds., *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992).

²³⁸ Anne F. Broadbridge, “Careers in Diplomacy among Mamluks and Mongols, 658-741/1260-1341,” in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, 263-301.

the talents they had gathered regardless of their races, ethnicity, or religions. And there were obvious advantages for choosing envoys from these foreign cohorts. They were familiar with the culture of the addressed, and practically they know the languages in speaking. Another underlying motive, as Vogel has revealed in his studies on Marco Polo, was that putting various kinds of alien personnel under his own command could boost the glory of the Great Khan and his great empire.²³⁹ To appoint these foreigners as envoys expresses strongly the universal ruler identity of the Mongol Great Khan and constitutes a part of the symbolic competition with other rulers.

As for the categories of the Mongol diplomatic corps, Michal Biran has proposed a twofold division, those envoys for political and military reasons, and those for ceremonial purposes.²⁴⁰ This division is well-grounded and largely a functionary approach. Here I would like to suggest a third group, namely the special envoys sent for meeting the consuming purpose of the Mongol imperial court. We may call them economic envoys. Throughout the history of the Mongol empire, the Great Khans kept a strong interest in collecting and consuming *exotica*, be it animals or other objects. Hunting animals like cheetahs enjoyed high popularity in the Mongol courts.²⁴¹ Since these animals were not native to China, they had other channels to arrive at the court of the Mongol empires. As Baohai Dang 黨寶海 has pointed out, there were three main ways for the Great Khans to obtain these animals, as gifts sent by the Mongol khans in the west or the rulers of the subordinated countries in central and west Asia, as commodities purchased from the Semu 色目 or “miscellaneous aliens” merchants, and collected by the envoys sent by the Great Khan.²⁴² In Chinese sources, there are many references to such

²³⁹ Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, 70.

²⁴⁰ Biran, “Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate,” 373-377.

²⁴¹ For an introduction to the political culture of hunting in the central Eurasian world, see Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

²⁴² [Baohai Dang] 黨寶海, “蒙古帝國的獵豹與豹獵” [Cheetah and Cheetah Hunting in the Mongol Empire], *Minzu Yanjiu* 民族研究 4 (2004): 94-101, here 98. [Xinyuan Chen] 陳新元, “八兒赤與元代豹獵” [Barsci and Cheetah Hunting in the Yuan Dynasty], *Xiyu Yanjiu* 西域研究 2 (2016): 60-71.

special envoys. In 1301, five of such groups were sent by the emperor Temür (r. 1294-1307) to collect these beasts. One group was led by Dazhuding 答術丁 and provided by the emperor with a two-year travel grant. His destination was Somalia in East Africa. The rest four groups, one of their leader known as Diaojier 刁吉爾, traveled further and they were provided with a three-year grant. Their destination was probably Morocco in North Africa.²⁴³ Other objects the Mongol emperor obsessed with were those rarities deemed to have a healing function. Noticed by Marco Polo, Kublai Khan heavily suffered from the pains of gout in a way that during the hunting he spent most of his time on the elephant howdah.²⁴⁴ This is also testified by Chinese sources. Kublai Khan had a special interest in the healing prescriptions and sent many envoys for them. After hearing that the hide of a special sea animal in Korea could be beneficial to patients with gout, Kublai Khan sent nine envoys to Korea and demanded these hides in 1267.²⁴⁵ In 1273, Kublai Khan sent a Mongol prince called Abha 阿不合 to purchase medicines in Sri Lanka.²⁴⁶ The already discussed case of the holy oils required by Kublai Khan from the Polo brothers belongs to this category alike. Since neither Somalia, Morocco nor Sri Lanka was tributaries to the Mongol empire, these envoys were differentiated from those aiming to collect tributes in Russia or Korea. Their relationships were economic rather than political.

A typical Mongol diplomatic group, as Michal Biran has suggested, was comprised of one to three chief envoys and a group of companions numbered from several persons to a few dozens and even several hundred.²⁴⁷ Recent studies have partly modified this calculation. Based on the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian Documents discovered in Xinjiang and Gansu,

²⁴³ *Yongle Encyclopedia* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), 7220; Dang, "Cheetah and cheetah hunting in the Mongol empire," 99.

²⁴⁴ Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, vol.1, trans. A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (London: Routledge, 1938), 94.

²⁴⁵ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 473.

²⁴⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 148.,

²⁴⁷ Biran, "Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices in the Chagataid Khanate", 382.

Márton Vér argues that such a great number of retinue posed serious challenges for the system of provisions. Instead, an estimation of ten people or more would be more reasonable.²⁴⁸ The contemporary Chinese sources could shed some new light. In 1290, a diplomatic corps was sent by Kublai to the Ilkhan Arghun, the main purpose of which was to bring a Mongol noblewoman named Kōköchin to Iran as a wife of the latter. However, when the embassy finally arrived in Iran, Arghun had already passed away and the princess became the wife of Ghazan, the son of Arghun.²⁴⁹ This embassy was an important event and was recorded in different sources: Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jami't-Tawarikh*, the travelogue of Marco Polo, and Chinese source.²⁵⁰ The names of the three chief envoys Polo gives are Oulatai, Apusca, and Coja which are totally identical to the Chinese sources. This is the key evidence to confirm that Marco Polo indeed went to China.²⁵¹ This same piece of Chinese evidence is also very relevant to us since it provides details of the composition of the embassy. According to the Chinese source, the companion of the group consists of 160 persons, 90 of them had been provided with provisions, the remaining 70 were the *Ortoq* merchants sponsored by the Mongol dignitaries and would not get the provisions.²⁵² In other words, these merchants although traveled together with or even within the diplomatic corps, were not acknowledged as the official envoys and were not entitled to obtain the provision from the postal system. The number of the official envoys must be much smaller than the estimation of Biran.

²⁴⁸ Vér, "Chancellery and Diplomatic Practices in Central Asia during the Mongol", 190-191.

²⁴⁹ The general background of this embassy, see Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 29-30.

²⁵⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, Part III, 606; Polo, *The Description of the World*, vol.1, 18-19; *Yongle Encyclopedia*, 7211.

²⁵¹ See note 163.

²⁵² *Yongle Encyclopedia*, 7211: "十七日尚書阿難答、都事別不花等奏，平章沙不丁上言：‘今年三月奉旨，遣兀魯緡、阿必失、呵火者，取道馬八兒，往阿魯渾大王位下。同行一百六十人，內九十人已支分例，餘七十人，聞是諸官所贈遺及買得者。乞不給分例口糧。’奉旨勿與之。" Here I have a different interpretation on the sentence of "聞是諸官所贈遺及買得者" with Cleaves, see Francis Woodman Cleaves, "A Chinese Source bearing on Marco Polo's Departure from China and a Persian Source on his Arrival in Persia," 187.

As an official diplomatic corps, these envoys have the right to use the postal system as far as it covers. The credential they used is called *Paiza* 牌子 or safe conduct pass (see Figure 2 and 3). From 1846 to 2019, 20 items of *Paiza* have been excavated in the former territories of the Mongol empire. The sites of excavation extend from Siberia to the Dnieper region, from the Yenisey region to southeast China. According to Baohai Dang, these safe-conduct passes can be divided into four categories: seven of them are used for the postal system, eight indicate the ranking of officers, four are for night patrols, and one is a private forgery. These *Paizas* are generally made in metals like gold, silver, iron, copper, or alloys. Their forms are either round or rectangle and a notable feature is that these *Paizas* have multilingual scripts on them. The typical scripts are Uyghur Mongolian, Khitan, Hanzi, 'Phags-pa Mongolian, Persian, and Tibetan. They appear alone or in different combinations depending on the region or historical periods used.²⁵³ A very recent discovery is the *Paiza* found in the summer of 2020 in Province Qinghai of China. This new item is different from the previous ones in that it is actually a pair of *Paiza* inlaid together. According to Uyunbilig, this is a kind of *Paiza* for indicating official ranking and belongs to a high military officer of the Department of Xuanwei 宣慰司 installed by the Yuan Dynasty in Tibet.²⁵⁴ It should be noted that not every *Paiza* were accepted in the postal system, only those personnel with the specific postal *Paiza* can access to the horses and provisions there. Correspondingly, strict rules regarding the use of the postal system were in implementation. According to the Bingzhi 兵制 or *Treatise on the Military* of the Yuan Shi, if the envoys have no *Paiza* or any written credential yet been provided with horses, the concerned postal officers will be seriously held to account. These postal officers will be likewise punished

²⁵³ See Baihai Dang, "The Paizi of the Mongol Empire," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 31 (2001): 31-62; "The Paizi of the Mongol Empire (continued)," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 32 (2003): 7-10. An updated version is published in Chinese: 黨寶海 [Baihai Dang], "蒙古帝國的牌符：以實物為中心" [The Paizi of the Mongol Empire: evidences from objects], *International Journal of Eurasian Studies/ 歐亞學刊* 4 (2004): 183-203.

²⁵⁴ 烏雲畢力格 [Uyunbilig Borjigidai], "青海新發現的元代金虎符及其歷史意義" [The Recently Discovered Golden-Tiger *Paiza* of Yuan Dynasty in Qinghai and Its Historical Significance], 光明日報 [Guangming Daily], November 30, 2020, plate 14.

if they did not provide services for those envoys with such credentials.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the Mongol postal system has its side of flexibility. In the cases of emergent military situations, and the transport of those objects like dyestuff, silk thread, food and drink, grains, cloth, and falcons exclusively for the royal use, even if these messengers or envoys don't have the safe conduct pass, they should be provided horses or carts after registering the numbers.²⁵⁶ This also partly explains that why gifts matter for those foreign envoys like Carpini, since it is much related to their rights to use the postal system. As for the envoys dispatched to the territories beyond the imperial postal system, the Yuan emperors would usually grant them extra money to cover the expenses. The previously mentioned economic envoys to Sri Lanka, Somalia, and Morocco were such cases. Rabban Sauma also received two thousand *mathkale* of gold, thirty good riding animals, and a *Paiza* from Arghun.²⁵⁷ If these envoys had two or more destinations, some of those foreign rulers they visited could be kind enough to provide them some gifts to cover the travel expense. Sauma received such hospitality from the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus, King Philip the Fair of France, King Edward I of England, and Pope Nicholas IV.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ *Yuan Shi*, 2584: “使臣無牌面文字，始給馬之驛官及元差官，皆罪之。有文字牌面，而不給驛馬者，亦論罪。”

²⁵⁶ *Yuan Shi*, 2584: “若係軍情急速，及送納顏色、絲線、酒食、米粟、段匹、鷹隼，但係御用諸物，雖無牌面文字，亦驗數應付車牛。”

²⁵⁷ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 166.

²⁵⁸ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 170, 185, 187, 196.

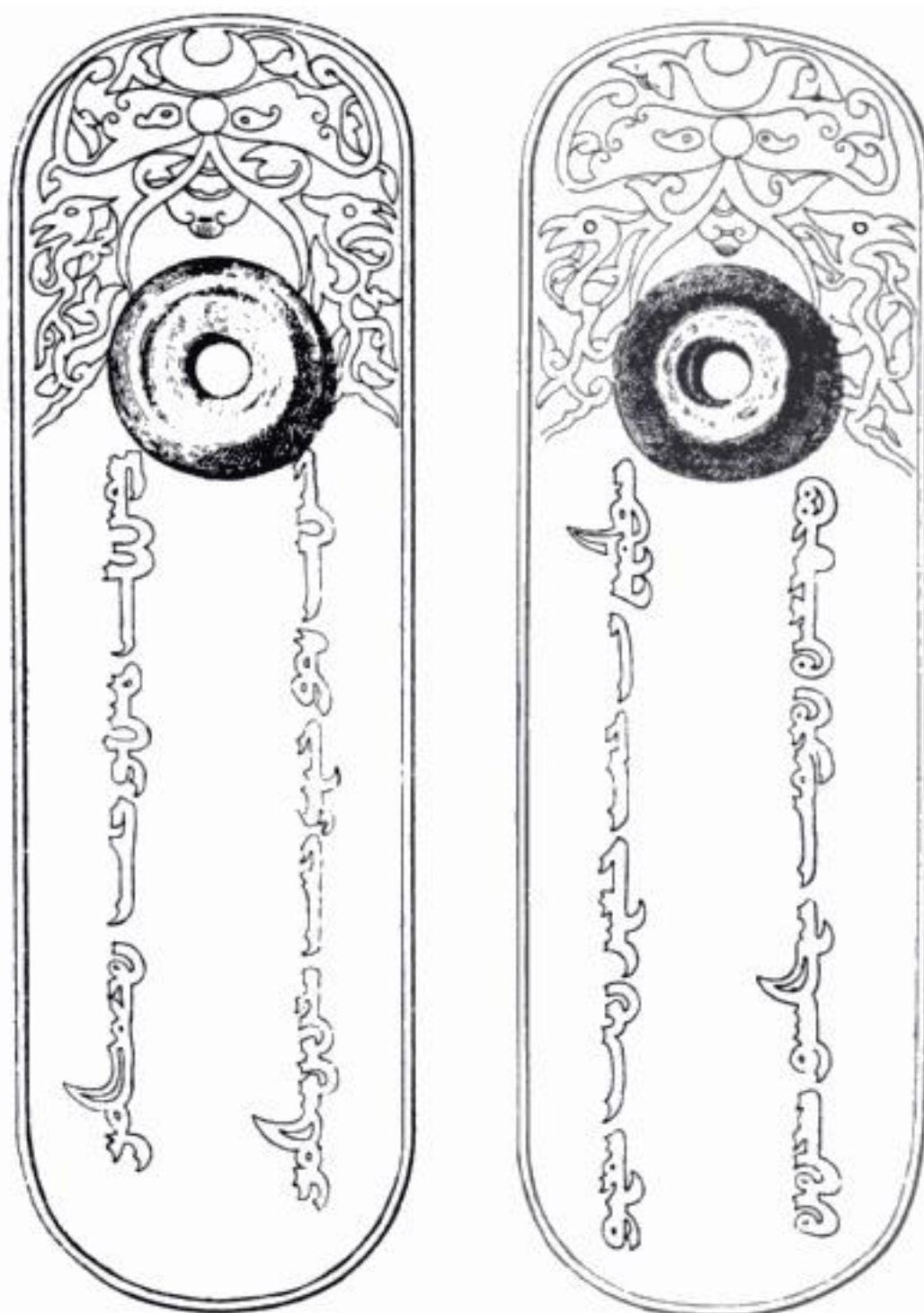


Figure 2 A Paiza in Mongolian script, found in the former territory of the Mongol Golden Horde, from Dnieper River, 1845. Public Domain. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paiza#/media/File:Paiza_Golden_Horde.jpg, accessed January 15, 2021.



Figure 3 A Royal Procession guided by an Envoy with a Paiza, illustration from the Diez Albums, Iran, early fourteenth century, Ink, colors, and gold on paper, 21.4 × 26 cm. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung (Diez A, fol. 71, S. 50). Available at: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN635104741&PHYSID=PHYS_0111, accessed January 15, 2021.

An interesting yet largely neglected issue is whether the Mongol envoys brought diplomatic gifts for the addressed rulers, especially those foreign ones.²⁵⁹ As early as in the 1940s, the distinguished political scientist Eric Voegelin has stated that the Mongol ruling ideology was a kind of worldly domination. According to which, all the foreign powers only have two statuses: being in a relationship of submission and dependence to the Mongols, or on in rebellion against them.²⁶⁰ His thesis has been accepted by the next generations of researchers and still has influences on current scholarship. Denise Aigle, for instance, although

²⁵⁹ There were regular gift exchange between the Mongol Great Khan/Yuan Emperor and the Mongol Khans of the three western Khanates, see Ning, “The Reception and Management of Gifts in the Imperial Court of the Mongol Great Khan”, 29-30.

²⁶⁰ Eric Voegelin, “The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255,” *Byzantion* 15 (1940-1941): 378-413, esp. 404-405.

acknowledged that a change seems to have taken place under the Ilkhans of Iran, she still restated that the Mongol concept of peace equals unconditional submission and that was one of the very reasons that led to the abortion of alliance.²⁶¹ Under such a premise, it is unthinkable that the Mongols would build certain formal and equal diplomatic relations with others, let alone prepare gifts for them. Here I would not argue that the Mongol imperial ambitions expressed in the various kind of correspondences were just figures of speech. Yet the present dissertation has so far shown that the Mongols had established a full-fledged diplomatic protocol and they were much more pragmatic in using their tool kits, with warfare as only one of them, than what have been held previously. The recent contribution of Yihao Qiu also proves that in the early thirteenth century, the Mongols indeed prepared diplomatic gifts for their counterparts as a continuation of previous central Eurasian diplomatic traditions. For instance, Genghis Khan sent a gift package to Shah Muhammad II of Khwarazm (r. 1200-1220) in 1218 just on the eve of the massacre of Otrar. As recorded by the contemporary source Jūzjānī's *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, this package includes a nugget of pure gold as big as a camel's neck was on the gift list.²⁶² Nevertheless, Qiu arrives at almost the same conclusion as the previous scholars that he states an abrupt rupture took place after the Mongol conquest of the Khwarazm Empire resulting in the non-negotiation diplomatic strategy gain the upper hand and it signified the decline and end of the classical Eurasian diplomatic culture of ceremonies, formulas, and gift-exchange.²⁶³

Then during the heyday and later periods of the empire, did the Mongols prepare gifts for the foreign rulers? The relevant sources were very sporadic, yet some important hints might be possible to be provided here. In 1300, a diplomatic group with one hundred members in

²⁶¹ Aigle, "From Non-Negotiation to an Abortive Alliance," 196-197.

²⁶² Yihao Qiu, "Gift-Exchange in Diplomatic Practices during the Early Mongol Period," *Eurasian Studies* 17 (2019): 202-227, here 207-208; Minhāj al-Sirāj Jūzjānī, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: a General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia: including Hindustan, from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam*, vol. 2, trans. by Major H.G. Raverty, (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881), 966.

²⁶³ Qiu, "Gift-Exchange in Diplomatic Practices during the Early Mongol Period," 222.

Mongol dress appeared in Rome and attended the Papal Jubilee of Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303). This group was sent by the Ilkhan Ghazan with the Florentine Guiscardo de' Bastari as its head.²⁶⁴ Meanwhile, in the inventory of the Papal treasury under Boniface VIII, an individual category *LXIX: Frustra pannorum tataricum et aliorum pannorum* was for Tatar cloths and others, under which fourteen entries were pertaining to the Tartar clothes.²⁶⁵ Since the total amounts of Tatar clothes in the inventory were rather small, it would be not unreasonable to deduce that some of these textiles were brought as gifts by the Mongol diplomatic groups like Guiscardo de' Bastari. In the travelogue of Rabban Sawma, more direct references on gifts exist. The Nestorian monk brought precious gifts provided both by the Ilkhan Arghun and by Yahballaha III, his former student and then the Patriarch of the Church of the East. Arghun prepared gifts for the Byzantine emperor, the King of France, and the King of England, while Yahballaha III presented suitable gifts for the Roman Pope. The content of the gifts package was unfortunately not provided in the texts.²⁶⁶ Gift exchange also existed between the Yuan Dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate in the fourteenth century. The Arabic traveler Ibn Battuta mentions in his travelogue that in 1342, a diplomatic corps sent by the "King of China" arrived at the royal court of Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq. They brought the Sultan valuable gifts including a hundred slaves of both sexes, five hundred pieces of velvet and silk cloth, musk, jeweled garments, and weapons. In return, the Sultan sent an even richer gift package comprised of a hundred thoroughbred horses, a hundred white slaves, a hundred Hindu dancing-and singing-girls, twelve hundred pieces of various kinds of cloth, gold and silver candelabra and basins, brocade robes, caps, quivers, swords, gloves

²⁶⁴ On the missionary of Guiscardo de' Bastari, see Petec, "Italian Merchants in the Mongol Empire", 182-183. On the backgrounds of this Papal Jubilee, see Gary Dickson, "The Crowd at the Feet of Pope Boniface VIII: Pilgrimage, Crusade and the First Roman Jubilee," *Journal of Medieval History* 25, no. 4 (1999): 279-307.

²⁶⁵ Émile Molinier, "Inventaire du trésor du Saint-Siège sous Boniface VIII (1295) (suite)," *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 47 (1886): 646-667, here 652-653.

²⁶⁶ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 166.

embroidered with pearls, and fifteen eunuchs.²⁶⁷ All of these pieces of evidences prove that the Mongols actually kept practicing the diplomatic custom of giving gifts to foreign rulers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

After returning from the missions, these envoys have to report to the Yuan emperor or other central bureaucrats personally, sometimes also with very well-written reports. The travelogue of Zhang Lidao 張立道, which is preserved in the *Annan Zhilue* 安南志略, and *The Customs of Cambodia* 真臘風土記 by Zhou Daguan 周達觀 belongs to such a genre.²⁶⁸ The central topics in these reports are usually practical intelligence information such as politics, economy, military, geography, and customs, very similar to the reports of Carpini. Zhao Liangbi 趙良弼 for instance after returning from his mission in Japan reported the titles of the Japanese rulers and officers, the numbers of the counties, and the customs and local products to Kublai.²⁶⁹ Moreover, those envoys who fulfill their missions successfully would be rewarded by the emperor and even obtain additional opportunities for promotions. As part of the criteria of assessment in the Yuan Dynasty, those officers who owned no long enough record of service, the experience to act as envoys to foreign countries could be considered as an asset, along with the experience of bearing heavy burdens, rendering meritorious service, taking office in the border regions, or recommended by the supervisory department.²⁷⁰ After a successful mission in Annan, Liang Zeng 梁曾 was given an audience by Kublai with the highest courtesy. Kublai took off his own robe and awarded it to Liang Zeng, gave him the very first glass of wine in the court banquet before all the other princesses, and even had him accommodated in the

²⁶⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325-1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Routledge: London, 2013), 214.

²⁶⁸ [Lê Tắc] 黎則, 安南志略 [*Records of Annam*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2000), 69-72. Zhou Daguan was on a mission to Cambodia between 1296 and 1297 set by the Yuan emperor Temür. Compared to his writings on Angkor, we have little information of the life of Zhou Daguan, see Chou Ta-Kuan, *The Customs of Cambodia*, 2nd edition, trans. Paul Pelliot and J. Gilman d'Arcy Paul (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1992).

²⁶⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 150.

²⁷⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 2063: “此外月日不及者，惟歷繁劇得優，獲功賞則優，由內地入邊遠則優，憲台舉廉能政跡則優，以選出使絕域則優，然亦各有其格也。”

imperial court.²⁷¹ Yiheimishi 亦黑迷失 was a key figure in the Mongol diplomatic contacts with Southeast and South Asia countries in the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century. He was once an imperial guard of Kublai and thereafter served regularly as envoys to Malabar, Sri Lanka, Champa, and Sumatra. After retirement, he was conferred the title of Wuguo Gong 吳國公 by Emperor Ayurbarwada (r. 1311-1330) for his outstanding diplomatic services in these remote countries.²⁷²

In sum, the Mongols developed a complicated and rather effective system of sending envoys: they selected the qualified candidates, and dispatched the diplomatic corps with different functions in different occasions; they prepared the diplomatic documents with great prudence; they practiced a well-organized postal system to support of the travels of these envoys and a credential system of Paiza to regulate the use of it; they prepared diplomatic gifts for foreign rulers; and they also had a set of mechanism to assess these missions, to gather and analyze the intelligence information, and to stimulate those envoys with good records of services. This system is by no means inferior to their counterparts. In terms of utilizing the talents from different races, ethnicities, and religions, we can even argue that the Mongols displayed a much more wide breadth of mind as true world conqueror, regardless of whether it is out of a nomadic culture of tolerance, a pragmatic maneuver, or a posture of symbolic competition.

²⁷¹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4134.

²⁷² Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3198-3200.

Identities of non-Mongol Envoys and their Encounter with European Courts: The Case of Rabban Sauma

Compared to the rich records on the Mongol court life provided by western missionaries and visitors, considerably fewer sources are available for us to examine the Mongol perception of the European courts. The Syriac Christian Rabban Sauma (ca. 1225-1294), the protagonist in this subchapter, without doubt belongs to the most pertinent example. Sauma wrote down his travelogue which was preserved in an early Fourteenth century anonymous Syriac narrative *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sawma*. This work however only came into light in the late nineteenth century and since then has been translated into many different modern languages.²⁷³ Before analyzing the encountering stories of Rabban Sauma, some backgrounds regarding the Mongol religious policy and the status of various religions under their rule would be necessary to offer. We have already shown that the Mongols frequently entrusted their diplomatic duties to ethnically non-Mongol persons or foreigners, including merchants, literati, and monks due to their specific linguistic and transcultural communicating skills. What we have not been answered is the motivations that drove these foreigners with different beliefs to serve in the Mongol court. To answer this, we should first investigate the indifferent or pragmatic attitudes Mongol rulers took towards religions.

There is, indeed, a tradition to regard the Turco-Mongol society as the exemplar of religious toleration.²⁷⁴ Three giants of Early Modern European intellectuals, John Locke (1632-1704), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) coincidentally praised the

²⁷³ See Pier Giorgio Borbone, "The History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sawma as a Source for Ilkhanid History," in Timothy May, Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, and Christopher P. Atwood, ed., *New Approaches to Ilkhanid History* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 349-350. Morris Rossabi otherwise suggests that Sauma prepared his reports in two versions, a specifically diplomatic one to the Ilkhan which has been lost, and another general report for his fellow Nestorians, see Morris Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu: Rabban Sauma and the First Journey from China to the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 101-102.

²⁷⁴ Understandably, authors of medieval crusade writings tend to portray a quite different and gloomy image compared to this.

religious peace and harmony of the Turco-Mongol Empires. Locke portrayed the Ottoman Turks as the protector for the estate and liberty of their Christian subjects.²⁷⁵ Voltaire claimed that under the domination of the Sultan there was not any revolt instigated by any of non-Islamic religions.²⁷⁶ Gibbon even concluded that Genghis Khan as a Barbarian established law of perfect toleration.²⁷⁷ Largely, the concept of religious toleration in Enlightenment thoughts was formulated with an image of Turco-Mongol toleration against medieval and Reformation European persecution. Echoes of this preference can also be identified in modern academic studies. In his famous and frequently cited article, the French historian Jean-Paul Roux argues that the Turco-Mongol toleration has roots in the political structure of their society and not depends on their own belief of being Muslim or not. He furtherly lists four aspects that he regards as the evidence of Turco-Mongol toleration, namely the freedom of worship, the freedom to organize churches, the convention of religious debates, the respect of religious people and privileges given under some conditions, and the lack of limitation on worship place.²⁷⁸ Roux's approach has its deficiency since it focuses too narrowly on the religious practices, without situating it within the underlying power relationship concerning the imperial rulers and his subjects, as well as the symbolic competitions of the Turco-Mongol Empires and their adversaries.

More balanced and nuanced studies have appeared in recent decades. Peter Jackson demonstrates that the tolerance of Mongol rulers should not be regarded as a matter of doctrine. Rather it is some kind of *Realpolitik* using all useable sources and skills for diplomatic and ruling purposes. He furtherly points out that the veneration of the image of Genghis Khan, the

²⁷⁵ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, edited and with an Introduction by Mark Goldie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 21.

²⁷⁶ Voltaire, *Toleration and Other Essays*, translated with an introduction by Joseph McCabe (New York and London: Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 23.

²⁷⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 6 (Philadelphia, 1871), 206.

²⁷⁸ Jean-Paul Roux, "La tolérance religieuse dans les empires turcomongols," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 203, no.2 (1986): 131-168.

institution of the levirate, the compulsory of Mongol coiffure, and the prohibiting of Muslim slaughter ritual are some of the renowned examples of intolerance. From the late thirteenth century on, the Islamization of the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde as well as the favoring adaption of Tibetan Buddhism in Yuan China made the faith landscapes even more complex.²⁷⁹ Christopher P. Atwood meticulously reconstructed the historical process of a mature Mongol religious policy had been formulated. He argues the policy presupposed a distinctive political theology that all the four great religions prayed to the God who was believed to give the great khans victories in their wars.²⁸⁰ Jonathan Brack has recently likewise revealed the complex relation of the Mongol religious policy and their idea of sacral kingship. According to him, those interfaith debates held in the imperial court were heavily loaded with political implications that they were essentially performances of the Mongol khan's own divine-like wisdom and model of sacral, deified kingship. Therefore, instead of religious tolerance, Brack prefers to use the term of religious pluralism.²⁸¹

Although this idealized image of religious tolerance has been challenged, it is still validated that the Mongol rulers created favorable conditions for the thriving of faiths and some sophisticated religious leaders made good use of these conveniences to achieve their own goals. A common scenery recorded by various travelogues is that the Mongol Great Khans were keen to preside public interfaith debates in their imperial court. William of Rubruck provided us a vivid description how a Catholic monk like himself made good use of the disagreement of his adversaries to win the debate. Rubruck first worked together with the Nestorians and the Muslims to fight against the Buddhists, since all of them would agree that there is only one

²⁷⁹ Peter Jackson, "The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, eds. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 245-290.

²⁸⁰ Christopher P. Atwood, "Validation by Holiness or Sovereignty: Religious Toleration as Political Theology in the Mongol World Empire of the Thirteenth Century," *The International History Review* 26, no. 2 (2004): 237-256.

²⁸¹ See Jonathan Brack, "Disenchanted Heaven: Interfaith Debate, Sacral Kingship, and Conversion to Islam in the Mongol Empire, 1260-1335," *Past & Present* 250, no. 1 (2021): 11-53.

God in the world. Then Rubruck cooperated with his Nestorian colleagues to argue against the Saracens. In the end, Rubruck swung the gun towards the Nestorians.²⁸² Since before the debate, Möngke Khan had already regulated the procedures and forbidden anyone to assault his opponents or cause any commotions, these interfaith debates proceeded very well.²⁸³ Generally, the Mongol Great Khan who presided the event did not give his own remarks lest to create the image that he had favorite for any one of them. The purpose of convening these debates, using the words of Möngke Khan, was to learn about the truth about these religions and their doctrines.²⁸⁴ This pragmatic attitude of Mongol rulers towards different religions is quite well illustrated by a speech of Kublai Khan recorded by Marco Polo:

And he [Kublai Khan] always observes this custom at the chief feasts of the Christians, as is Easter and the Nativity. He does the like at the chief feast of the Saracens, Jews, & Idolaters. And being asked about the reason, he said: There are four prophets who are worshipped and to whom everybody does reverence. The Christians say their God was Jesus Christ; the Saracen Mahomet; the Jews Moses; and the idolaters Sagamoni Burcan, who was the first god of the idols; and I do honor and reverence to all four, that is to him who is greatest in heaven and more true, and him I pray to help me.²⁸⁵

This tolerant religious policy can also be testified from the topographic evidence of Mongol capitals like Karakorum, Soltaniyeh, and Sarai. A great feature of these cities is their cosmopolitan culture and people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds lived generally peacefully side by side. In Karakorum, as recorded by Rubruck, there were “twelve idol temples belonging to different peoples, two mosques where the religion of Mahomet is

²⁸² *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 231-235. More generally on the encountering with the Buddhism, see Bernard Hamilton, “Western Christian Contacts with Buddhism, c.1050-1350,” *Studies in Church History* 56 (2015): 80-91.

²⁸³ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 231.

²⁸⁴ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 229. Scholars have different opinions on the motivations of the Mongol Great Khan to preside these interfaith debates. Richard Foltz suggests that these events are mischief of the Mongol rulers in order play with the religious leader. Peter Jackson likewise indicates that these debates were actually “intellectual counterpart of the bloody gladiatorial conflicts” with purpose of entertainment and of dividing and ruling. These two arguments, according to my point of view are over deductive and will not been adopted in the present study. See Richard Foltz, “Ecumenical Mischief under the Mongols,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 43, no. 1 (1999): 42-69; Peter Jackson, “The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered,” 253-254.

²⁸⁵ Polo, *The Description of the World*, vol.1, 201.

proclaimed, and one Christian church at the far end of the town.”²⁸⁶ In Soltaniyeh, as described by the Persian geographer Hamdallah Mustawfi in 1340, “People also have migrated hither from many other provinces, to settle in the (new) capital, being of all nations and sects, whereby the language spoken at present here is not uniform.”²⁸⁷ In Sarai, we learn from Ibn Battuta that “it has thirteen cathedrals and a large number of other mosques. The inhabitants belong to diverse nations; among them are Mongols, who are the inhabitants and rulers of the country and are in part Muslims, As [Ossetes], who are Muslims, and Qipchaqs, Circassians, Russians, and Greeks, who are all Christians.”²⁸⁸

Meanwhile, by making self-adaptation and active engagement with the Mongol rulers, these religious elites also obtained benefits for themselves and their followers. A notable example is the relation of Genghis Khan and the Daoist Changchun, or Qiu Chuji (1148-1127), and the thriving of his Quanzhen School 全真教 in Yuan China.²⁸⁹ Before the rising of the Mongols, these elites of Quanzhen School had already been recurrent guests in the imperial court of Jurchen Jin emperors. As early as 1188, Qiu Chuji was invited by Emperor Wanyan Yong 完顏雍 (r. 1161-1189) to Beijing. There he was granted an audience three times by the emperor and warmly hosted for half a year. In 1211, Qiu was invited to Beijing once again by Emperor Wanyan Yongji 完顏永濟 (r. 1208-1213). Soon later, the war between the Mongols and Jurchen restarted. In 1213, the Mongol armies besieged Beijing, and Wanyan Yongji was murdered in a court coup. Genghis Khan agreed to retreat after receiving tributes from the new Jin emperor Wanyan Xun 完顏珣 (r. 1213-1224). One year later, Wanyan Xun moved his capital south to Kaifeng. Qiu Chuji keenly sensed the change of political balances and

²⁸⁶ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 221.

²⁸⁷ Hamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat al-qulūb* (1340), trans. G. Le Strange (Leiden: Brill, 1919), 61.

²⁸⁸ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325-1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Routledge: London, 2013), 166.

²⁸⁹ A good biography of Qiu Chuji, see I. de Rachewiltz and T. Russell, “Ch’iu Ch’u-chi,” in Igor de Rachewiltz et al., ed., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period, 1200-1300* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1993): 208-223.

thereafter he refused the invitations from Jin emperor and Song emperor several times.²⁹⁰ In 1219, Genghis Khan sent an invitation to Qiu Chuji to meet him. At this time, Qiu was already over seventy. Genghis Khan was leading campaigns in Central Asia, which is thousands of miles away from Shandong, the main base of Qiu Chuji and his disciples. Qiu gladly took the invitation and after a two-year's tough journey, he arrived at Genghis Khan's camp with his eighteen disciples. The Great Khan and the Daoist had very good conversations there that Genghis Khan exempted all the monks in Quanzhen School from all taxes.²⁹¹ One relevant issue is that whether Qiu Chuji advised Genghis Khan to stop massacring civilians and the Great Khan gladly followed it. This is the standard version provided by sources like *Yuan Shi*. And several years later in 1227, Great Khan indeed issue an edict to prohibit slaughtering civilians.²⁹² Some other sources like the travelogues of Qiu Chuji written down by his disciple and companion Li Zhichang 李志常 however do not have these passages.²⁹³ If this story is authentic, then it serves as a good illustration how a religious figure can influence the policy of a Mongol Great Khan.

A similar case took place in Ilkhanid Iran. In 1281, Markos was surprisingly elected as the Patriarch of the Church of the East and consecrated as Yahballaha III. At that time, Markos was only in his middle thirties and had just arrived in Iran with his teacher Sauma for several years. The *History of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sawma* provides an in-depth record on this election:

And on the following day the Fathers gathered together to elect a person suitable to sit on the [patriarchal] Throne. There were present the following: first and foremost there was Mâran-‘Ammeh, Metropolitan of Elam. Another was [the Metropolitan of] Tangôth [in China]; another was [the Metropolitan of] Tîrâhân near Samarrâ in Irak; and another was [the Metropolitan of] Tûrê [i.e. Tûr ‘Abhdîn]. And with these were the nobles, and governors, and scribes, and

²⁹⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4524.

²⁹¹ Li Chih-ch'ang, *Travels of an Alchemist*, trans. Arthur Waley (London: Routledge, 2014), 100-119.

²⁹² Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4526, 24.

²⁹³ For instance, renowned Chinese historian Yang Ne 楊訥 is skeptic of the authenticity of this story and regards it as a late construction, see [Yang Ne] 楊訥, 丘處機 “一言止殺” 考 [Textual Studies on the Issue of Qiu Chiji's *Admonishment to Stop Killing*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 2018).

lawyers, and physicians of Baghdâd. And one said, “this man shall be Patriarch,” and another said, “that man shall be Patriarch,” until at length they all agreed that Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ should be the head and governor of the Throne of Seleucia and Ctesiphon. The reason for his election was this: The kings who held the steering poles of the government of the whole world were Mûglâyê (Mongols), and there was no man except Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ who was acquainted with their manners and customs, and their policy of government, and their language. And when [the nobles of Baghdâd] said these things to him he made excuses and demurred to their statements, saying, “I am deficient in education and in ecclesiastical doctrine, and the member of my tongue halteth. How can I possibly become your Patriarch? And moreover, I am wholly ignorant of your language, Syriac, which it is absolutely necessary for the Patriarch to know.” And having pressed upon him their request, he agreed to their opinion and accepted [the office]. And all the aged men, and priests, and nobles, and scribes, and also the physicians, gave their support to him.²⁹⁴

The main reason for the election of Yahballaha III was that he came from the east, could speak Mongolian, and was familiar with the Mongol system, although as admitted by himself he had little knowledge of Syriac, the liturgical language of the Church of the East. Yahballaha III was expected by his peers to promote their religion under the ruling of the Mongol Ilkhans. The situation in Iran became much more complicated than in Yuan China after Islamization. Yahballaha III and his disciples were well treated during the reign of Arghun (r. 1284-1291), but were tortured and persecuted under the Islamic rulers like Tekuder (r. 1282-1284) and in the early period of Ghazan (r. 1295-1304). Yahballaha III himself was put into prison several times. These new changes after Islamization will be addressed in the next chapter. It is precise because their beliefs and religions were protected and even sponsored by Mongols that religious elites like Rabban Sauma were willing to act as envoys of the Mongols to Europe and displayed a complicated identity.

Now we will turn to the diplomatic mission of Rabban Sauma in Europe. As we have shown, Sauma was appointed as envoy because of his Christian background and excellent linguistic skills. It was expected that the European rulers would value his Christian identity and further facilitated the diplomatic negotiation. This plan paid off and Sauma was properly

²⁹⁴ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 152-153.

received in many European royal courts. From the side of Sauma and the Ilkhan, they also made good preparation for this mission, including selecting gifts for European rulers and collecting practical information. A notable example is that before the audience, Sauma had already collected some intelligence concerning the protocols of the Roman Curia. Sauma's embassy comprised several members including a "Frank" man, who became his most important informant on the European issues. This man according to Pier Giorgio Borbone is actually Thomas Anfossi, a Genoese merchant.²⁹⁵ Thomas Anfossi told Sauma that they must bow to the altar in the cell of the Pope and salute the cardinals, which Sauma followed and pleased the cardinals.²⁹⁶ Morris Rossabi, one of the leading historians of the Mongols, provides a significant parallel here that the reception of Sauma in the Roman curia is similar to the custom in the Chinese imperial courts. Both of them are required to follow the etiquette of paying homage before the formal audience and the Italian Thomas Anfossi played the same role as the Confucius officers of the Ministry of Rites to teach the visitors the correct courtly manner.²⁹⁷

The dialogue between the Roman Cardinals and Sauma begins with some basic information the Roman sides would like to know from Sauma, such as where was he come from, who was the head and where was the headquarter of his church, and what position did Sauma hold in the church. Then the conversation was concentrated on the purpose of Sauma's mission and his Christian identity. These cardinals could not understand or intentionally question why as a Christian Sauma would serve as envoy of the infidel Mongols. The relevant passage is quoted in detail as follows considering its high relevance:

Three days later the Cardinals sent and summoned Rabban Sâwmâ to their presence. And when he went to them they began to ask him questions, saying, "What is thy quarter of the world, and why hast thou come?" And he replied in the selfsame words he had already spoken to them. And they said unto him, "Where doth the Catholicus live? And which of the Apostles taught the Gospel in thy quarter of the world?" And he answered them, saying, "Mâr Thomas, and

²⁹⁵ Pier Giorgio Borbone, "A 13th-Century Journey from China to Europe: The Story of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma," *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 31(2008): 229.

²⁹⁶ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 172.

²⁹⁷ Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu*, 119-120.

Mâr Addai, and Mâr Mârî taught the Gospel in our quarter of the world, and we hold at the present time the canons [or statutes] which they delivered unto us.” The Cardinals said unto him, “Where is the Throne of the Catholicus?” He said to them, “In Baghdâd.” They answered, “What position hast thou there?” And he replied, “I am a deacon in the Cell of the Catholicus, and the director of the disciples, and the Visitor-General.” The Cardinals said, “It is a marvellous thing that thou who art a Christian, and a deacon of the Throne of the Patriarch of the East hast come upon an embassy from the king of the Mongols.” And Rabban Sâwmâ said unto them, “Know ye, O our Fathers, that many of our Fathers have gone into the countries of the Mongols, and Turks, and Chinese and have taught them the Gospel, and at the present time there are many Mongols who are Christians. For many of the sons of the Mongol kings and queens have been baptized and confess Christ. And they have established churches in their military camps, and they pay honour to the Christians, and there are among them many who are believers. Now the king [of the Mongols], who is joined in the bond of friendship with the Catholicus, hath the desire to take Palestine, and the countries of Syria, and he demandeth from you help in order to take Jerusalem. He hath chosen me and hath sent me to you because, being a Christian, my word will be believed by you.”²⁹⁸

The answer of Sauma is quite well organized and likewise illuminative on several levels. He first stated that there was a long history of preaching activities in the east, which were quite successful since many Mongol royal members became followers of Jesus. Then Sauma introduced the general favorite attitudes of the Mongol rulers towards Christians and their churches and their concerns of the Christians living in the Holy Land governed by Islamic rulers. In the last part, Sauma turned to the purpose of his mission, that is, to deliver the message of the Ilkhan to facilitate an alliance against the Mamluk Egypt. As for his religious identity questioned by the Cardinals, Sauma explained that it was indeed his Christian background that the Mongol ruler appointed him as the envoy to Europe. The conversations continued. The Cardinals and Sauma had “discussions” on theological doctrines in a not quite peaceful atmosphere. In the end, no one could convince the other. Considering the Pope had not been elected, Sauma continued his journey to visit the French and English kings.

Sauma and his companions were generally quite well treated in terms of reception and accommodation in Europe. In Byzantium, Sauma and his companions were accommodated in

²⁹⁸ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 173-174.

a mansion allotted by the emperor.²⁹⁹ This was in fact a very high favor according to the Byzantine protocols if we compare Sauma with the contemporary Latin ambassadors arriving at Constantinople. As Krijna N. Ciggaar has demonstrated, only a few of these Latins had such privilege to lodge in a place in the center of the city; as for the Church officers and Papal envoys sent from Rome, most of them would be hosted in the western monasteries in or outside of the city, or occasionally housed by the Patriarch.³⁰⁰ Upon the roof of a mansion in Naples, Sauma and his companions witnessed the famous war of the Sicilian Vespers between the Aragonese king of Sicily and King Charles II of Anjou. To dwell in the mansion was possibly also a courtesy from King Charles II of Anjou after the audience granted by him.³⁰¹ In Rome, In Paris, Sauma received the highest hospitality on his European journey. The French King Philippe IV le Bel host a city entrance ceremony for Sauma and his corps: “he sent out a large company of men to meet them, and they brought them into the city with great honour and ceremony.”³⁰² Then, he assigned a quite good place for them to rest. More significantly, the King granted audiences to Sauma twice in two places of distinctive functions. The first audience took place in his royal court three days later after the arrival of Sauma. The main agenda of this meeting was to exchange diplomatic letters and gifts, and the King positively responded to the offer of the Ilkhan to fight together against the Arabs.³⁰³ The second audience was arranged as a farewell, yet this time, the King invited Sauma to the Sainte-Chapelle that was originally commissioned by Louis IX. This meeting was meticulously arranged and highly symbolic in several ways. First, this site of meeting belongs to holy space related to a Crusading king rather than a simple secular space. Second, this meeting consisted of a series of scenes like a play. The King led Sauma into the golden chamber of the Holy Chapel, opened the coffer, and

²⁹⁹ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 168-169.

³⁰⁰ Krijna N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople: The West and Byzantium, 962-1204* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 23.

³⁰¹ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 171.

³⁰² Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 182.

³⁰³ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 182-183.

showed Sauma the famous and symbolic relic Crown of Thorns.³⁰⁴ By performing this, King Philippe IV le Bel delivered a clear message that he would inherit the wish of Saint Louis to work with the Mongols and liberate the Christians in the east. In addition, as Borbone has suggested, according to the Nestorian tradition, the space around the altar is considered too holy for anyone other than priests to enter it. The presence of King Philippe IV has a strong implication of sacral kingship, which must have impressed Sauma a lot.³⁰⁵ Overall, this relatively high standard of reception in Paris quite well illustrates that the French kings were one of the most zealous European rulers in crusading and cooperating with the Mongols, a tradition that can be dated back to the period of Louis IX.³⁰⁶

In addition to fulfilling the formal diplomatic duties, one of the main agendas on Sauma's schedule was to visit the various kind of Christian sacral sites. This is quite understandable considering Sauma's background, and we will see similar cases in the next chapter that the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta also had special interests in the Islamic sites in Iran and Central Asia ruled by the Islamized Mongol Khans. In most cases, Sauma initially asked permission to visit these places and the local hosts then gladly arranged for him. In Constantinople, Sauma was guided to visit the famous Hagia Sophia and some other sites.³⁰⁷ In Rome, the Cardinals sent the city officers and some monks to accompany Sauma to visit St. Peter's Basilica, the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, and other places.³⁰⁸ In Paris, Sauma and his companion stayed for more than a month. There they visited "one Great Church wherein were the funerary coffers of dead kings and statues of

³⁰⁴ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 184-185.

³⁰⁵ Borbone, "A 13th-Century Journey from China to Europe," 232.

³⁰⁶ More generally on the abortive Franco-Mongol alliance and its influence, see Jean Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," *Journal of Asian History* 3, no. 1 (1969): 45-57; John Andrew Boyle, "The Ilkhans of Persia and the Princes of Europe," *Central Asiatic Journal* 20, no. 1/2 (1976): 25-40; Reuven Amitai, "Mamluk Perceptions of the Mongol-Frankish Rapprochement," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (1992): 50-65; "Edward of England and Abagha Ilkhan: A Reexamination of a Failed Attempt at Mongol-Frankish Cooperation," In Michael Gervers and James M. Powell, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusades* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 75-82.

³⁰⁷ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 168-169.

³⁰⁸ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 178-179.

them in gold and in silver were upon their tombs”, which was actually the Basilica of Saint-Denis.³⁰⁹ In Gascony where Edward II, the King of England resided at that time, Sauma raised the same requirement which was kindly refused by the King since there were no comparable holy sites in Gascony.³¹⁰ It is reasonable to believe that these guided tours serve as perfect means to display the royal glories of the host with subtle symbolic implications. In fact, guided tours are widely practiced in the Eurasian world as part of diplomatic protocols. In Medieval Egypt, for instance, organized excursions to the Pyramids were one of the routine courtesy of the local rulers for foreign envoys. According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif, this custom dated back to the Fatimid period and the Ilkhanid envoys likewise enjoyed such hospitalities provided by the Sultans of Mamluk Sultanate like Al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-1294).³¹¹ In the east, we will see later that Kublai Khan similarly arranged guided tours for two Japanese guests in Beijing.

After meeting the French and English king, Sauma learned that a new Pope had been elected. The new Pope Nicholas IV sent a messenger to Sauma and invited him to come to Rome again. In Rome, Sauma had a deep encounter with the rites of the Catholic Church. He attended the celebrations of the Eucharist, Palm Sunday, the Holy Passover, and the Sunday of the Resurrection. It should be noted the descriptions of Sauma on these Catholic rites were not exotic as one might expect, neither the Rome clergies treated Sauma as a complete outsider. As Borbone has pointed out, as a stranger from a faraway, Sauma actually felt at ease in Europe.³¹² When meeting Pope Nicholas IV, Sauma followed the custom to bow to the Pope, kissed his feet and hands, and gave the Pope the letters and gifts from the Ilkhan and the Patriarch of the East. In Rome, Sauma celebrated the Eucharist in a Nestorian manner, which

³⁰⁹ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 183-184.

³¹⁰ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 186-187.

³¹¹ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 13-14.

³¹² Borbone, “A 13th-Century Journey from China to Europe,” 236.

was approved and rejoiced by the Pope. During Palm Sunday, Sauma was offered communication in the first place by the Pope preceding all the Catholic prelates and crowds. During the Holy Passover and the Sunday of the Resurrection, Sauma was invited by the Pope to witness and participate in all the parts of the ceremonies.³¹³ Upon leaving, the Pope invited Sauma to stay at Rome: “We wish thee to remain with us, and to abide with us, and we will guard thee like the pupil of our eye.”³¹⁴ This invitation was offered perhaps out of politeness, and Sauma kindly refused and emphasized his official identity as the Ilkhanid envoy. He replied that he had to go back to the east to report on the fulfillment of his diplomatic duty. He hoped after introducing the kindness of European rulers to the Ilkhan, and the Christians would receive favor positions in the east.³¹⁵ This is without doubt proof of Sauma’s loyalty to the Ilkhanid rulers and the Nestorian Church as a Christian.

Then perhaps one of the most dramatic yet symbolic occasions in Sauma’s journey in Europe took place. Sauma asked the Pope to give him some Christian relics as gifts in order to stimulate the belief of the Christians in the east. This episode has not aroused enough attention from modern scholars. Morris Rossabi, for instance, simply regards it as a request of brazenness that doubtless annoyed the Pope, and the Pope nonetheless responded with aplomb and magnanimously granted the permission.³¹⁶ As I have demonstrated in Chapter 1, there were indeed precedents that the Rome Pope prepared gifts for foreign rulers including the infidels. Here the further question would be whether sacral relics can be included in such kinds of gift packages for infidels. Patrick Geary, one of the leading medievalists of our age, has convincingly proved that in the Middle Ages the Rome Popes habitually practiced the tradition to give sacral relics as gifts to develop their patronage networks. Before the mid-eighth century, the secondary relics or *brandia*, objects that related to the martyrs’ tombs, were the main

³¹³ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 190-194.

³¹⁴ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 195.

³¹⁵ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 195.

³¹⁶ Morris Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu*, 163-164.

distributed objects. After that, the corporeal species of relics were also given as gifts. More importantly, as gifts instead of stolen objects or traded commodities, these relics kept their unalienable attributes and served as good indications of the subordination the Pope would like to place on the recipients.³¹⁷ According to the travelogue of Sauma, we know that the gifts Pope Nicholas IV selected and gave to Patriarch Yahballaha III and the Church of the Eastern include a small piece of the apparel of Lord Christ, a piece of kerchief of Lady Mary, and some small fragments of the bodies of saints buried in Rome.³¹⁸ This package consists of both the secondary and corporeal relics and quite well complied with the established gift-giving tradition of the Roman Curia. Meanwhile, these highly symbolic items potentially delivered the same message of subordination, which can be testified from the letter patents Pope Nicholas IV issued for Patriarch Yahballaha III and Sauma. Rossabi rightfully pointed out that the real message, behind investing the Nestorian Patriarch with authority over all Christians in the East and confirming Rabban Sauma as Visitor-General in the East through the patents, was to assert his own primacy and authority over the Nestorian Patriarchs.³¹⁹ This engagement on gifts between Sauma and Pope is therefore never a meaningless episode rather a highly symbolic event.

In sum, from the texts of Sauma, we have the impression that his experience of religious encountering in the Roman Curia and royal courts was not much of transculturality or alterity. This could belong to the narrative strategy of Sauma to show his audiences that the alliance with the Latin Christendom would not only be desirable but also feasible. More probably, if we compare to the narrations of the Latin visitors concerning the Mongol imperial court, the

³¹⁷ Patrick Geary, "Sacred Commodities: the Circulation of Medieval Relics," in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 182-183; and *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³¹⁸ Budge, trans., *The Monk of Kublai Khan*, 195.

³¹⁹ Morris Rossabi, *Voyager from Xanadu*, 164-166.

distinctions between Catholic churches and the Church of the East are indeed much less. Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that Sauma still kept political and religious loyalty to the Ilkhanid rulers and the Nestorian Church. As we will see in the next subchapter, Sauma's loyalty was much stronger than many other non-Mongol envoys from laypeople. This phenomenon cannot be well understood out of the context that the Mongol rulers indeed created favorable conditions for professing religions in their lands and many ecclesiastic elites obtained real interests for their churches and themselves.

Displaying the Imperial Aspiration: Mongol Envoys and their Experience in Foreign Royal Courts

Not every Mongol envoy was lucky enough like Rabban Sauma. In many cases, the Mongol envoys were mistreated, detained, or even killed in their missions, especially during the early stage of the Mongol empire. According to the data provided by Dong Miao, among the 242 Mongol diplomatic missions, as many as 23 envoys were killed, 4 envoys were detained and 3 envoys were humiliated, 43 failed their mission, and only 85 missions were recorded as a full success.³²⁰ In this subchapter, the various fates of the Mongol envoys in the foreign courts and the motives behind them, the issue of their loyalty, the personal gifts they received, and the symbolic competitions in rituals they were involved in will be discussed.

Most of these Mongol envoys whose life was endangered during their mission were dispatched to urge the rivals to surrender, and this was usually though not necessarily the only reason for conflicts. The massacre of Otrar was conducted by the Khwarazmians in 1218, which we have already pointed out the ambiguity of the status of merchants may cause some misjudgments. Yet the real trigger, from the perspective of the Mongols, was that the Khwarazmians broke the central Eurasian diplomatic convention and killed their formal envoys. According to the Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir, Genghis Khan had once sent a second diplomatic corps to negotiate the issue of compensations and remedies. The Khwarazmian Shah nevertheless had the chief Mongol envoy executed and his two companions humiliated by shaving off the beards.³²¹

³²⁰ [Dong Miao] 苗冬, 元代使臣研究[Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty], PhD dissertation, Nankai University, 2010, 221.

³²¹ *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh, Part 3, The Years 1193-1231: The Ayyubids after Saladin and the Mongol Menace*, trans., D. S. Richards (London: Routledge, 2008), 206; W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol invasion* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1968), 399.

If the Khwarazmian Shah committed the misconduct out of greed for the goods of the Mongols and thereafter miscalculated the Mongols' determination to take revenge, some others might do it out of political and military reasons. When the war seemed to be unavoidable, some rulers would choose to kill the Mongol envoys as a boost to the morale of their soldiers, or as a signal of solidarity with their alliances. On the eve of the battle of the Kalka River, the Mongols had sent envoys to inform the Russians that their only target was the nomadic Kipchaks (also known as Polovtsians or Cumans) and had no interests in the Russian towns and villages. Those Russian princesses did not follow the advice and executed all the Mongol envoys. Shortly afterward, the Mongols sent their envoys a second time to condemn the atrocity and declare war formally. This time the Russians let them free to go, yet the arrow was already on the bowstring.³²² A similar situation took place in Hungary several years later. Before the campaign against Hungary, the Mongols sent an ultimatum to the Hungarians through the hands of the Dominic Friar Julian. In the letter, the Mongols blamed King Béla IV for giving shelter for the Cumans and executing all the thirty groups of envoys they had sent to Hungary.³²³ The exact number of the massacred Mongol envoys might not be trustful considering the rhetorical aspect of this document, and we know from other sources that at least one of these envoys indeed survived. A certain Englishman, who was originally an outlaw, was entrusted by the Mongols as envoy and interpreter to the court of Béla IV twice since he had extraordinary languages skills. Later, this man was captured by the prince of Dalmatia during the retreating of the Mongols from central Europe and deflected immediately.³²⁴ Yet as the Russian case indicates, very likely these Mongol envoys received no proper treatment in

³²² *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016-1471*, trans., Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (London: Royal Historical Society, 1914), 65. A comparable scene took place in Russia in the late eleventh century: envoys sent by the Cumans were arrested and killed by the Russian princes, which incurred the revenge of the former, see George Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 88.

³²³ Sinor, "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," 344.

³²⁴ This Englishman's life story was recorded by Ivo of Narbonne in his famous letter or confession, which was in turn preserved in the work of Matthew of Paris, see J. A. Giles, trans., *Matthew Paris's English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, vol.1 (London: Bell and Sons, 1889), 470-471.

Hungary at this stage. Similar situations also took place in the Middle East during the first contact between the Mongols and the Mamluk Egyptians. In 1260, Hülegü sent envoys with an ultimatum to Cairo and urged the Mamluk Sultan Qutuz (r. 1259-60) to surrender. Qutuz responded with a decision to cut these Mongol envoys in half and hanged their heads on the gate of Bab Zuweila.³²⁵ Some six years later, the newly enthroned Ilkhan Abaqa sent another embassy to Sultan Baibars. This time we were informed that besides an ultimatum, the Mongol envoys also brought gifts for the Sultan. The destination of these envoys is nevertheless not provided.³²⁶

If the addressed rulers had not decided how to respond to the requests of the Mongols or did not want to embark on the war immediately, or just worried that these envoys would bring important intelligence back, they usually chose to detain the Mongol envoys. In 1260, Kublai was enthroned as the Great Khan, and shortly after he sent several envoys to the neighboring countries to inform of this message. Hao Jing 郝經 was one of these envoys and dispatched to Southern Song.³²⁷ At that time, the relation between these two powers was very delicate. On the one hand, Kublai was in civil wars with his younger brother Ariq Böke and had, for now, no intention for further conflicts with Song. On the other hand, the powerful Song councilor Jia Sidao 賈似道 played a trick both on the Song emperor and the Mongols. He promised a peace treaty to the Mongols in return for their retreat yet reported to the emperor that he had defeated the Mongols. For that, Jia got further promotion from the Song emperor. The mission of Hao Jing would disclose the lie immediately. In the end, Hao Jing was detained for sixteen years, until the Mongol army crossed the Yangtze River and the Song Dynasty set Hao Jing free.³²⁸

³²⁵ Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, 36.

³²⁶ Amitai-Preiss, "An Exchange of Letters in Arabic between Abaya Ilkhan and Sultan Baybars (A.H. 667 / A.D. 1268-9)," 11.

³²⁷ On the career of Hao Jing, see Igor de Rachewiltz, et al., eds., *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period, 1200-1300* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), 348-370.

³²⁸ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3708-3709.

The Mongol envoys were also detained by Annam during their early contact. After conquering the Dali Kingdom in 1254, Kublai sent his general Uriyangqadai to continue the campaign towards the southeastern Asian countries.³²⁹ As usual, the Mongols sent their envoys before the armies. In the November of 1257, two envoys were dispatched to meet Trần Thái Tông, the King of Annam (r. 1225-1258). Yet, the envoys did not return and were detained immediately. When the Mongols captured the capital city of Annam and released these two envoys from imprisonment, one of them had been tortured to death. The Mongols sought revenge by slaughtering the innocent citizens. Shortly after, the Mongol sent their second group of envoys, and the two envoys were detained by Trần Thái Tông again and took them southward. This dispute was finally solved after Trần Thái Tông retired in the next year and had his son Trần Thánh Tông 陳日烜 (r. 1258-1278) enthroned. The new king decided to send the Mongol envoys back and accept the suzerainty of the Mongols.³³⁰

The imprisoned Mongol envoys would generally face another challenge, that is, whether they chose to defect or still kept loyalty to their master. This question is rather relevant since a great number of Mongol envoys as we have shown was ethnically non-Mongols. The case of Hao Jing 郝經 serves well here again. During his detainment for over a decade, the Song authorities attempted several times to persuade him to surrender and not unexpectedly failed. Instead, Hao Jing sent many letters to the Song authorities to defend his own position and declared that the fall of the Song would be inevitable.³³¹ In these letters, Hao Jing himself an ethnic Chinese expressed his loyalty to Kublai in a strong cultural sense: “the ruler who can

³²⁹ For an introduction on these military events, see Francesca Fiaschetti, “Mongol Imperialism in the Southeast: Uriyangqadai (1201-1272) and Aju (1127-1287),” *Asia* 71, no. 4 (2017): 1119–1135.

³³⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4633-4634.

³³¹ There was even an anecdote that the imprisoned HAO Jing once sent a letter through wild goose, which successfully arrived at the hand of the Mongols. The authenticity of this story nevertheless has been recently revealed as a fabrication, see [Pujiang Liu] 劉浦江, “历史是怎样寫成的: 郝經雁吊書故事真相發覆 [How the History was Written: The Authenticity of the Story of Hao Jing and his Silk Letter of Wild Goose], in his 正統與華夷: 中國傳統政治文化研究 [Legitimation and the Sino-barbarian Dichotomy: A Study of Chinese Traditional Political Culture] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2017), 116-142.

employ the Confucius literati and follow the way of Chinese will be the lord of the Middle Kingdom.”³³² Such a culturally-based identity was not uncommon in the traditional Chinese political culture and the ethnic boundary was not rigid as it appeared. Every barbarian could be civilized and therefore be granted the membership of the community of China if they do as the Chinese do. The legitimation of a ruling house was also less hinged on its ethnic background.³³³ An interesting comparison is the above-mentioned Englishman served as an envoy to Hungary. Obviously, he did not share the same cultural identity with his Mongol master, nor had he the professional ethics like Rabban Sauma. Once been captured, he confessed everything he knew about the Mongols “without hesitation”.³³⁴

The issue of loyalty also occurred in the diplomatic missions between the Great Khan and the Mongol Khans in the west, which nevertheless has nothing to do with the issue of identity. A well-known case is Isa Kelemechi (1227-1308) and Bolad Aqa (d. 1313), as well as the famous comments on them from Kublai. Isa Kelemechi was original a Syrian Nestorian Christian.³³⁵ Recommended by Simeon Rabban Ata, another Syrian monk who served in the Mongol imperial court, Isa came to the household of Sorghaghtani Beki, the widow of Tolui, and served as an imperial guard in the 1240s. Isa married one of the maidservants of Sorghaghtani Beki and kept the personal affinity to the Toluid house for a lifetime. After the Toluid revolution, Möngke and Kublai become the Great Khan one after another and Isa obtained his opportunities on the political stage. The titular Kelemechi literally means

³³² [Hao Jing]郝經, [Letter to Governor of Huai Region of the Song Dynasty] 與宋國兩淮制置使書, in [Xiusheng Li] 李修生, ed., 全元文 [Complete Collections of Yuan Literature], vol. 4 (Nanjing: Phoenix Press, 2004), 103-104: “今日能用士而能行中國之道, 則中國之主也。”

³³³ This idea of Sino-barbarian Dichotomy was in transformation during this period, see Shao-yun Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians: Redrawing Ethnic Boundaries in Tang and Song China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

³³⁴ Giles, trans., *Matthew Paris's English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, vol.1, 470.

³³⁵ On the career of 'Īsa Kelemechi, see Hodong Kim, “A Portrait of a Christian Official in China under the Mongol Rule: Life and Career of 'Īsa Kelemechi (1227-1308),” *Ouya Yicong/歐亞譯叢* 1 (2014): 224-263; “'Īsa Kelemechi: A Translator Turned Envoy between Asia and Europe”, in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, and Francesca Fiaschetti, eds., *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 255-269. There was a short biography of Isa in *Yuan Shi*, see Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3249-3250.

interpreter and that was the first post that Isa occupied in the imperial court. Other important positions he took included the leader of the imperial branch of Islamic medicine and astronomy. In 1283, Kublai appointed Isa as envoy to the Ilkhanid Iran four decades after his service in the east. The chief envoy of this mission was Bolad Aqa, also known as Bolad Chingsang.³³⁶ Bolad and his family had a longer and more intimate relationship with the Chingisid house. Bolad came from the Mongolian Dörbet tribe and his father was once a member of the imperial guards of Genghis Khan. Succeeding his father, Bolad served in the court of Kublai and won great trust from the Great Khan. Bolad held high positions like the leader of the imperial guards, the deputy director of Bureau of Military Affairs 樞密院, and eventually the grand councilor of the Imperial Secretariat where the titular Chingsang derived. He also presided over the judicial cases of Ariq Böke and the murder of Ahmad Fanakati, Kublai's rebellious brother and finance minister separately. In the embassy of 1283 to Iran, Bolad served as the chief envoy.

This diplomatic corps stayed in Iran for quite a well. In 1285, Isa was on a diplomatic mission again. This time he was sent by the recently enthroned Ilkhan Arghun to Pope Honorius IV, apparently because of his Christian background. The fact that Isa was originally an envoy from the Great Khan might also contribute to it. Beside Isa, the chief envoy of this mission, the groups included four other members: two Mongols Bogagoc and Mengilic, and two Italians Thomas Anfossi and Ugeto, the later served as interpreter. This group also brought gifts for the Pope.³³⁷ Although the content of the gift package is unknown to us, it can be thinkable that this corps received proper treatment in Rome. After returning to Iran, Isa and Bolad embarked on their journey back to China. Unfortunately, the Ögedeid and Chagataid princess Kaidu and Du'a repelled against Kublai again in Central Asia, which put the passage of Isa and Bolad in

³³⁶ On the career of 'Īsa Kelemechi, see Thomas T. Allsen, "Biography of a Cultural Broker: Bolad Ch'eng-Hsiang in China and Iran," *Oxford Studies in Islamic Art* 12 (1996): 7-22; *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 63-71.

³³⁷ Karl-Ernst Lupprian, *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert Anhand ihres Briefwechsels* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1981), 246.

great difficulty. At that time, Isa was almost sixty years old and Bolad was possibly in his forties. Yet Isa insisted on continuing the journey, while Bolad chose to go back to Iran and spent the rest of his life there. After two-year's endeavor, Isa finally arrived in Beijing and was ceremoniously welcomed by Kublai. Later, Isa was appointed as Chongfushi 崇福使 to preside over all Christian issues in the empire. According to the biographical epitaph of Isa, Kublai highly praised Isa and shows his deep dismay towards Bolad, which reads as follows: "Bolad was a native to my land and a courtier of mine, yet he chose to live in another land; Isa was born abroad and housed there, yet he kept loyalty to me. What a distinction (of their character)!"³³⁸

After a proper relation between the Mongols and their counterparts had been established, the safety of the Mongol envoys was much better secured. Yet the precaution towards the Mongol envoys still existed. When Carpini finished his mission, Güyük Khan proposed that he would like to send his envoys with Carpini back to the Pope. Carpini refused the request politely and confessed his considerations in his report. He gave five reasons altogether. First, the Mongols would be aware of the inner conflicts among European rulers and encouraged to initiate a second invasion. Second, these envoys could be actually spays and obtain intelligence. Third, they could be possibly killed in Europe and cause unnecessary conflicts, since the Mongols would never make peace with those who killed their envoys. Fourth, they could also be kidnaped and held captive. Last, the letters Carpini brought back could serve a better purpose than the coming of Mongol envoys.³³⁹ This conservative attitude of Carpini towards the Mongol envoys is quite understandable, and it is even more illuminating that Carpini rightfully

³³⁸ [Jufu Cheng] 程鉅夫, 拂林忠獻王神道碑 [Epitaph of Isa], in [Xiusheng Li] 李修生, ed., 全元文 [Complete Collections of Yuan Literature], vol.16 (Nanjing: Phoenix Press, 2004), 325: "博囉生吾土, 食吾祿, 而安於彼; 愛薛生於彼, 家於彼, 而忠於我, 相去何遠耶?"

³³⁹ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 68-69. In contrast, Ascelin readily accepted to accept the request of Baiju to take two Mongol envoys back with him without worrying about their possible espionage activities, see Pow et al., *Simon of Saint-Quentin: History of the Tartars*, XXXII, 50, accessed at: www.simonofstquentin.org, December 15, 2020.

perceived the diplomatic culture of the Mongols and their determined willingness to take revenge if their envoys were mistreated. This might partly influence the attitude of European monarchs towards the Mongol envoys in the following periods considering the popularity of Carpini's travelogue.

More assuredly, however, the humiliation or execution of Mongol envoys much less commonly occurred either in the East or in the West in the following periods. Smart rulers like the Nicaean Emperor Theodore II Laskaris (r. 1254-1258) even fulfilled their own diplomatic aims by overawing the Mongol envoys with the complicated Byzantine courtly protocols. The former diplomatic engagement between the Mongols and Byzantine lands began in the 1240s. The emperor of Trebizond Manuel I (r. 1238-1263) arguably came to Karakorum personally and attended the coronation of Güyük in 1246.³⁴⁰ The Latin Emperor of Constantinople also sent their envoys to the Mongols. Baldwin of Hainaut arrived at Karakorum and was granted an audience by Möngke between 1251 and 1252.³⁴¹ The Nicaean Emperors approached the Mongols slightly later, yet they were the true beneficiary of the presence of Mongols in that region. In 1252, the first Mongol embassy arrived at Nicaea and the Nicaean envoys were sent to Karakorum in 1254. This Mongol envoy was likely identical to the Saracen William of Rubruck mentioned in his travelogue we will refer to later.³⁴² In 1257, Hülegü sent his envoys to Nicaea seemingly to discuss the issue concerning the Seljuk Sultan Kaykaus II (r. 1246-1262), who was then a fugitive in the Nicaean court. We know the reception of this Mongol embassy owing to the texts of Byzantine historian George Pachymeres. According to

³⁴⁰ A. A. M. Bryer, "The Grand Komnenos and the Great Khan at Karakorum in 1246," *Res Orientales* 6 (1994): 257-261; J. S. Langdon, "Byzantium's Initial Encounters with the Chinggisids: an Introduction to the Byzantino-Mongolica," *Viator* 29 (1998): 95-139; Rustam Shukurov, "The Empire of Trebizond and the Golden Horde," in Kenan İnan, ed., *I. Uluslararası Karadeniz Tarihi Sempozyumu. Bildiriler Kitabı* (Trebizond: T. C. Avrasya Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2020), 89-95.

³⁴¹ On the mission of Baldwin of Hainaut, see [Aleksandar Uzelac] Александар Узелац, [Baldwin of Hainaut and the Nomadic Diplomacy of the Latin Empire] "Балдуин од Еноа и 'номадска дипломатија' Латинског царства," [Historical Journal] *Историјски часопис* 61 (2012): 45-65; John Giebfried, "Diplomacy, Black Sea Trade, and the Mission of Baldwin of Hainaut," in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, and Francesca Fiaschetti, eds., *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia*, 160-174.

³⁴² *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 227.

Pachymeres, Theodore II first sent his men to Iran in advance to spread the news that how formidable was his empire. Then he ordered his local guiders to detour the embassy into those most rugged roads to show how his lands were difficult to conquer. After the envoys finally arrived, Theodore II hosted a meticulously arranged and grandiose ceremony for them. He assigned his soldiers in full armour and his noblemen in magnificent customs by the roadside. He himself was dressed in imperial garb, holding a sword, and sat on his throne on a high platform behind the curtains. Suddenly the curtains opened and his appearance created discomforts and fears for the envoys.³⁴³ These stratagems and performances achieved very good results. In the following periods, the Nicaean emperors kept a relatively equal relation with the Mongols and established marriage alliances both with the Ilkhanate in the east and the Golden Horde in the North.

Some rulers even used their relationship with the Mongols to their advantage against other countries. In Central Europe, we know from the chronicle of Jan Długosz that the Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło received a Mongol diplomatic corps in Buda in 1412.³⁴⁴ At that time, Władysław was invited by Sigismund, King of Hungary and recently crowned Holy Roman Emperor, to discuss the issues of the Teutonic Order and the Dalmatia. This diplomatic corps was sent by Jalal al-Din, Khan of the Golden Horde (r. 1411-1412), who had previously fought in the Battle of Grunwald by the side of Vytautas the Great (r. 1392-1430) and then obtained his throne with Lithuanian aid. The purpose of this embassy was likely associated with further political and military cooperation in Eastern Europe. These envoys did not come empty-handed, according to Długosz, they brought three camels with woven coverings and

³⁴³ Georges Pachymeres, *Relations historiques, vol.1: Livres I-III*, ed. Albert Failler and trans. Vitalien Laurent (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 186-189. Also see Dimitri Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 194-199; Dimitar Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene: The Life of Emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 171.

³⁴⁴ Jan Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, ed. and trans., Maurice Michael and Paul Smith (Chichester: I. M. Publications, 1997), 411.

other gifts for Władysław and were received properly in Buda. Interestingly enough, the presence of these Mongol envoys also became symbolic capital for Sigismund to boost his power during his negotiation with the Venetians, whose envoys were in the same city.³⁴⁵

Personal gifts are another issue the envoys would encounter in foreign courts, which was widely practiced yet controversial in pre-modern diplomacy. In classical antiquity, for instance, gift-giving was not part of the customary diplomatic hospitalities. Those foreign envoys arriving at Greek city-states had to sustain themselves on their own, let alone receiving gifts from the local hosts. As for Greek envoys on missions abroad, receiving personal gifts would be suspected as accepting bribes. Some of them like Timagoras, an Athenian envoy to Persia in 367 BC even lost his life for accepting the gifts presented by the Achaemenid emperor.³⁴⁶ In Medieval Europe, to receive personal gifts from foreign rulers became more or less the default rights of envoys, only with a few exceptions. Venice for instance regulated that all those gifts given to their ambassadors should be turned over to the state.³⁴⁷ In the Mongol empire, as has been already shown, foreign envoys would receive proper care like board and lodging. Less infrequently, they would also receive personal gifts from the great khan and *khatun*. Rubruck, for instance, mentioned that the chief wife of Möngke Khan was going to distribute gifts to those who were presented at her court. A golden silk brocade was intended for Rubruck. Yet Rubruck was unwilling to accept this valuable gift out of his mendicant creed, this brocade was then given to Rubruck's interpreter. The latter took it all the way to Cyprus and sold for eighty Cypriot besants.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, 408-411; Balázs Nagy, "Ceremony and Diplomacy: The Royal Summit in Buda in 1412," in Attila Bányai, ed., *The Jagiellonians in Europe: Dynastic Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* (Debrecen, 2016), 15-16. More generally on the place of the Golden Horde in Eastern Europe in the Fourteenth century, see Jarosław Pelenski, "The Contest between Lithuania-Rus' and the Golden Horde in the Fourteenth Century for Supremacy over Eastern Europe," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2 (1982): 303-320.

³⁴⁶ Frank E. Adcock and Derek J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1975), 164-165.

³⁴⁷ Donald E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 202-206; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 11-12.

³⁴⁸ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 190-91.

The Mongol envoys in foreign courts were involved in the same matter. Some of them like Rabban Sauma received proper hospitality in these royal courts and obtained gifts there. No less of these gifts were used to cover furthering travel expenses and some of them were actually personal gifts. What would be the afterlives of these personal gifts? Could the Mongol envoys have these gifts at their full disposal? Just as in the cases of Ancient Greek or Medieval Venice, personal gifts could also be suspected as bribery to the Mongol envoys. There were indeed debates in the Yuan Dynasty concerning the purposes of these items. The Mongol rulers however held a general tolerance towards their own envoys. Liang Zeng 梁曾, as has been discussed, received a warm reception by Kublai after his successful mission to Annam. However, rumors had already preceded him and spread in the imperial court. Someone had accused him of receiving bribes from the King of Annam. Kublai and Liang Zeng had a frank conversation, which is recorded in *Yuan Shi*. Liang Zeng told Kublai that the King of Annam had sent golden vessels and coins and other exotic things to him, yet he refused and gave them back to the Annam ambassador Tao Ziqi 陶子奇. Kublai showed his full trust in Liang Zeng and answered that it would be completely appropriate to have these personal gifts. He decided to reward Liang Zeng with an ingot of platinum and two ingots of golden coins for his upright and loyalty.³⁴⁹ There was also a negative example. William of Rubruck had mentioned a certain Saracen who once acted as the envoy of Möngke to the Nicaean emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes (r. 1222-1254). This envoy was however bribed by the emperor with precious gifts, instead of fulfilling his duties, he advised John III Doukas Vatatzes to send envoys to Karakorum and play time with the Mongols.³⁵⁰

In some cases, local rulers of the vassal countries would provide another kind of hospitality for the envoys, that is, services of young women. This special hospitality also has a

³⁴⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4135.

³⁵⁰ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 227.

tradition, which may be worthy to be provided here. In the eleventh century, the Jurchens were vassals of the Khitan Liao dynasty. Hong Hao 洪皓 a Song envoy to the Jurchens testified in his travelogue that each time Khitan envoys arrived, they demanded the Jurchens to select young unmarried girls to serve them. Later these Khitan envoys became more and more insatiable and they simply requested good-looking women regardless of their marital status and family background. This invoked the Jurchens to rebel and finally led to the overthrow of the rule of the Khitans.³⁵¹ The renowned Sinologist Herbert Franke, therefore, used the ethnological concept “guest prostitution” to refer to it and fatherly suggested the Song envoys also possibly enjoyed such hospitalities in Liao dynasty, although there was no written evidence.³⁵² This in my opinion might be erroneous, since the Song Dynasty was never suzerain of the Jurchens and it is unthinkable that the Jurchens would host the Song envoys in the way they indeed resented. In fact, Franke and some other scholars might confuse the different types of sex services in provision: one is for personals from the suzerain; another is for complete strangers. In the Mongol Empire, Marco Polo noticed that some people of Hami of present-day Xinjiang, Tibet, and Caidu of Sichuan practiced such a custom of guest prostitution for strangers traveling across their places.³⁵³ Contemporary scholars like Patricia Crone noticed guest prostitution also practiced among some tribes in the Middle East. According to Crone, two main motivations help explain: to demonstrate the magnanimity of the host, and more importantly, to avoid inbreeding and secure healthy offspring.³⁵⁴ This kind of guest prostitution is essentially different from the hospitalities the Kitans enjoyed in the Jin Dynasty and the Mongol envoys enjoyed in Annam and Korea in the following discussion.

³⁵¹ [Hong Hao] 洪皓, 松漠紀聞 [Accounts in Songmo], ed.[Liwei Zhai] 翟立偉 (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi, 1986), 23-24.

³⁵² Herbert Franke, “Sung Embassies: Some General Observations,” in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 136-137.

³⁵³ Polo, *The Description of the World*, vol.1, 58-59; 115, 116-117.

³⁵⁴ Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 427-433.

However, Herbert Franke is right in the sense that envoys like Hong Hao were silent about their own encountering with the so-called “guest prostitution” partly due to the influence of their Confucius education background. This is also applicable for the Yuan sources. We do not have any direct reference in the official history *Yuan Shi* or diplomatic reports written by these envoys. The existed evidence comes from a special genre, *Jixing Shi* 紀行詩, the poems composed by the Yuan envoys during their journeys. In 1335, a Yuan embassy arrived at Annam with Shoushi Calendar 授時歷, the calendar the Yuan Dynasty adopted since the 1280s, as a gift. This embassy was headed by Tiezhu 帖住, director of Ministry of Personnel and Zhi Xishan 智熙善, an officer of the Ministry of Rites, with Fu Ruojin 傅若金 served as a companion. Fu Ruojin wrote his mission down and composed several poems. One of them tells that the Annam side provided young women to serve them at the residence of the envoys, yet Fu Ruojin refused such hospitalities.³⁵⁵ Since there was no further evidence, we could only have speculation on the motivations from the Annam side. This service could be possibly voluntarily arranged, considering the refusal of Fu Ruojin, and be associated with briberies or reciprocity.

For the Mongol envoys in Goryeo Korea, we have more evidence provided by the sources from both sides. The presence of the Korean prince Wang Jeon 王僊 in the camps of Kublai in 1259, as we have shown, indicted the establishment of a stable vassal relationship. Before that, their relations were in vicissitudes. The Goryeo Korea accepted the suzerainty of the Mongols twice in 1219 and 1231, yet repelled soon after. During this period, the fate of Mongol envoys in Korean courts was uncertain as their peers did. In 1222, a Mongol envoy named Zhuoguyu 着古歟 was killed in Korea, which led to the suspension of their relations

³⁵⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 819-820; [Sicheng, Zhou] 周思成, “元人詩歌中的安南出使與南國奇景” [The diplomatic missions to Annam and the the exotica scenes of the South in the poems of Yuan Dynasty], 文史知識 [Literary and historical knowledge], 11 (2015): 27-35.

for seven years.³⁵⁶ In 1231, the Korean generals in Pingzhou 平州 detained the Mongol envoys Aertu 阿兒禿 and Hong Fuyuan 洪福源 and sent them to the capital of Goryeo Korea Wangjing 王京, present-day Kaesong. Some courtiers suggested the execution of these envoys, which was abandoned by the King in the end.³⁵⁷ The campaign of the Mongols in Korea continued through the reign of Ögedei, Gyüyük, and Möngke.

In addition to these military engagements, a distinctive aspect in the bilateral relationship is that the Mongols nobilities showed strong interest in the Korean young ladies. According to the data provided by Lei Xi, 喜蕾, as many as 1,479 Korean women were sent to Yuan Dynasty in form of tributes as recorded by the official Yuan and Goryeo court annals and the actual number would be much higher.³⁵⁸ However, the situation was much complicated than it appears and cannot be simply understood from the perspective of tributes. The Korean women arrived in the Mongol empire through different channels. At the very beginning, most of them belonged to spoils of war, captives, hostages, or tributes. In 1231, right after the Goryeo court submitted for the second time, the conditions the Mongols gave include an article that the Korean king, princes, generals, and other dignitaries ought to send their sons and daughters one thousand each.³⁵⁹ This had a clear indication of hostage to secure the loyalty of the Korean side. There is also evidence showing that some of the Mongol officers stationed in Korea and envoys who traveled there received young ladies, some of them were demanded by power, but not seldom were provided voluntarily. According to data provided by Lei Xi again, references the

³⁵⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4608. This incident was later proved to be conducted by the order of the Jurchen warlord Puxian Wannu 蒲鮮萬奴 rather the Korean King, see [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 27-28.

³⁵⁷ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 400.

³⁵⁸ [Lei Xi] 喜蕾, 元代高麗貢女制度研究 [*Studies on the Tributary System of the Korean Women in Yuan Dynasty*] (Beijing: Publishing House of Minority Nationalities, 2003), 51; also see David M. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 52-56.

³⁵⁹ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 403-404.

Mongol governors requested or received Korean ladies five times, and the Mongol envoys received three times.³⁶⁰

In the later period, the Koreans became actually a stable marriage partner and alliance of the Mongol imperial families. The Chingisid houses have a tradition to marriage with foreign tribes or countries. Candidates of sons-in-law usually came from the clans of Ongirad, Ikires, Oirat, Öngüt, and the Uighur Iduq-qut. The clans of Ongirad, Ikires, and Oirat also provided wives for the Mongol khans and princes.³⁶¹ From the late Thirteenth century on, the Goryeo Korean dynasty also joined this marriage pool. Among the seven Korean kings between 1275 and 1374, five of them married eight Mongol princesses.³⁶² This was rather exceptional since all of the other marriage partners were Turkic-Mongol groups. In the imperial system of the Mongols, the Goryeo Korea had a unique place and certainly benefited from such marriage relations. It should be noted that the Korean court was also active in the diplomatic engagements between the Mongols and the Japanese. Korean officers often acted as tour guides, intermediaries, and not seldom as official envoys of the Mongols, which we will go into detail afterward.

Although these Mongol envoys received much better treatment in the foreign courts than their predecessors did, conflicts still existed, especially in symbolic issues like protocols of receptions and related ceremonies. The Mongol envoys attempted to display the imperial order and promote the imperial ambitions in these courtly encounters. The rulers of vassal countries otherwise tried their best to keep their status as normal as possible. Symbolic conflicts were very common in the diplomatic engagement between Mongols and other East and Southeast Asian countries. Hao Jing 郝經, for instance, upon his arrival, was requested by the

³⁶⁰ [Lei Xi] 喜蕾, 元代高麗貢女制度研究 [Studies on the Tributary System of the Korean Women in Yuan Dynasty], 50.

³⁶¹ See Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, 135-163; George Qingzhi Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

³⁶² Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression*, 179.

Song generals to give his letter of credence to them. Hao Jing refused determinedly and stated that as a matter of convention letter of credence can only be handed over to the Song emperor personally. Without an official audience, a diplomatic mission can never be regarded as a success. Besides, Hao Jing doubted whether this important document could finally arrive at the hand of the Song emperor. The follow-ups especially Hao Jing's own detainment indeed confirmed it. During the detainment, Hao Jing wrote several letters to the Song emperor to clarify the situation, yet the Song guards delivered none of them.³⁶³

A similar conflict on the letter of credence took place during Zhao Liangbi 趙良弼's mission to Japan in 1271. Zhao and his companions were officially yet not friendly received by Dazaifu 太宰府, the Japanese administrative authority in Kyushu which was traditionally responsible for the diplomatic issues with China and Korea. According to the biography of Zhao in *Yuan Shi*, the local officers made all kinds of efforts to seize the letter of credence from Zhao and prevent him to meet the Japanese emperor. During the first night, they sent groups of soldiers to make huge noise near the place of the embassy accommodated hoping to frighten the ambassador to give up his mission, which turned out to be useless. In the next days, the Japanese officers attempted several times to persuade Zhao to hand over the document voluntarily. They asserted that there was no official diplomatic relationship with China for a long time and they were doubtful about the real identity of Zhao, only if he gave the letter to them. These also failed. In the end, the Japanese decided to use forces. Zhao Liangbi had to make a compromise that he would send a copy to these officers yet kept the original one until the official audience; and if they took it away by force, he would commit suicide. Eventually, the copy was delivered, yet Zhao neither was granted an audience, nor received any official reply.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3708.

³⁶⁴ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4638.

This episode of Zhao Liangbi and the complex attitudes of the Japanese side towards the Mongols should be understood within the context of their tedious negotiations over a decade. Before the embassy of Zhao Liangbi, the Mongols had already sent several diplomatic corps to Japan yet none of them succeeded. In 1266, Kublai sent his first diplomatic corps headed by Heidi 黑的 and Yin Hong 殷弘, officers of the Ministry of Military and Ministry of Rites to Japan separately, with some Korean officers in the same rank as tour guides and intermediary. This mission was cancelled due to the terrible weather and they only arrived at Geoje, an island off the south coast of the Korean peninsula.³⁶⁵ In 1267, Kublai sent Heidi and Yin Hong again. This time they did not land on the Japanese islands personally, Kublai's letter was however carried to Japan by a Korean envoy named Pan Fu 潘阜 and finally arrived at the hands of the Japanese emperor. Besides the letter, Pan Fu also brought some local specialties as gifts including the prestigious Korean ginsengs. The letter aroused great uneasiness in the Japanese royal court yet an official replay was never given. Pan Fu stayed in Japan for six months and was treated very poorly in board and lodging.³⁶⁶ The third mission led by Heidi and Yin Hong again was sent in 1268 and they disembarked on Tsushima Island. Yet they were not allowed to come to the Japanese mainland. Enraged by this, Heidi and Yin Hong kidnapped two locals and returned.³⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, according to the Korean sources, as a way of symbolic competition, the two Japanese were warmly received by Kublai personally. Kublai gave them many gifts and ordered his servants to show them around the attractions in Beijing. They visited the Buddhist temple in Wanshou Mountain and other parts of the imperial capital.³⁶⁸ In 1269, Kublai decided to send two Japanese back with Korean

³⁶⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4626.

³⁶⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4626; [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 82-89.

³⁶⁷ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4626.

³⁶⁸ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 478-479.

officers as escorts and with his ultimatum. This embassy was traditionally deemed fruitless.³⁶⁹ Recent researches have demonstrated the Japanese side indeed drafted written replies both to the Mongols and to the Koreans. Yet in the end, they decided not to send the prepared replies. The replies underline the idea of *Shinkoku*, that is, the Japanese emperor ruler his lands by the divine willing of God and they cannot be defeated either by intrigues or by forces.³⁷⁰ This symbolic discourse is a clear response to the Mongol idea of universal rule.

The mission of Zhao Liangbi in 1271 belonged therefore to the last peaceful efforts the Mongols made to reach Japan. Indeed, Zhao made his last attempt in the next year, which unsurprisingly failed. Now, the war between the Mongols and the Japanese was inevitable. With the help of the famous *kamikaze* or typhoon, the Japanese defeated the Mongols. Though not like the cases in the West, the first generation of Mongols envoys like Heidi, Yin Hong, Pan Fu, and Zhao Liangbi were not killed in Japan. After the breaking of the war, however, the members of the Mongol diplomatic corps led by Du Shizhong 杜世忠 were all also executed in Japan in 1280.³⁷¹

The way of Annam in treating the Mongol envoys was somehow in between Korea and Japan. The former had been in full dependence on the Mongols and built marriage alliances with the Yuan emperors, while the latter resisted the universal rule of the Mongols both in military battles and in symbolic areas. Annam, after decades of resistance, was forced to submit. Yet their kings still strive to defend their national dignity in a symbolic sense. Ritual conflicts frequently took place during their diplomatic engagements, which were recorded by the sources of both sides. One focus of the conflicts is that how will the representatives of the Yuan emperor

³⁶⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4626.

³⁷⁰ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 96-98; [Dongyi Zhang] 張東翼, 1269 年大蒙古國中書省的牒及日本方面的反應 [The Ultimatum of the Mongol empire to Japan and its response], *Studies on the Mongol-Yuan and China's Bordering Area/ 元史及民族與邊疆研究集刊* 19 (2007):147-159.

³⁷¹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3745.

be received by Annam side when they arrived at the capital of the latter.³⁷² Another conflict is the seating order of the Mongol envoys and the King of Annam. As early as 1258, the King of Annam had submitted to the Yuan Dynasty. Yet they were reluctant to fulfill the obligation of presenting themselves in the Mongol imperial court. In the early 1270s, Trần Thánh Tông (r. 1258-1278) had already questioned the Mongol sides that as a king he did not need to bow to the Mongol envoys according to the Confucius rites prescribed in *Chunqiu*, or *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, which Francesca Fiaschetti has recently gave a brilliant analysis.³⁷³ In 1278 and 1281, Trần Nhân Tông (r. 1278-1293) refused twice the requests of the Mongols and instead sent his courtiers to pay homage to Kublai. One of the excuses he gave is that he had to be in mourning for the death of his past father and according to Confucius creeds, he was not allowed to go on a long journey.³⁷⁴ In 1290, after decades of war, the Mongol envoy Zhang Lidao 安南 arrived at the city gate of the capital of Annam. At first, Trần Nhân Tông was not willing to come personally to the gate and received the envoys. After some negotiation, Trần Nhân Tông yielded. He received the envoys by the gate ceremonially and then accepted the edict of Kublai on his knees in the inner court.³⁷⁵ A similar situation reoccurred in 1293 when Liang Zeng and Chen Fu arrived. Trần Anh Tông (1293-1294) this time used the mourning excuse and sent his courtiers to receive the envoys outside the city and led them into the city through the side entrance rather than the formally central one. Liang Zeng and Chen Fu were

³⁷² Cf. the ceremony of *adventus* or royal entry in European history, see Sabine MacCormack, “Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: The Ceremony of *Adventus*,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 21, no.4 (1972): 721-752; Jonathan Shepherd, “*Adventus*, Arrivistes and Rites of Rulership in Byzantium and France in the Tenth and the Eleventh Century,” in Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria Parani, ed., *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 337-371; Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

³⁷³ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4636-4637; also see Francesca Fiaschetti, “Voices from Afar: Yuan Diplomacy between Ritual and Practice,” *Eurasian Studies* 17 (2019): 277-278.

³⁷⁴ [Lê Tắc] 黎則, 安南志略 [*Records of Annam*], 66-67.

³⁷⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 3918.

enraged by this little trick and threaten to return to their accommodation. The Annam king made concessions after negotiations back and forth three times.³⁷⁶

Clearly, the Mongol-Yuan side try to display their suzerain status by forcing the Annam King to accept the protocol of city entry, bowing the knee, and seating orders, while the Annam side equipped themselves exactly with the Confucius ideology and intentionally utilized it to aid their symbolic competitions against the Mongols. To some degree, we can even argue the subtext of the Annam side is that they were actually more proficient in Confucius knowledge and therefore more civilized than their overlord from the north. It is worth noting that very likely, the Mongol envoys experienced similar ritual conflicts in the European royal courts. Yet we have no comparable sources as in East Asia, except the travelogue of Rabban Sauma. These two envoys, however, as we have shown, were not completely aliens to European court culture and the cultural differences were not perceived or underlined by them in their writings. Instead, the conflicts focused on their own religious and ethnic identities. As a Christian, to serve in the court of the infidel Mongols could not be rightly perceived by the contemporary westerners, let alone the universalness of the Mongol statecraft in using human resources.

Another arena of symbolic competitions was more delicate, namely, the addressing titles used in the diplomatic correspondences. As we have shown, most of these documents were prepared by the personals who were familiar with the culture and customs of the addressed countries. As things should be, the Mongol side would choose the most proper titles to cater to the status of the addressees unless they were intentionally used. These addressing titles therefore reflect the symbolic status the Mongols attempted to display or achieve. In medieval Eurasian diplomacy, establishing fictive kinship among rulers was a practice shared by many polities. The ruler of one side would call his counterpart as son, nephew, or brother generally based on the balance of power. Jonathan Karam Skaff has listed several examples from both

³⁷⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4134, 4339.

two sides of the Eurasian steppes. In eastern Eurasia, the emperors of the Tang Dynasty built such fictive kinship with their nomadic neighbors like the Turks and the Tibetans. Taizong became brother of Tuli Khagan, Empress Wu Zetian had as her son, and Xuanzong was father of Bilgä Kaghan and Sulu of the Türgish, and uncle of Mé Aktsom. In western Eurasia, the Byzantine emperor Justinian I became brother of the Sasanian Emperor Khusrau and father of the Avar Khagan Baian I.³⁷⁷ This list can be much longer. For instance, in 1005, the rulers of Khitan Liao and Northern Song concluded a peace treaty at Chanyuan 澶淵 that the Song emperor became the elder brother of the Liao emperor and addressed the queen mother of the latter as his aunt. Although the Song emperor gained a superior symbolic place in this fictive kinship, his country had to pay annually tribute of 200,000 bolts of raw silk and 100,000 taels of silver to Liao.³⁷⁸ In 1165, the Southern Song reached a similar treaty with the Jurchen Jin. This time the Song emperor became nephew of the Jin emperor and had to pay annually tribute of 200,000 bolts of raw silk and 200,000 taels of silver.³⁷⁹

The Mongols also followed this convention. In 1218, a message from Genghis Khan was carried by his envoys to Shah Muhammad II of Khwarezmia. Historians like Juvaini, Juzjani, and Rashīd al-Dīn provide slightly different versions of this letter. The texts of Juvaini are simple and lack any specific diplomatic figure of speech.³⁸⁰ Juzjani was a fugitive from the Mongol conquest in Khwarezmia and later served in the court of Delhi Sultanate. There he wrote his famous histories of Muhammadan dynasties with a clear standpoint of anti-Mongol. In Juzjani's version, Genghis Khan called himself the sovereign of the sun-rise and called Shah Muhammad II the sovereign of the sun-set.³⁸¹ What Juzjani intended to do here is to emphasize

³⁷⁷ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 224-225. Some scholars even suggest that, see Christopher P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (New Heaven: Harvard University Press, 1999),

³⁷⁸ [Toqto'a] 脱脱, ed., 辽史 [Liao Shi: official history of the Liao dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 160.

³⁷⁹ [Toqto'a] 脱脱, ed., 宋史 [Song Shi: official history of the Song Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), 630.

³⁸⁰ Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, 254-255.

³⁸¹ Jūzjānī, *Tabakat-i-Nasirī: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia II*, 966.

the equal status of both rulers. The version of Rashīd al-Dīn is more interesting. Genghis Khan stated that Khwarezmian Shah was a dear son to him and so as well all Muslims.³⁸² As the Grand Vizier and court historian of Mongol Ilkhanate, Rashīd al-Dīn would naturally glory the ancestor of his patrons. In my opinion, however, this rhetoric was not associated with the declaration of status, rather shows a friendly attitude of Genghis Khan towards the Muslims. As we have shown, the first recorded ultimatum sent by a Mongol Great Khan would be probably from Ögödei to the Seljuk sultan of Rūm in 1236. This letter of 1218 was not an ultimatum of submission but an initiation of cooperation in facilitating the commercial activities between these two lands. Besides, none of the above historians provided clues in their texts that the Khwarezmian Shah was ever enraged by this kinship term.

After the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty, we have more confirmative evidence. In the diplomatic correspondences, Kublai usually referred to his relationship with the rulers of the vassal countries as father and son. This relation of father and son is however somewhat different from that claimed by Genghis Khan. It is intertwined with the Confucius ideology of 君 lord and 臣 subject, as a result of the process of sinicization and the use of Confucius literati in preparing diplomatic documents. In the letter carried by Pan Fu to Japan in 1268, Kublai indicated that the Korean king and his ministers were treated well after accepting the Mongol suzerainty. They were in principle subjects to Kublai, yet he treated them like a father to sons.³⁸³ Kublai attempted to use the example of Korea to convince the Japanese side to pay tribute peacefully. In 1269, a second letter was sent to Japan through the hands of Jin Youcheng 金有成, a Korean messenger like Pan Fu. Compared to the first one, this letter was much more carefully prepared with more details that the Mongols wanted to display. In the first part, it lists the wide territories the Mongols had conquered. It states that after his enthronement, Kublai

³⁸² Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 234.

³⁸³ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4625-4626.

regarded all the four seas as his home, loved all human beings, and treated them all equally. His empire extended as south as Yunnan, as north as Lake Baikal, and as west as Kunlun Mountains. All those countries as far as several ten thousand miles away were overawed by his mighty, persuaded by his virtues, and then decided to pay tributes to him. In the second part, Kublai blamed the Japanese side for mistreating his envoys Pan Fu, Heidi, and Yin Hong, and explained why they had to kidnap two local Japanese officers back to China. The third part was devoted to explaining the Mongol policy towards the subjected countries. It states that Kublai was benevolent and concerned the well-being of the world. He treated all the countries submitted to him as father to sons, regardless of their size and distance. For the Koreans, since they have and paid tributes every year, their government and lifestyle continued like before. If the Japanese side decides not to surrender, the war is coming.³⁸⁴ The content of this letter is identical to other ultimatums of the Mongols. This image of a cosmopolitan empire publicized by Kublai's letters was also in some aspect at odds with the truth. In the end, the Japanese did not take it. The rhetoric of father and son was also used in the relation of Yuan and Annam. The rulers of Annam, as we have shown, were reluctant to fulfill the obligation of presenting the imperial court and some else. In 1270, Kublai sent an edict to blame the king of Annam for not obeying the way of lord-father and subject-son.³⁸⁵

Yet, one should note that not all of these fictive kinships were established by force. Plenty of examples show that the inferior side in this kinship would make full use of his status to claim his interests. In the engagement of Byzantium and the Avars, the identity of fictive son was frequently used by the latter to demand tributes from the former. The late sixth-century

³⁸⁴ [Dongyi Zhang] 張東翼, 1269 年大蒙古國中書省的牒及日本方面的反應 [The Ultimatum of the Mongol empire to Japan and its response], *Studies on the Mongol-Yuan and China's Bordering Area/ 元史及民族與邊疆研究集刊* 19 (2007):150-151: 逮皇帝即位, 以四海為家, 兼愛生靈, 同仁一視, 南抵六詔、五南, 北至於海, 西極崑崙, 數萬里之外, 有國有土, 莫不畏威懷德, 奉幣來朝...皇帝寬仁好生, 以天下為度, 凡諸國內附者, 義雖君臣, 歡若父子, 初不以遠近小大為間。至於高麗, 臣屬以來, 唯歲致朝聘, 官受方物。而其國官府土民, 安堵如故, 及其來朝, 皇帝所以眷遇樹慰者, 恩至渥也。

³⁸⁵ [Lê Tắc] 黎則, 安南志略 [Records of Annam], 47: 一家之禮, 豈有如此耶? 君臣之義, 實同父子, 豈有臣子而背其君父者耶?

Byzantine historian Menander the Guardsman recorded such a cunning speech from the Avar envoys:

I am here, Emperor, on a mission from your son. For you are truly the father of Baian, our master. I am sure that you are eager to show your love for your son by giving him the son's portion. Since these are our views (and perhaps the views of yourself and your people), will you not yield to him what he deserves? It is not a foreigner or an enemy to whom you will hand over what you give. Moreover, the ownership of it will not change, since it will revert to you through the son if you hand over to him.³⁸⁶

In Eastern Eurasia, Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭 (r. 936-942), the founder of the Late Jin Dynasty 後金, accepted the Liao emperor Yelü Deguang (r. 927-947) as his adoptive father, who was as a matter of fact ten years junior to him. The Liao emperor in return provided military forces for Shi Jingtang.³⁸⁷ During the Mongol-Yuan period, I have so far not come across very directly related examples, except the Korean one, which I will return to later. Yet as the episode of the king of Siam at the beginning of this dissertation shows, the rulers of vassal countries would like to formalize their relationship with the Mongols by obtaining symbolic things from their overlord like gifts. A fictive kinship could be another possible choice.

Another category of kinship was much less fictive since they were confirmed through prescribed rites and procedures. These kinships through adoption, oath, and marriage belong to this. Like the fictive kinship, they are essentially political bonds. One of the most well-known examples in early Mongol history is the brotherhood between Temüjin and Jamukha, and the adoption relation between Ong Khan and Temüjin. Temüjin's father Yesugei was sworn brothers of Ong Khan and therefore, Temüjin regarded Ong Khan as his sworn father. Ong Khan also sent armies to aid Temüjin in uniting his tribes and fighting against his enemies. Temüjin and Jamukha became sworn brothers through certain rites including gift changes. According to the *Secret History of the Mongols*, they picked up two things from their own

³⁸⁶ Blockley, ed. and trans., *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, 139.

³⁸⁷ [Xue Juzheng] 薛居正, ed., 舊五代史 [Old History of the Five Dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 1833.

booties for each other. Temüjin sent a golden belt and a yellowish-white mare with a black tail and mane, Jamukha otherwise sent a golden belt and a kid-white horse.³⁸⁸ The relationship with Jamukha and Ong Khan deteriorated as Temüjin gain more and more strength. In 1202, the united army of Temüjin and Ong Khan defeated Jamukha and his alliance the Naimans. In 1203, Ong Khan and his son Senggüm set a plot to trap and kill Temüjin. They pretended to agree on the marriages of the younger sister of Senggüm with Jochi, the elder son of Temüjin, and the son of Senggüm with the daughter of Temüjin. Once Temüjin accepted the invitation and came for the banquet, he and his companion will be killed on the spot. This plot was revealed to Temüjin and the war became inevitable. On the eve of the battle, Temüjin sent an envoy to bring a message to Ong Khan. This edict has several editions preserved in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, *Yuan Shi*, *Shengwu Qinzheng Lu*, and *Compendium of Chronicles*. The texts are slightly different yet the central theme is identical: although Temüjin and his father did a favor to Ong Khan on five different occasions, Ong Khan chose to betray their blood oath and kinship.³⁸⁹

In addition to the sworn brotherhood, the membership of kinship with the Mongols can also be established through marriage. As we have shown, the Goryeo Korean ruling house became one of the marriage partners of the Yuan Dynasty from the late thirteenth century on. This kinship was reflected by addressing titles used by both sides in their official communications. The first Mongol princess married into the Goryeo house is Khudulu Khaimish, daughter of Kublai, who became the queen of Wang Chun 王禕 (r. 1274-1308) in 1274.³⁹⁰ This marriage was firstly proposed by the Korean side in 1269. In 1270 and 1271 another two Korean embassies were sent to China in order to realize it as soon as possible.

³⁸⁸ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, vol. 1, trans., Igor de Rachewiltz, 44-45. See also Ágnes Birtalan, "Rituals of Sworn Brotherhood (Mong. *anda bol*-, Oir. and, *ax düü bol*-) in Mongol Historic and Epic Tradition," *Chronica* 7 (2007): 44-56.

³⁸⁹ [Dong Miao] 苗冬, 元代使臣研究 [Studies on the envoys of Yuan Dynasty], 42-49.

³⁹⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4620.

Apparently, Kublai ratified this marriage after a long time of consideration.³⁹¹ The father of Wang Chun is exactly Wang Jeon 王儼, whose stories in Kublai's court we have already discussed. Wang Jeon therefore became *fuma* 駙馬 or imperial son-in-law of Kublai. Imperial son-in-law was an official title used in the administrative system of the empire. In 1278, Kublai granted a new princely seal with this title to Wang Chun.³⁹² In 1281, Wang Chun was furthering allowed to use this title in issuing domestic edicts.³⁹³ In 1294, Temür Öljeytü (r. 1294-1307), grandson of Kublai enthroned as the new emperor, he invested his aunt Khudulu Khaimish with the title Anping princess 安平公主.³⁹⁴ As for the Korean rulers, such relation by marriage also formed a part of their diplomatic rhetoric. In the memorial to Temür Öljeytü in 1299, Wang Chun expressed his gratitude to the Yuan emperor for granting marriage and establishing the kinship of uncle and nephew with him and hoped that the Mongol could uphold his ruling house in Korea forever.³⁹⁵ After the Korean kings became the imperial sons-in-law, their status on diplomatic occasions was also elevated. Unlike the case of Annam, whose ruling house had no marriage relation with the Chingisid family, the arriving Mongol envoys would be seated in a more prominent place than the local kings. In Korea, however, the seating orders became different. In 1269, the Mongol envoy Heidi and his companions were received by Wang Jeon in his court. Wang Jeon invited Heidi to take the most prominent seat conventionally. Heidi instead insisted that since the royal princess had been betrothed to the son of Wang Jeon, he himself as a subject was improper to sit in a higher position. They finally came into a compromise to sit face to face in an east-west orientation.³⁹⁶

³⁹¹ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 137-143.

³⁹² Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4621.

³⁹³ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4621.

³⁹⁴ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 384.

³⁹⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4623: 累世有勤王之功, 凡八十餘年, 歲修職貢。嘗以世子入侍, 得聯婚帝室, 遂為甥舅, 實感至恩。使小國不替祖風, 永修侯職, 是所望也。

³⁹⁶ [Weixian Jin] 金渭顯, ed., 高麗史中中韓關係史料彙編 [*Compilation of Historical Materials on the Sino-Korean Relations in the History of Goryeo*], 481: 王宴黑的等。使坐上座, 黑的等讓曰: 今王太子已許尚帝

A more interesting issue is how these vassal countries like Goryeo Korea referred to their overlord in the diplomatic correspondences with a third party. We are lucky to have some documents between Goryeo Korea and Japan of this kind. In 1268, along with the ultimatum from Kublai, Pan Fu arrived in Japan with a letter from the Korean King Wang Jeon. At that time, the marriage alliance between Goryeo Korea and the Mongols had not been established. In this letter, Wang Jeon called the Mongol state in his original term *Menggu Dachao* 蒙古大朝 or *Yeke Mongyol Ulus*. Wang Jeon also attempted to explain the Mongol policy to the Japanese: their real intention was to have their name spread all over the world, rather than gain economic interests from Japan.³⁹⁷ Pan Fu also wrote a personal letter to the Japanese emperor, in which the Sinicized Mongolian name *Da Menggu Guo* 大蒙古國 was likewise used.³⁹⁸ In the mission of Jin Youcheng in 1269, the Korean Side sent a second letter to Japan in which the appellation for Kublai was changed to “the emperor of the Northern dynasty”.³⁹⁹ At that time, the Song Dynasty still existed in South China. Some scholars therefore regarded it as evidence of Korea’s noncompliance to the Mongols. Oyungua 烏雲高娃 however reveals that it was related to the inner politics of the Goryeo Korea in the year of 1269. According to her, this letter was composed by the order of the powerful minister 林衍 Lin Yan, who launched a coup and overthrew the ruling of Wang Jeon. Lin Yan was hawkishness and stood for a stronger position against the Mongols.⁴⁰⁰ This coup was soon suppressed with the aids of the Mongol army. These delicate competitions in diplomatic addressing titles clearly show that both the

女，我等帝之臣也，王乃帝駙馬大王之父也，何敢抗禮，王西向，我等北面，王南面，我等東面。王辭曰：天子之使，豈可下坐？固辭東西相對。

³⁹⁷ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 85-86.

³⁹⁸ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 87-88.

³⁹⁹ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 94-95.

⁴⁰⁰ [Oyungua] 烏雲高娃, 元朝與高麗關係研究 [*Studies on the Relations of Yuan Dynasty and Goryeo Korea*], 95-96.

Mongols and their vassal countries or counterparts were fully aware of the power of rhetoric. Both sides were readily entering such kinships in order to gain real political interests, regardless of its fictiveness or normativity regulated by blood oaths or marriages.

In sum, the success of a Mongol mission rested not only on the original assignments given by their rulers, but also depended on the decisions and reactions from the host side, and the flexibility of the Mongol envoys in the rapidly changing diplomatic occasions. In face of threats or seducements, the Mongol envoys took different measures and made different decisions, out of their own political identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, or simply their professional standard as an envoy. The functions of the Mongol embassies were never limited to delivering the ultimatums and demanding unconditional submission. They had many colorful encountering stories in those foreign courts. They served as the representatives of the Mongol imperial authorities, they were the channels of transmitting the diplomatic messages, and they were active agents involved in the symbolic competitions between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts. They were indeed one of the contributing factors in sharpening the diplomatic relations between the Mongol empire and its alliances, adversaries, or vassals.

Summary

Compared to the better treatment or at least safe guarantee of foreign envoys in the Mongol court, the Mongols were in no sense less civilized than their counterparts. By large and far, the Mongols followed the central Eurasian tradition of granting the immunities of diplomats. Even the arrogant papal envoy Ascelin of Lombardy was allowed to leave the Mongol court unscathed as we have already discussed. In contrast, the Mongol envoys were however commonly badly treated during their foreign missions. The studies of Mongol

diplomacy should be reevaluated at least from three dimensions. First, the Mongols value the role of envoys and diplomatic engagements with their counterparts more than the previous scholarship had admitted. The Mongols practiced rigid protocols to select, prepare and assess their envoys, which covered different areas including the qualifications and identities of the envoys, the functions and size of the embassies, the credential and rights of the envoys in travel, the prepared diplomatic gifts, the obligations, and other follow-ups after returning from the mission. Second, the Mongols practice a cosmopolitan or pragmatic political culture in their courts. Many foreigners served in the Mongol courts as envoys out of complicated considerations of identities and interests. Meanwhile, appointing foreigners as envoys expresses strongly the universal ruler identity of the Mongol Great Khan and constitutes a part of the symbolic competition with other rulers. Third, the competition in the field of diplomacy, as well as its role in the decision-making process of the Mongols, is never of little amount than in the real military battles. The Mongols tended to solve the problems first through their diplomatic tools before considering a large-scale military campaign. After the establishment of the vassal relations, diplomacy became the main approach to sustain the imperial system besides the coercion of using military power. The Mongols were much flexible in their statecrafts than what had been acknowledged.

Chapter 3 – Experiencing the Islamic Mongol Court Culture from Comparative Perspectives

Succeeding the previous chapters on the foreign envoys in the Mongol imperial court and the Mongol envoys in foreign courts, the present chapter will discuss the courtly encounter with the Mongols in comparative perspectives. This comparison is twofold. The first is a diachronic comparison of the Mongol courtly culture before and after Islamization. As with Islamization, the royal courts of the Mongol rulers in the west had more evidently Islamic flavors. Islamic factors and items were widely present in the daily life of the Islamic Mongol rulers. Yet the transplantation of Islam within the Mongol empire is never a procedure that can be concluded once for all and its real impacts on the political life of the Mongol rulers are waiting to be reevaluated. The first subchapter will therefore provide a general overview of the process of Islamization in the Mongol *uluses*. Issues such as the motivation, mechanism, and depth of Islamization in the Mongol empire, and its impacts on the daily life of Mongol rulers, as well as the implication of Islamization for the Mongol diplomacy with other Islamic polities, will be addressed one after another.

In the meantime, these Islamic favors of Mongol courts were quite well recognized by contemporary visitors both Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim visitor Ibn Battuta had a chance to be a guest of the court of the Ilkhans, the Jochid Khans, and the Chagataid Khans, the Castilian ambassador Ruy González de Clavijo and the Chinese envoy Chen Cheng 陳誠 otherwise were guests in the court of Tamerlane and his son Shah Rukh separately. Their writings provide valuable hints to assess the degree of Islamization in the Mongol royal courts as well as the continuities or ruptures of the Mongol courtly practices from their central Eurasian tradition. Besides, these writings are themselves the results of the courtly encounters. The foci of these narratives are coordinated by the religious and cultural affiliation of their

authors. The Muslim visitors paid specific attention to the piety of the Islamic Mongol rulers and their religious activities, similar to what the Syrian Christian Rabban Sauma did in the royal courts of Latin Christendom. For the Christian and Chinese envoys, their experiences with Islamic Mongol *uluses* were less religiously than politically oriented and with a clear intention of intelligence gathering. Some cultural phenomena pertaining to Islam such as the observation of circumcision nevertheless aroused attention from both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors and serve as ideal cases for comparative analysis. The second level of comparisons will be therefore a somehow synchronic comparison, to examine the perceptions of the Islamic Mongol court from Muslim, Christian, and Chinese visitors.

The third subchapter will turn to the diplomatic gifts themselves, as they were regularly exchanged between the Islamic Mongol rulers and their counterparts. In the previous chapters, we have already approached the gift issues from various aspects, such as what kind of role did the gifts played in the formal politics with the Mongols, what was the Mongol court protocol of managing these gifts, and whether the Mongols prepared gifts for the foreign rulers. The last subchapter will first introduce the traditions of gift-giving in the Mongol society in general, then the influence of Islamization on the gift-giving practices will be evaluated. As this subchapter suggests, although new Islamic items appeared in the gift packages and new Islamic rhetoric was added into the diplomatic letters, the underpinning logic is the same, i.e. gift-giving has always been the arenas of symbolic competition between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts.

Islamization and the Transformation of the Mongol Court Life

The Islamization of the Mongol *uluses* in the west is perhaps one of the most key events in the western Eurasian world in the fourteenth century, in terms of the reconfiguration of the political and religious landscapes. From the end of the fourteenth century, these three westernmost Mongol *uluses* started the process of Islamization one after another, the Ilkhanate in 1295, the Golden Horde and Chagatai Khanate in the next decades. Under the rule of the Mongol Ilkhans, the traditional Iranian culture experienced vigorous revivals, the formation of Iranianness, the triumph of new Persian over Arabic, the geographic boundary, and the population and ethnic composition of modern Iran are all inextricably related with the Mongols.⁴⁰¹ In the Golden Horde, the adoption of Islam of Jochid Khans has a profound impact on the Turkic-speaking groups in the Pontic steppes, the North Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia. Nowadays, many of these groups trace their origins of ethnicity and beliefs in Islam back to the reign of the Mongol rulers.⁴⁰² The Timurid Empire, one of the immediate successors of the Mongol Empire, was also an Islamic polity. Temür and his successors relied both on the Islamic and Turco-Mongolian traditions to generate legitimation. The Islamic arts and sciences received revivals and prosperity under their rule in a way that the term Timurid Renaissance has been widely assigned for this period. Their legacy was embraced by post-Timurid dynasties, including the Mughal Empire in India, the Uzbek and Ottoman states, and even the Safavid Persia and modern Afghanistan states.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Bert Fragner, "Iran under Ilkhanid rule in a world history perspective" in Denise Aigle, ed., *L'Iran face à la domination mongole* (Louvain: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1997), 121-131; and "Ilkhanid Rule and its Contributions to Iranian Political Culture," in Linda Komaroff, ed., *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 68-80. David O. Morgan however have reservations on these points, see David O. Morgan, "The Mongols in Iran: A Reappraisal," *Iran* 42 (2004): 131-136; and "Iran's Mongol Experience," in Morris Rossabi, ed., *How Mongolia Matters: War, Law, and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 57-68.

⁴⁰² Devin DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, ed. N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank and P. B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 125-126.

⁴⁰³ On the legacy of Temür and his empire, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 8, no. 1 (1998): 21-41; Stephen Frederic Dale, "The

Although the historical significance of the Islamization of the Mongol *uluses* in the west has been well accepted, details like the motivation, mechanism, depth, and impacts of Islamization are still in debate among scholars. A huge obstacle faced in front of researchers is the scarcity and imbalance of related primary sources. In a geographic sense, the sources concerning Islamization in the Ilkhanate are relatively richer than in the Golden Horde and the Chagatai Khanate. Yet in general, those foreign court visitors and envoys provided the majority of these records. A few indigenous sources coming down to us are legends or legendary biographies composed by the later generations and full of fictive elements.⁴⁰⁴ In a societal sense, most of these records focus on the Mongol khans and elites living in cities, the beliefs of the general common folk are not well present in these sources. Consequently, the Islamization in the Mongol *uluses* is often depicted in traditional scholarship as a process initiated by the Mongol Khans from above to below. This image however has been redrawn in recent decades especially by Devin DeWeese. Instead of focusing on the glorious deeds of the Mongol rulers, DeWeese turns to the groups of ordinary people and the external signs of their conversion. He proposes five key issues to approach Islamization in the Mongol empire: (1) the bearers or vectors of Islamization among the Mongols and the subjects they conquered; (2) the targets of Islamization, both the elites and the mass; (3) the factors facilitating religious change and its social accompaniments; (4) the diversity of modes of articulating conversion and religious change; and (5) the essence of the change implicit in conversion and Islamization. As DeWeese convincingly concludes, the conversion of the Mongol rulers was a gradual process that

Legacy of the Timurids,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 8, no. 1 (1998): 43-58. David Morgan otherwise regards the Timurids have been overrated, see David Morgan, “The Empire of Tamerlane: An Unsuccessful Re-Run of the Mongol State,” in J. R. Maddicott, and D. M. Palliser, eds., *The Medieval State: Essays in Honour of James Campbell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 233-241; and the response from Beatrice Forbes Manz, “The Empire of Tamerlane as an Adaptation of the Mongol Empire,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 26, no. 1-2 (2016): 281-291.

⁴⁰⁴ See particularly Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

followed and reflected the conversion of a significant portion of his subjects.⁴⁰⁵ Based on a case study of Arghun Aqa, the Mongol governor in Persia in the middle of the thirteenth century, Ishayahu Landa has recently similarly argued that the conversion of the middle layer of the Mongol military society could possibly be crucial for the conversion of the whole *ulus*.⁴⁰⁶

It has been more and more clearly revealed that the Mongol rulers were not the first followers of Islam or initiators of Islamization in their states as previous scholarship believed. Nevertheless, these Mongol rulers certainly had a role in facilitating or hindering the process with their political powers. In fact, their own conversion to Islam was not necessarily motivated by faith-related consideration and political reasons usually played a more considerable part. The conversion of Ghazan Khan serves as a good example here. As recorded by Rashid al-Din, Ghazan accepted the new faith in the battles against his rival Baydu in 1295 and since then he acted as a pious Muslim ruler, or Padishah of Islam as praised by Rashid al-Din, who followed the will of Allah, demolished the temples of all idols, and sponsored the followers of the Prophet.⁴⁰⁷ Yet the sincerity of Ghazan has been constantly questioned by contemporary observers and modern scholars. Instead of accepting the old theme that a conquering people are doomed to be conquered by the culture of one people they conquered, Charles Melville suggests that the conversion of Ghazan was not intended to secure the supports of the Persian Muslim population, but of those Mongol leaders and troops who had already converted to Islam. Therefore, the choice of Ghazan was typically politically and militarily driven.⁴⁰⁸ Reuven

⁴⁰⁵ Devin DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, ed. N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank and P. B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120-134. Recently, Bruno De Nicola somehow returns to the elitism approach by highlight the role of the royal mothers, tutors and nurses, and Muslim wives in the conversion of the Mongol rulers, see Bruno De Nicola, "The Role of the Domestic Sphere in the Islamisation of the Mongols," in A.C.S. Peacock, ed., *Islamisation: Comparative perspectives from History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 353-376.

⁴⁰⁶ Ishayahu Landa, "New Light on Early Mongol Islamisation: The Case of Arghun Aqa's Family," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 28, 1 (2018): 77-100. More on the career of Arghun Aqa, see George Lane, "Arghun Aqa: Mongol Bureaucrat," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 459-482.

⁴⁰⁷ Rashīd, *Jamī'at-Tawarikh*, 619-621, 663 ff.

⁴⁰⁸ Charles Melville, "*Pādshāh-i Islām*: The conversion of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan," *Pembroke Papers* 1 (1990): 159-77.

Amitai furtherly argues that the conversion of Ghazan and other Mongol elites, even the Islam of the Mongols as a whole was a syncretistic faith. They followed the Mongol traditional beliefs and rites, no matter how contradictory these were to the creeds of Islam. In fact, the faith of Ghazan was even not endorsed by his own brother and successor Öljeitü. Öljeitü called his brother a Muslim on the outside and an infidel on the inside in a letter to the Mamluk Sultan.⁴⁰⁹

The often-depicted image of the piety of the Chagataid rulers has also been reconsidered. As mentioned, sources on the Islamization in the Chagatai Khanate are much less, and there were no comparable conversion stories pertaining to its first Islamic ruler Tarmashirin Khan (r. 1331-34). Michal Biran suggests it was caused by the fact that the glories of Tarmashirin were overshadowed by Temür, a much more famous figure in the history of Chagatai Khanate. Meanwhile, Temür perhaps purposely suppressed the cult of Tarmashirin Khan for fear of the growing influence of Tarmashirin's descendants in his court.⁴¹⁰ This explanation is duly justified and we have a reason to believe the piety of Tarmashirin as a Muslim ruler. Yet a more noteworthy phenomenon is that during the late period of Chagatai Khanate, the Chagataid Khans were quite often portrayed as pious Muslims while their political status was reduced to the puppets of the Timurids. This correlation, as argued by DeWeese, is no coincidence: "retirement into a Sufi *khanaqah* may well have seemed a potential way for a Chinggisid sultan to stay alive" away from being "potential front-men for ambitious amirs and prime targets for other ambitious amirs."⁴¹¹ Like many similar pious stories in other parts of the world, religious institutions provide the *de facto* shelters for the politically frustrated Mongol rulers.

In some cases, the devotion stories of the Mongol rulers are merely later inventions. Hülegü, the founder of the Ilkhanate, was not a Muslim but a great destroyer of Islam. It was

⁴⁰⁹ Reuven Amitai, "Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamluk Sultanate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, no. 1 (1996): 1-10.

⁴¹⁰ Michal Biran, "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331-34)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122 (2002): 742-752.

⁴¹¹ DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire," 132.

by his order that the centuries' long Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad was overturned in 1259. Interestingly enough, as Michal Biran suggests, in some legendary stories compiled in the mid-fourteenth century, Hülegü was portrayed as a pious Muslim, and even his execution of the Caliph won a new explanation. These protagonists created the narratives with multiple considerations. They were intended for religious competition against other beliefs like Christianity and Buddhism since Hülegü had been similarly claimed as a member of them. Moreover, they aimed to legitimize the Mongol conquest of Iran and Iraq as a way to unite the divided and rival Islamic world. If Hülegü had already converted to Islam, all his military campaigns were just intended to fulfill the will of Allah. For these writers living in the chaotic post-Ilkhanid period, the reign of Hülegü and his descendants was indeed a golden age for them.⁴¹²

Tamerlane, the founder of the Timurid Empire is assuredly a Muslim ruler. His empire comprises all the previous territories of the Chingisid house at its height, except Yuan China, at that time ruled by the Ming Dynasty. The planned campaign against Ming China was in abortion only due to the sudden death of Tamerlane during the march. The legends of Tamerlane popularly circulated in Islamic Central Asia from the eighteenth century on. As Ron Sela has pointed out, although it is unlikely to have the exact number of existed manuscripts due to the poor situation of catalogue and their dispersion in libraries of St. Petersburg, Tashkent, Dushanbe, and else, the wide worship of Tamerlane can be well traced in post-Timurid Central Asia. The main agenda of these legends is to present how Tamerlane grew and became a pious Muslim ruler and how he was committed to Islam, to Sufis, and to the entire Muslim communities.⁴¹³ Yet these legends are not necessarily consistent with the realities. One

⁴¹² Michal Biran, "The Islamization of Hülegü: Imaginary Conversion in the Ilkhanate," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 26, 1-2 (2016): 79-88.

⁴¹³ Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-7; Ron Sela, "Tamerlane's (Fictitious) Pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Prophets," in Sabine Schmidtke, ed., *Studying the Near and Middle East at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 1935–2018* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2018), 435.

fictitious part is Tamerlane's pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Prophets that never took place. It says that in his late years, Tamerlane made his pilgrimage starting from Adam's tomb in Sri Lanka to the Holy City Jerusalem, during which Tamerlane passed several tests arranged by Allah, showed his firm belief, and fulfilled his obligation as a true Muslim.⁴¹⁴ This is not saying that all the converted Mongol rulers were hypocritical in faith, since as Jonathan Brack shows, El Qutlugh, an Ilkhanid Princess indeed made his pilgrim to Mecca and gave charities along the way as a pious Muslim woman.⁴¹⁵ The point is that we should be more critical of the biographical works on the Mongol Islamic rulers prepared by late generations of Muslim writers.

In the meantime, the process of Islamization proceeded very unevenly in different Mongol *uluses* as well as in different parts within a particular *ulus*. The fourteenth-century Arabic traveler al-'Umarī was perhaps one of the first observers on this unevenness of Islamization in the Mongol empire in general. As he commented, the Chagatai Khanate and the Yuan Dynasty in the East more rigorously adhered to Genghis Khan's Yasa and less Islamized than the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde in the East.⁴¹⁶ Peter Jackson recently verifies this argumentation with more evidence. According to him, Islamization brought the promotion of Muslim individuals and communities in the political and social life in the empire, while the status of other confessions including some conservative Mongol elites was inevitably relegated. The process of Islamization in the Mongol *uluses* was therefore very much concerned with the willingness and resolution of their rulers. The Ilkhanid and Jochid rulers were more resolute in promoting the new faith by purging the enemies even in the ruling house than their counterparts

⁴¹⁴ Sela, "Tamerlane's (Fictitious) Pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Prophets," 429-435.

⁴¹⁵ Jonathan Brack, "A Mongol Princess Making *Hajj*: the Biography of El Qutlugh Daughter of Abagha Ilkhan (r. 1265-82)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Series 3*, 21, no. 3 (2011): 331-359.

⁴¹⁶ Klaus Lech, ed., *Das mongolische Weltreich: Al-'Umarī's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968), 118-119, 140.

in the east did.⁴¹⁷ The local variant of Islamization within a particular *ulus* is well represented by the case of the Golden Horde, a polity that has been generally considered to have a dichotomous division of sedentary and nomadic parts. Islamization has particular current relevance for the Muslim minorities living on its historical lands, and most of these groups date their origin of ethnicity and belief to the period of the Mongols. Ilnur Mirgaleev, a renowned scholar based at the Republic of Tatarstan in the Russian Federation, has argued that the Islamization of the Golden Horde took place not only among the sedentary and especially urban population but also among its enormous nomadic population. It is a process that has never been interrupted even during the non-Muslim Jochid Khans were in power.⁴¹⁸ This thesis of the total Nomadic Islamization has been recently refuted by Roman Hautala. Based on the evidence provided by the Franciscans proselytizing in the Golden Horde, Hautala suggests, the statement that Islam had been accepted as the state religion since the accession of Uzbek Khan in 1313 has to be reconsidered. In fact, compared to its Southern neighbor the Ilkhanate, the Jochid rulers achieved relatively limited success in converting their nomadic subjects.⁴¹⁹ This dichotomous structure clearly affects the proceeding of Islamization in the Golden Horde.

In addition to the willingness of individual Mongol rulers, the process of Islamization has much to do with the existed traditions both among the Mongols the conquerors, and the subjects they conquered. In Yuan China, a sharp contrast to the three western *uluses* is that there was no significant native Muslim population except some sporadic Muslim merchants communities prior to the coming of the Mongols.⁴²⁰ Meanwhile, as the principal inheritors of

⁴¹⁷ Peter Jackson, "Reflections on the Islamization of Mongol Khans in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 356-387.

⁴¹⁸ Ilnur Mirgaleev, "The Islamization of the Golden Horde: New Data," *Golden Horde Review* 1 (2016): 89-101.

⁴¹⁹ Roman Hautala, "The Franciscan Letters from the Golden Horde: Evidence of the Latin Sources against the Thesis of the Total Nomadic Islamization," *Golden Horde Review* 7 (2014): 311-323; "Comparing the Islamisation of the Jochid and Hülegüid Uluses," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 143 (2018): 65-80.

⁴²⁰ See Morris Rossabi, "The Muslims in the Early Yüan Dynasty," in John Langlois, ed., *China Under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 257-295; Liu Yingsheng, "Muslim Merchants in Mongol Yuan China," in Angela Schottenhammer, ed., *The East Asian Mediterranean: Maritime Crossroads of Culture, Commerce and Human Migration* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 133-144.

the empire and its highest title Khagan, the Mongol rulers in China have a much stronger commitment or obligation to follow the *Yasa* of Genghis Khan.⁴²¹ In 1280, a group of Muslim merchants from Central Asia came to China and they brought specialties like falcons and eagles as gifts for Kublai Khan. However, as Muslims, they refused to accept the food provided by the host, which they believed was not prepared according to the Islamic manner. This episode sparked a chain of events. Shortly after Kublai issued an edict to forbid slaughtering animals by cutting throats in his empire, which was generally considered to target Muslims but Jews were also affected by this. This dramatic episode is widely recorded in contemporary Chinese and Persian narrative sources and leaves traces in Chinese administrative documents. The passage in *Yuan Shi* is the briefest one. It says that these merchants were by custom received by the Mongol postal system and were offered board and lodging in the posts. Yet, they refused to accept the served sheep meats that they thought were unclean. After receiving the reports, Kublai felt deeply offended, he denounced that as slaves of the Mongols, these Muslims were not entitled to say no to the Mongol way of diet.⁴²² The Persian version provided in Rashid al-Din's *Compendium of Chronicles* adds more details on the follow-ups. It blames the misfortune of the Muslims to the Christians in Kublai's court, especially Isa Kelemechi. For the Muslim writers, Isa Kelemechi and his followers seize it as an opportunity to strike their Muslim opponents and seize their properties. As a result, many Muslim Merchants were forced to leave China for quite a while.⁴²³ These two explanations, namely the rage of a mighty Mongol Great Khan or the undermining of the rival Christians provided by *Yuan Shi* and *Compendium of Chronicles* separately are not sufficient if we turn to the text of edict itself. This edict defended

⁴²¹ This is not saying that a single Mongol-Yuan prince cannot be a pious Muslim, Prince Ananda 阿難答 (? – 1307), grandson of Kublai Khan, for instance, was recorded by Rashīd al-Dīn as a devoted Islamic ruler: he not only raised a large army mainly comprised of Muslims, but also held circumcision for the children of his Mongol subjects. See Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 465; and R. W. Dunnell, "The Anxi Principality: [Un]Making a Muslim Mongol Prince in Northwest China during the Yuan Dynasty," *Central Asiatic Journal* 57 (2014):185–200.

⁴²² Song, *Yuan Shi*, 217-218.

⁴²³ Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 451-452.

the imperial decision from two aspects. First, he traced the policy back to the period of Genghis Khan and Ögedei Khan and indicated that he just restored the regulation that was set aside during the reign of his cousin Güyük Khan. Second, the edict lists three Muslim rebellions in Central Asia and Iran as a warning. These three events are: the rebellion of the Tarabi crushed down by Mahmud Yalavach, Ögedei's governor in Central Asia in 1239; Hülegü Khan executed Sayfuddin Bitigchi, his vizier, Khwaja Aziz, his governor of Georgia, and Khwaja Majduddin of Tabriz in 1262; and Abaqa Khan executed Mu'inuddin Parvana in 1277.⁴²⁴ From these texts, it is clear that the respect of Genghis Khan's *Yasa* and the concerns of the growing influence of Muslim communities in the Yuan government are the reasons for Kublai to issue such an edict. In 1287, when realized that these policies had caused great loss in commerce and revenue, meanwhile, the powerful Ahmad Fanakati, a Muslim who served as finance minister in the government had been eliminated, Kublai decided to revoke the edict.

This dietary tension between the Mongol rulers and their Muslim subjects has its cultural implications as recently argued by Timothy May. As he suggests, the Mongols decided to prohibit slaughtering animals by cutting the throat because it is inhumane and the spit of animal blood would cause some spiritual retaliation and eventually be detrimental to the Mongols themselves; meanwhile, Mongol style animal slaughter was enforced as a means to promote the Mongol identity just like to have the Mongol hairstyle.⁴²⁵ This new perspective nevertheless needs to be reconsidered. One may wonder whether the Mongol rulers had willing to impose the identity of Mongols on all the subjects they had conquered. It has been well established that the Mongols adopted the statecraft of divide and rule to run their multiethnic

⁴²⁴ [Chen, Gaohua, Fan Zhang, Xiao Liu, and Baohai Dang] 陳高華, 張帆, 劉曉, 黨寶海, eds. 元典章: 大元聖政國朝典章 [Statutes and Precedents of the Yuan dynasty], vol.3 (Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Press, 2011), 1893-1894; English translation of this edict, see Francis W. Cleaves, "The Rescript of Qubilai: Prohibiting the Slaughtering of Animals by Slitting the Throat," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 16 (1992): 67-89. On these three rebellions, see Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, 109-115; Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 511, 538.

⁴²⁵ Timothy May, "Spilling Blood: Conflict and Culture over Animal Slaughter in Mongol Eurasia," in Rotem Kowner, et al., eds., *Animals and Human Society in Asia: Historical, Cultural and Ethical Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 151-177.

empire. Although the prevailing theory of the “four-class system” of the Yuan Dynasty has been challenged by scholars like Yoshiyuki Funada, since as argued by him this terminology only appeared in Chinese sources and therefore possible is a Chinese construct,⁴²⁶ it still is verified that different ethnic groups had different opportunities of political participation in running the empire. As I. de Rachewiltz has convincingly demonstrated, the Mongol rulers entrusted the *semu* people with much of the actual management of the empire, among whom the Turks fatherly formed the backbone.⁴²⁷ There is no reason to believe that the Mongols would treat their subjects as equal to them, as Kublai called the Muslim merchant slaves clearly shows. Meanwhile, we also have evidence showing that the Mongol lords could tolerate disrespect for their dietary practices. The Armenian chronicler Kirakos Gandzaketsi recorded such kind of episode. In 1238, the Armenian Prince Awag came to surrender to Chormaqan, the Mongol governor in Near East. Chormaqan was overjoyed since Awag was the first Caucasian noble to submit to the Mongols and decided to hold a great feast for Awag and his companions. In the banquet, however, these guests did not eat or drink the food prepared by the host and explained that as Christians they were not accustomed to having unclean food. Chormaqan was not only not enraged, instead, he provided them food that was consistent with the Christian doctrines, and following the customs of the Mongols, after the formal submission, he elevated the seat of Awag from a lower rank to a higher one.⁴²⁸ This episode as well as the case of Ascelin of Lombardy we have discussed convincingly illustrate that political

⁴²⁶ [Yoshiyuki Funada] 船田善之, “色目人與元代製度、社會: 重新探討蒙古、色目、漢人、南人劃分的位臚” [Semu People and the System and Society in the Yuan: Re-examining the Classification of the Mongols, Semu, Hanren and Nanren], 元史論叢 [Yuanshi Luncong] 9 (2004): 162-174.

⁴²⁷ I. de Rachewiltz, “Turks in China under the Mongols: A Preliminary Investigation of Turco-Mongol Relations in the 13th and 14th Century,” in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th - 14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 281-310.

⁴²⁸ Kirakos Gandzaketsi, “History of the Armenians, Chapter 26,” translated by Robert Bedrosian, <https://archive.org/details/KirakosGanjaketsisHistoryOfTheArmenians/page/n75/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed February 20, 2021.

consideration usually played the dominant role in the decision-making of the Mongol rulers when dealing with ritual-related issues.

Then what indeed did the Islamization mean for the high culture among the Mongol elites? What kind of alterations did it bring to the Mongol court and daily life? The conversion to Islam, or any other monotheism religions, usually means a new whole set of social and cultural norms and practices that could be new ways of behaviors, observances, and in their material forms new religious items and sites.⁴²⁹ Although the sincerity of individual Mongol rulers and the depth of Islamization in the Mongol-ruled society have been challenged, the enduring impacts of Islamization on the court culture have been widely acknowledged. We will take the Islamic rulers of the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde as examples, who won good names in sponsoring Islamic arts, architecture, and culture on their lands. Under the rule of the Mongol Ilkhans, a quite number of Islamic mosques, madrasas, and other facilities were restored and newly built in Iran. Ghazan Khan, for instance, restored the congregational mosques at Isfahan and Ardabil that were destructed during the Mongol campaigns several decades ago and established many new ones in the rural areas. Öljeitü Khan established a new capital Sultaniyya where his own mausoleum that designed and decorated according to the Islam manner located. Even their Grand Vizier Rashīd al-Dīn was known to have his own building complex functioning as a religious foundation and a center of Islamic knowledge production.⁴³⁰ The Islamic Ilkhans were also active in providing patronage for the production of illustrated copies of sacral and secular literature. The sacral book paintings include Korans, *hadith* or sayings of the Prophet, and *tafsir* or commentaries on the Koran. The representative secular works produced in or related with the Ilkhanid court include Juvaini's *History of the*

⁴²⁹ Recent reflections on the Islamization in general, see the contributions in A.C.S. Peacock, ed., *Islamisation: Comparative perspectives from History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

⁴³⁰ See Sheila Blair, "The Religious Art of the Ilkhanids," in Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni, eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 105-133.

World Conqueror, Rashid al-Din's *Compendium of Chronicles*, and the reissues of the traditional Persian national epic *Shahnama* or *Book of Kings*.⁴³¹ Through these narrative and illustrative projects, the Mongol Ilkhans displayed and propagated their simultaneous images as the heirs of the Chingisid golden family, guardians of Islam, and meanwhile inheritors of the ancient Persian culture.

The process of Islamization also had impacts on the daily life of Mongol rulers from birth, to marriage, and to death, although notable remains of Mongol steppe traditions persisted especially during the first several generations.⁴³² One indication of accepting the faith of Islam for males is the ritual of circumcision, which usually happens on the eighth day after birth or in some cases between six and eleven years old. For the first generation of Mongol elites who converted to Islam, they performed this ritual as already being an adult. According to the sixteenth-century historian Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, author of the *History of Rashid*, the Eastern Chagataid khan Tughluq Temür had himself circumcised and converted to Islam upon enthroned as the Khan in 1347 at his age of eighteen.⁴³³ As a transcultural phenomenon with symbolic intention, the circumcision-related matter will be discussed in detail in the next subchapter. Here we will focus on the marriage and burial customs parts. Traditionally, the Mongol society practices levirate marriage that allows a younger brother to take over the widows of his deceased brother and a son to inherit the secondary wives of his father. Such a form of marriage complies with the needs of a nomadic society to secure the property transfer within the clan.⁴³⁴ After the Mongols became the rulers of their former sedentary neighbors, levirate marriage however causes anxiety in the new social and cultural environment. In Yuan

⁴³¹ Robert Hillenbrand, "The Arts of the Book in Ilkhanid Iran," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 135-167.

⁴³² Other aspects of the influence of Islamization on daily life, for instance, dress customs, see Eiren L. Shea, *Mongol Court Dress, Identity Formation, and Global Exchange* (London: Routledge, 2020), 96-121.

⁴³³ Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlát, *Tarikh-i Rashidi: A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, trans. Ney Elias and Edward Denison Ross (London, 1895), 12-14.

⁴³⁴ A classic research on the Mongol levirate marriage, see J. Holmgren, "Observations on Marriage and Inheritances Practices in Early Mongol and Yüan Society, with Particular Reference to the Levirate," *Journal of Asian History* 20, no. 2 (1986): 127-192.

China, for instance, the form of levirate marriage was significantly opposed by Chinese Confucius scholars.⁴³⁵ In west Asia, we are lucky to learn an episode from the Mamluk historian Al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363 AD) in his monumental biographical dictionary regarding the marriage of Ghazan Khan and Bulughan Khatun. Bulughan Khatun had been the wife of Ghazan's deceased father Arghun. According to the Mongol custom of levirate, Ghazan took her as his own wife. The problem was that at that time Ghazan had already accepted the new faith of Islam, and based on the Islamic law, such a marriage was totally unacceptable. In order to solve this legal issue, Ghazan had his official *Ulama* or Islamic scholars make a verdict that the previous marriage of Bulughan Khatun and Arghun was announced illegal since Arghun himself was an infidel.⁴³⁶

As for his own burial, Ghazan nevertheless showed great reverence for the Islamic customs. In the early ages, the Mongol rulers practiced secret burials. The most well-known passage regarding the death and funeral of a Mongol Khan belongs to Genghis Khan. As narrated by Rashid al-Din, even before his own death, Genghis Khan had chosen the burial sites, under “a lone tree growing by itself” that he had come across during hunting in the mountain Burqan Qaldun.⁴³⁷ In August 1227, Genghis Khan passed away during his campaign against Western Xia. The real reason for his death has been in debate for centuries, which is nevertheless not very relevant to us. We know from Rashid al-Din again that Genghis Khan had ordered his commanders to conceal this news until the defeat of the Tanguts and his body was then taken north to the *ordus* in Mongolia. All the people they encountered during the return were killed to keep the burial place of Genghis Khan under confidentiality.⁴³⁸ This secret burial practice was generally observed by his offspring in China. The burial places of all the

⁴³⁵See Bettine Birge, “Levirate Marriage and the Revival of Widow Chastity in Yüan China,” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, vol. 8, no. 2 (1995): 107-146.

⁴³⁶ See Amitai, “Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition”, 2-3.

⁴³⁷ Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 263.

⁴³⁸ Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 263.

Yuan emperors have not been identified so far and highly probably their bodies were carried north into the family sanctuary Qinian Valley 起輦谷, where Genghis Khan was buried.⁴³⁹ According to the Notes of Wang Yun 王惲 (1224-1304), a Yuan official and writer in service of Kublai for decades, the burial of Kublai in 1294 kept the same protocol, that is, all the Han Chinese officials were only allowed to escort the coffin of the emperor within the imperial capital Beijing and beyond that were not accessible for them.⁴⁴⁰

In West Asia, however, Islamization seems to bring thorough changes in terms of funeral rites.⁴⁴¹ According to Rashid al-Din, Ghazan Khan expressed in public his admiration for Islamic burial customs instead of the traditional secret burial: “Although such was the custom of our fathers... there is no benefit in it. Now that we have become Muslim we should conform to Islamic rites, particularly since Islamic customs are so much better.”⁴⁴² Ghazan built his own Islamic stylized tomb outside the walls of Tabriz within a complex of buildings known as Ghazaniya today. His brother and successor Öljeitü was an exceptional Ilkhanid ruler who followed Shi'ism. He built some 20 feet high and 10 feet across mihrab with inscriptions to display the virtue of Ali.⁴⁴³ These changes can be quite well understood if we compare them to the burial customs of the first generation of Mongol commanders in West Asia and other regions. Chormaqan, the Mongol governor in west Asia in the 1230s, died around 1241 in the line of duty. His bones, according to the Armenian historian Kirakos Gandzakets'i, was not buried in the earth yet carried by the troops.⁴⁴⁴ The bodies of the Mongol soldiers died during

⁴³⁹ For the burial practices of common folks in Yuan China, see Xinlin Dong, “A Preliminary Research on the Burials of the Mongol Khanate Period and Yuan Dynasty in Northern Area,” *Chinese Archaeology* 18 (2018): 164-171.

⁴⁴⁰ [Wang Yun] 王惲, 秋澗先生大全集 [The Complete Works of Qiuqian], Chapter 13, in 元人文集珍本叢刊 [Collection of Rare Books of Yuan Authors], vol.1 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Publisher, 1985), 284.

⁴⁴¹ In west Asia, the funeral of Hülegü is “the last occasion on which human victims are recorded as having been buried with a Chingizid prince”, see J. A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 354.

⁴⁴² Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 685.

⁴⁴³ Sheila Blair, “The Religious Art of the Ilkhanids,” 119-120.

⁴⁴⁴ Kirakos Gandzakets, “History of the Armenians, Chapter 29,” translated by Robert Bedrosian, <https://archive.org/details/KirakosGanjaketsisHistoryOfTheArmenians/page/n77/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed February 20, 2021.

the western campaign in Eastern Europe in 1230s and 1240s were likewise carried back to Mongolia. John of Plano Carpini confirms, although not necessarily completely accurate, in his reports that the Mongols had two cemeteries: one is for the emperors and nobilities that was heavily guarded, and no matter where they passed away their bodies would be carried to this place; another is for the soldiers who died in Hungary during the western campaign.⁴⁴⁵ The bodies of Ilkhanid rulers were buried in Iran and even in an Islamic way, therefore, is a strong signal that the Ilkhanid rulers had stronger and stronger political independence. To follow the Islamic customs of their subjects was certainly an ideal way to foster this new identity.⁴⁴⁶

In the Golden Horde, we have no comparable native written sources as in the Ilkhanate. Considering the extensive entanglements with the Mongol court at Sarai, the Russian sources could have been the key ones on the courtly culture of the Golden Horde. Yet astonishingly, none of these travelogues, even if they had been written, has been handed down to us. This unusual silence, as explained by Charles J. Halperin, is due to the dilemma of infidel rule: although the Russian authors knew the geography, society, and language of the Golden Horde better than anyone else did, they were reluctant and felt shameful to acknowledge it.⁴⁴⁷ The descriptions of the Islamized rulers of the Golden Horde and their court life are mainly provided by the travelogue of the great Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta. Ibn Battuta was traveling in the Golden Horde in 1333, at the time ruled by the Uzbek Khan (r. 1313-1341). It has been commonly received that that under the rule of Uzbek Khan, Islam became the state religion of the Golden Horde. Although this image of total Islamization has been challenged in recent years,⁴⁴⁸ the

⁴⁴⁵ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 13-14.

⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as Sheila Blair reminds of us, some traditional elements of Great Mongol empire period are still perceivable even if in a delicate way. The tomb of the Öljeitü at Sultaniyya is set to the south instead of toward the southwest, as Islamic doctrine normally regulate in order to follow the qibla direction. See Sheila Blair, "The Religious Art of the Ilkhanids," 106-107.

⁴⁴⁷ See Charles J. Halperin, "Know Thy Enemy: Medieval Russian Familiarity with the Mongols of the Golden Horde," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 30, H. 2 (1982): 161-175; and "The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984): 442-466.

⁴⁴⁸ See note 420.

extensive construction of mosques and madrassas in the cities and the increase of the Muslim population are clear indications of the thriving of Islamic culture in the Gold Horde. According to Ibn Battuta, only in Sarai, he found “thirteen mosques for the holding of Friday prayers, one of them being for the Shafi‘ites; as for the other mosques, they are exceedingly numerous.”⁴⁴⁹ Through his whole journey in the country, in every city he passed through it was rather convenient for him to find mosques to pray, madrasah to converse with religious scholars, and Sufi hospice to lodge.⁴⁵⁰ Uzbek Khan was also well known for his reverence for Muslim scholars. Ibn Battuta writes of an anecdote about Uzbek Khan and the learned imam Nu‘man al-Din al-Khwarizmi in Sarai. It is said that instead of calling for him into his court, Uzbek Khan visited the Shaikh every Friday: “the Shaikh will not go out to meet him nor rise before him,” while the khan “sits in front of him and addresses him in the most courteous manner and humbles himself to him.”⁴⁵¹ Regarding the private life of the Jochid Khan, we come across a similar scene as with the Ilkhan Ghazan. According to the Mamluk Egypt historian Ibn Duqmāq, Uzbek Khan married Bayalun Khatun, first the wife of his father Toghrilcha and then his uncle Toqta Khan (r. 1291-1312). Bayalun Khatun was the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos III and this marriage certainly had its political weight. Uzbek Khan fulfilled his goals by having an Islamic jurist named ‘Imad ad-Din b. al-Maskiri to make a verdict that the former marriages of Bayalun Khatun were illegal since both Uzbek Khan’s father and uncle were infidels.⁴⁵²

The Jochid rulers like Uzbek Khan were also recorded as good patrons for sponsoring Islamic cultural activities in the land through receiving and inviting foreign Muslim scholars. A notable phenomenon concerning the Islamization in the Golden Horde is that it had extended

⁴⁴⁹ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham (Ashgate: Surrey, 1959), 515-516.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, 469-482.

⁴⁵¹ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, 516.

⁴⁵² Quoted from DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde*, 118-119.

beyond its territories and interacted with the development of the Islamic culture in adjoining areas, especially the Mamluk Egypt, Central Asia, and the Anatolian region. The Mamluk Egypt stayed a good relationship with the Golden Horde since 1260s the not only as political and military alliance but also in spreading Islamic belief. The famous “Baybars mosque” in Crimea is such an example. This mosque is believed to be built under the sponsor of a Mamluk Sultan with an amount of 2000 dinars, and the Sultan sent his own craftsmen to decorate the mosque and cut his own titles on it. Regarding the identity of this Sultan, the contemporary sources such as the Arab Chronicler and the travelogue of Ibn Battuta are in discrepancy, being Baybars, Qalawun, or Nasir ad-Din Muhammad.⁴⁵³ Nevertheless, this mosque illustrates well the shared interests and values between the two parties. Central Asia serves as the main reservoir for the Islamic especially Sufi scholars for the Golden Horde. Although some of the legendary factors of the conversion of Uzbek Khan to Islam have been revealed firstly by István Vasáry and then thoroughly by Devin DeWeese,⁴⁵⁴ the role of Sufi shaykhs and Sufi communities is in well presented the society of Jochid *ulus*. It was under the influence of Ibn Abdul Hamid, a Sunni Sufi shaykh that Uzbek Khan finally accepted the new faith. These Sufi orders from Khwarazmia developed effective social bonds including marital ties and master-disciple ties with the local nomadic groups on a large-scale communal level and greatly contributed to the process of Islamization in the Golden Horde.⁴⁵⁵ Anatolia otherwise functions as a political, economic, and cultural channel to connect the Golden Horde with the Mediterranean world as well as the Middle East in general, since another bordering zone the Caucasus region was in constant contests. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Muslim

⁴⁵³ See Elmira Sayfedinova, “The Islamic Culture of the Golden Horde,” in *The Golden Horde in World History*, 459; Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 64.

⁴⁵⁴ István Vasáry, “History and Legend in Berke Khan’s Conversion to Islam,” in Denis Sinor, ed., *Aspects of Altaic Civilization III* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); reprinted in *Turks, Tatars and Russians in the 13th-16th Centuries* (London: Ashgate Variorum, 2007), Chapter XVII. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde*, 67-158.

⁴⁵⁵ See Devin DeWeese, “A Khwārazmian Saint in the Golden Horde: Közlük Ata (Gözlü Ata) and the Social Vectors of Islamisation,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 143 (2018): 143-150.

scholars with Turkic backgrounds had been extensively exchanged between the Golden Horde and Anatolia, and a common cultural area of literary Turkish was formed. The Golden Horde was therefore not only the subject of a process of Islamization but also a force of it.⁴⁵⁶

When it comes to the international level, the process of Islamization of the Mongol successive states not necessarily brought peace and harmony in the *Dar al-Islam*. Instead, it often generates new symbolic sources to boost up the competitions especially regarding who would be the more sincere or earlier believers. This is evident in the relations between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Egypt. The Ilkhan Ahmad Tegüder (r. 1282-1284) was known to be the first Muslim Mongol ruler in Iran. Unlike his father Hülegü and brother Abaqa, Tegüder was subject to Muslim influence in an earlier age, possibly under the influence of his tutor Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman. Upon his enthronement, Tegüder was already a publicly asserted Muslim and got the name of Sultan Ahmad in Muslim sources. The decades of tensions between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Egypt seemed to have the chance to be eased. Tegüder sent envoys with his letters to the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun (r. 1279-1290) twice in 1282 and 1283-1284 to find a way to reach peace. The major part of the first letter by Tegüder (August 1282) is the glorification of Tegüder’s conversion to Islam. It speaks about the rightful deeds of the new Muslim ruler to build mosques, respect the Shari‘a, restore *waqfs*, and protect the pilgrimages. And more than once the Ilkhan expressed his concerns about the welfare of the Islamic community in general and his retentions to spill the blood of fellow Muslims through wars.⁴⁵⁷ However, as convincingly argued by Adel Allouche and Reuven Amitai, a closer philological reading of the letter shows that it is still an ultimatum in the old Mongol style to demand submission in the guise of the new Islamic rhetoric.⁴⁵⁸ Perhaps exactly because of

⁴⁵⁶ A.C.S. Peacock, “Islamisation in the Golden Horde and Anatolia: Some Remarks on Travelling Scholars and Texts,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 143 (2018): 151-164.

⁴⁵⁷ Adel Allouche, “Tegüder's Ultimatum to Qalawun,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 4 (1990): 438.

⁴⁵⁸ Allouche, “Tegüder's Ultimatum to Qalawun,” 437-446; Reuven Amitai, “Mamluk-Ilkhanid Diplomatic Contacts: Negotiations or Posturing?” in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, 334.

grasping the real intentions from the Ilkhanid side, the responses from the Egypt side were rather negative. The reply of Qalawun was measuredly organized and twice as long as the Ilkhanid letter. Although Qalawun acknowledged the conversion of Tegüder and his pro-Islamic policies, the major part of the letter was that what Tegüder had done was not enough to be a real and good Islamic ruler, and as a senior in the belief, Qalawun felt obligatory to give admonitions to the newcomer.⁴⁵⁹

The second letter (June 1283) from Tabriz became much more tender in speech. As Allouche has revealed, it replaces the word *ta'a* (obedience or submission) with peace and concord (*sulh* and *ittifaq*) and intends for a negotiated settlement instead of unconditional submission.⁴⁶⁰ However, as Judith Pfeiffer has reminded us, the second letter is much more conciliatory out of strategical considerations and the real intention is to break the alliance that had been established between Mamluk Egypt and the Golden Horde. The latter was never less a threat to the Ilkhanid rulers.⁴⁶¹ For the Mamluk Egypt side, Qalawun took a much harsher way to treat the second embassy sent by Tegüder to pay back the insults, even if this time the embassy was led by the most intimate of the Khan, his mentor Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman. Although the contemporary accounts provide versions with minor differences, it has been generally held that Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman and his companions were imposed various kinds of restrictions. They had to wait for six months before being granted an audience by the Sultan. One episode before the formal audience is that 'Abd al-Rahman was traveling with a huge of retinue and used a parasol to hide from the sun. The Sultan felt offended since on his lands the parasol was exclusively for his own use and then he sent one of his senior amir to command

⁴⁵⁹ Anne F. Broadbridge, "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalawun," *Mamluk Studies Review* 5 (2000): 113-115.

⁴⁶⁰ Allouche, "Tegüder's Ultimatum to Qalawun," 443.

⁴⁶¹ See Judith Pfeiffer, "Aḥmad Tegüder's Second Letter to Qalā'ūn (682/1283)," in J. Pfeiffer, Sh. A. Quinn, eds., in collaboration with E. Tucker, *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 167-202.

the embassy to stop using the insignia.⁴⁶² And during the audience, the Shaykh refused to prostrate himself in front of the Sultan and was forced to the ground so violently that his limbs were almost broken one by one.⁴⁶³ In the end, the Shaykh was reported to die a few days later perhaps due to these bad treatments.

If the case of Ahmad Tegüder and Qalawun can still be claimed as partly exceptional, since the Ilkhanate has not fulfilled Islamization, then later examples from the Islamic Ilkhanid rulers and the Timurids clearly show that the symbolic and ideological competitions continued between the Muslim Mongol rulers and their fellows. The modest origin of the Mamluk Egyptian sultans has always been mocked and disdained by the Mongol rulers. In 1269, the Ilkhan Abaqa sent an official envoy to the Sultan Baybars with an oral message, in which the Mongol side not only boosts their mandate power from the heaven but also attacks the slave origin of his opponent: “You are a *mamluk* who was bought in Siwas. How do you rebel against the kings of the earth?”⁴⁶⁴ This disdain continues in the late period. During his occupation of Damascus in 1300, the Muslim ruler Ghazan proudly compare his noble origin with that of the Mamluk Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-1294) through the mouths of the local ulema: Ghazan himself was “Shah Ghazan, son of Arghun Khan, son of Abaqa Khan, son of Hülegü Khan, son of Tolui Khan, son of Genghis Khan”, while Al-Nasir Muhammad’s father is Alfi, and Alfi’s father was a slave.⁴⁶⁵ Even at the beginning of the fifteenth century, in a letter addressed to the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (1389-1402), the Turco-Mongol ruler Timur still mocked the origin of the Mamluk Sultan Barquq (r. 1382-1389 and 1390-1399).⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² P. M. Holt, “The Ilkhan Ahmad’ s Embassies to Qalawun: Two Contemporary Accounts,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1986): 130.

⁴⁶³ Allouche, “Tegüder's Ultimatum to Qalawun,” 443.

⁴⁶⁴ Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, 121.

⁴⁶⁵ Rashīd, *Jami't-Tawarikh*, 646; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols,” 94.

⁴⁶⁶ Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols,” 94.

In sum, Islamization in the Mongol empire was not a process initiated by some heroic rulers. Rather, it was a response to the growing number of Muslim generals and soldiers in the Mongol army. The Mongol rulers' decision to embrace Islam was largely out of political considerations. Within the empire, Islamization proceeded very unevenly in different *Uluses* and was coordinated by the existed structures and local religious traditions. The three westernmost Mongol *uluses* converted to Islamic polities from the end of the thirteenth century on, while the emperors of the Yuan Dynasty had a tough relationship with their Muslim subjects, embodied in the conflicts on the dietary practices, which were nevertheless essentially politically oriented instead of religiously or culturally. Within the individual *ulus*, Islamization proceeded better among its urban population than among the steppe folks, as the case of the Golden Horde nicely illustrated. Islamization also added new favors to the courtly life of the Mongol *uluses* in the west and affect the daily life of their rulers. Many of the Mongol rulers earned good names of patrons of Islamic arts, architecture, and other cultural activities. Their daily life from birth to marriage to funeral rites was significantly affected by this new belief, while remnants of the Mongol traditions waned but still were discernible. At the international level, embracing Islam does not necessarily smooth the relationships between the Mongols and their Muslim counterparts. As the case of Ilkhanate and Mamluk Egypt clearly shows, Islam was not the integrating factor to bring the Mongols to the Islamic world, but instead, it provides new ideological impetuses for their symbolic competitions.

Encountering with Islamic Mongol Courts: Perspectives from Muslim, Christian and Chinese Visitors

After discussing the general issue of Islamization in the Mongol *uluses*, we will turn to the perceptions of the Islamic Mongol court by contemporary visitors, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Ibn Battuta (1304-1369) is our key source on the Islamized Mongol royal courts in the first half of the fourteenth century. During his decades-long itinerary, Ibn Battuta set his feet on the continents of Africa, Europe, and Asia and left personal observations on the royal courts of all the three westernmost Mongol *uluses*. The Castilian Ruy González de Clavijo (?-1412) was the ambassador of Henry III of Castile to the court of Timur in 1404. In his famous travelogue, de Clavijo provides lots of details on the court life of the Islamic Turco-Mongol ruler.⁴⁶⁷ In the East, the Chinese official Chen Cheng 陳誠 was sent by the Ming emperor Zhu Di 朱棣 (r. 1402-1424) as envoy to the Timurid empire for four times in 1413, 1416, 1418, and 1424 respectively. His two accounts 西域行程記 *Travel in the Western Region* and 西域番國志 *A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region* are the unique contemporary Chinese sources on the Islamic central Asia. In this subchapter, we will analyze these narrations on the Islamic Mongol courts, examine in what sense these Islamic Mongol rulers preserved their central Eurasian tradition and to what degree they renovated their court protocols in order to fit into the new Islamic regulations, as well as the similarities or differences these narrations shared and the reasons behind.

In similar to the first records on the Mongol society by the western missionaries in the thirteenth century, the custom, belief, and social life in general in the Mongol society is of great

⁴⁶⁷ Another European traveler, who reached at Timur's court almost around the same time with Clavijo, is the German soldier Johann Schiltberger (1380-c. 1440). His records nevertheless concentrate on the military activities of Timur and provide little information on the Timurid court life, see Johann Schiltberger, *Travels of Johann Schiltberger: A Native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396 - 1427*, ed. Philip Brunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22-30.

interest to Ibn Battuta. Yet as commented by David Morgan, unlike William of Rubruck or Marco Polo who traveled into the land of an unknown and alien culture, Ibn Battuta's voyage during the middle of the fourteenth century was basically within the Islamic world, to which the western part of the Mongol empire also belonged.⁴⁶⁸ Ibn Battuta's observations on the Mongol courts were therefore with significantly less of exoticness or cultural shocks. Under his pens, we can find many references to Islam, no matter it concerns religious facilities, activities, or events. Here we will not repeat the evidence pertaining to Islamization as in the previous subchapter, instead we will focus on those eyewitnesses Ibn Battuta had on the Mongol rulers and their court life.

As we have discussed in Chapter 1, the Mongol royal wives enjoyed a relatively high status in the political life of the empire, they were never secluded from public life, but actively took part in the formal diplomatic occasions alongside their husbands, and frequently they would also grant audiences to the foreign envoys individually. This custom was not much affected by the process of Islamization. In the Golden Horde, Ibn Battuta was hosted by Uzbek Khan and his wives and somehow won their trust. And later Ibn Battuta was even in the company of Baylun Khatun, the third wife of Uzbek Khan and the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos III (r.1328-1341), to Constantinople and under her protection.⁴⁶⁹ Ibn Battuta hence had first-hand information on the Mongol royal women and their daily life. As he noted, the women were held with respect and even higher in dignity than the men in the Golden Horde and the Mongol *khatuns* attended the public ceremonies "in full view of those present" and "without any use of veils".⁴⁷⁰ The Mongol royal wives also enjoyed real power in politics. They possessed their own towns, districts, and vast revenues, and their names even appeared on the royal edicts alongside with the name of their husband. In the

⁴⁶⁸ David Morgan, "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Mongols," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 11, no.1 (2001): 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, 497-504.

⁴⁷⁰ Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, 480-483.

Ilkhanate, Ibn Battuta gave us an example that how strong political influence a Mongol *khatun* could have: Baghdad Khatun, daughter of the powerful Amir Chunpan, murdered his husband the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id (r. 1316-1335) out of envy and brought extinction to the dynasty.⁴⁷¹ Nevertheless, Ibn Battuta's own narrations regarding the females were not so decent. For instance, he added an anecdote that how Taitughli Khatun, the principal wife of Uzbek Khan, used her physical specialty to make the Khan enamored of her.⁴⁷² And the Muslim traveler's own pleasures with slave girls were also very frequently mentioned in his travelogue.

Ibn Battuta's passages on Yuan China have attracted no less scholarly attention, unpleasantly due to its confusion and ambiguity. In his travelogue, Ibn Battuta lists the seven great and mighty kings of the world, they are the sultan of Morocco, the sultan of Egypt and Syria, "the sultan of the two Iraqs", the sultan Uzbek, "the sultan of the land of Turkistan and the lands beyond the river [Oxus]", the sultan of India, and "the sultan of China".⁴⁷³ Such a contemporary Eurasian political map of Ibn Battuta's age is in line with reality. Besides the sultan of Morocco who is listed since he was the patron of the traveler, the Mamluk Sultan, and the Sultan of Delhi, the rest four kings are the rulers of the four Mongol *uluses*, since the Mongol empire was still a major power on the early fourteenth-century Eurasian continent. Sultan, the title of a Muslim ruler, was assigned by Ibn Battuta to the Yuan emperor nevertheless needs close attention. Did it belong to any kind of cultural misunderstandings or simply misinformation? There are indeed many oddities in Ibn Battuta's description of China. One of them is concerning the death of a Yuan emperor during Ibn Battuta's visit to China. According to him, the emperor was killed during an expedition against his rebellious cousin. The reason for the emperor's failure was that he had diverged from Chinggis Khan's Great Yasa and broke away from the Mongol nomadic tradition. In the end, the usurper removed the

⁴⁷¹ Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol. 2, 340.

⁴⁷² Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol.2, 486. Also see the case study: István Zimonyi, "Ibn Battuta on the First Wife of Özbek Khan," *Central Asiatic Journal* 49, no. 2 (2005): 303-309.

⁴⁷³ Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol.2, 482-483.

capital from Beijing back to Karakorum.⁴⁷⁴ This passage, which might remind of us the civil wars of Kublai Khan and his younger brother Ariq Böke seventy years ago, is nevertheless not a reality. Hans Ulrich Vogel otherwise makes a detailed comparative study on the China-related passages in the works of Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, and Ibn Battuta. As he shows, many typical Chinese social and cultural phenomena are not mentioned in the above three travelogues. The Chinese scripts, tea-drinking customs, use of chopsticks, and the Great Wall are mentioned by no one, while the custom of footbinding and cormorant fishing are only recorded in Odoric's texts. It does not necessarily indicate that all of them did not go into China.⁴⁷⁵ Ross E. Dunn, a renowned expert on Ibn Battuta, therefore comments that no studies have convincingly shown that Battuta did not go to East Asia, or at least reached as far as the ports of South China.⁴⁷⁶ Return to the title of Sultan, it might not be simply misinformation. A possible explanation I would like to suppose is that as a Muslim, Ibn Battuta was much more familiar with the Islamic world and beyond that, he had limited information and had to rely on hearsays. It would be natural and unenviable for him to use his own culture motifs to approach the alien culture. Meanwhile, the title of Sultan could be more easily for Ibn Battuta's potential reader in the Islamic world to comprehend this remote land.

A more or less similar case appears in the writings of the Franciscan Odoric of Pordenone, who arrived in China several decades earlier than Ibn Battuta. Unlike Ramadan or Haji, we have scarce sources on the celebrations of royal circumcision in the Islamic Mongol royal court and we are even not sure whether it was really celebrated as a festival. One of such records comes actually from the Odoric of Pordenone. He wrote about the four magnificent court festivals he had witnessed in the imperial court of the Yuan emperor, which include the celebration of circumcision:

⁴⁷⁴ Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, vol.4, 907-910.

⁴⁷⁵ Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, 44-50.

⁴⁷⁶ Ross Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveller of the Fourteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 253.

Every year that emperor keepeth four great feasts, to wit, the day of his birth, that of his circumcision and so forth. To these festivals he summons all his barons and all his players, and all his kinsfolk; and all these have their established places at the festival. But it is especially at the days of his birth and circumcision that he expects all to attend. And when summoned to such a festival all the barons come with their coronets on, whilst the emperor is seated on his throne as has been described above, and all the barons are ranged in order in their appointed places. Now these barons are arrayed in divers colors; for some, who are the first in order, wear green silk; the second are clothed in crimson: the third in yellow....And there be also many officers to look diligently that none of the barons or of the players are absent. For any one of them who should absent himself would incur heavy penalties...one of them calls out with a loud voice, saying: " Prostrate yourselves before the emperor our mighty lord! " And immediately all the barons touch the ground three times with their heads. Then he will call out again: "Rise all of you!" and immediately they get up again... And after this all those of the famous princely families parade with white horses. And a voice is heard calling: "Such an one of such a family to present so many hundreds of white horses to the lord "; and then some of them come forward saying that they bring two hundred horses (say) to offer to the lord, which are ready before the palace. And 'tis something incredible the number of white horses which are presented to the lord on such an occasion. And then come barons to offer presents of different kinds on behalf of the other barons of the empire; and all the superiors of the monasteries likewise come with presents to the Khan, and are in duty bound to give him their benison. And this also do we Minor Friars.⁴⁷⁷

Odoric's text provides great details of the Yuan imperial courtly ceremonies. Regarding the part of circumcision, it is well known that the Yuan emperors were never followers of Islam as the Mongol rulers of the three western *uluses* and there is little chance that they would hold such Islamic rites. This part has long been considered as misinformation.⁴⁷⁸ However, from a different perspective, we may consider Odoric's passage as a right distortion that reflects the courtly practices of the Islamic Mongol *uluses* in the west.

Indeed, there was a long tradition in the medieval Islamic world that royal circumcision was celebrated as a grand court festival. One of the most well-recorded events of such kind

⁴⁷⁷ Odoric of Pordenone, "The Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone," in *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Henry Yule (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1913), 237-39.

⁴⁷⁸ There is another version of the four feasts in one manuscript of the travelogue of Oderic, in which the fourth festival is the birthday of the first-born son of the Yuan emperor. Scholars like Sir Henry Yule believes this version is in line with the facts, see: Yule, trans. and ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, vol. 1, 141, note 2.

pertains to the Mu'tazz, son of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861). In his *Book of curious and entertaining information*, the Medieval Arabic chronicler Al-Tha'alibi regarded this event as one of the most splendid feasts of the age. The caliph held a grand feast for his great commanders, courtiers, and holders of high official positions. He prepared huge amounts of gold and silver coins, ambergris, amber, and musk, and every guest present was free to take whatever he wanted to take. And in the last part, the caliph distributed a thousand robes of honor to the guests with the same number of mounts to take away and he also freed 1000 slaves.⁴⁷⁹ The royal circumcision in the Medieval Islamic court is therefore not only a religious event, but an occasion for the ruler to display wealth and power and engage with his nobles through hosting feasts and the poor people through distributing alms. The famous eleventh-century Islamic gift-giving manual *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf*, or *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, also has a special chapter to teach people how to prepare for the circumcision feasts.⁴⁸⁰ When it comes to the early modern period, we are quite informed that the royal circumcision celebrations continued in the Islamic imperial courts. In the Ottoman Empire, three big public circumcision festivals were hosted in 1582, 1675, and 1720 respectively. These events were organized according to rigid rules of protocol and were highly symbolically oriented.⁴⁸¹ In addition, we also know that in 1264 the envoys of Berke Khan were invited to attend the circumcision of the Mamluk Sultan Baybar's son al-Malik al-Sa'id during their visit to Cairo.⁴⁸² Although these pieces of evidence are circumstantial and indirectly, we might still have a good chance to guess that the Islamic Mongol rulers might also have such royal

⁴⁷⁹ Al-Tha'alibi, *The Lata'if al-ma'arif of Tha'alibi: The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information*, trans. C. E. Bosworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 100-101.

⁴⁸⁰ Muhammad Hamidullah, ed., *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf: Book of Gifts and Rarities*, trans. Ghada Hijjawi Qaddumi (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 135-145.

⁴⁸¹ See Hedda Reindl-Kiel, "Power and Submission: Gifting at Royal Circumcision Festivals in the Ottoman Empire (16th-18th Centuries)," *Turcica* 41 (2009): 37-88.

⁴⁸² Broadbridge, *Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols*, 100.

circumcision celebrations in their courts, or at least such celebrations were never strange to them.

Compared to the narrations of Ibn Battuta, the records of Clavijo were much better organized both chronologically and thematically and with less anecdotal flavor. As a professional bureaucrat and diplomat, the diplomatic protocols of the Timurid court and related rituals greatly attracted his attention. We have very little information regarding the biography of Ruy González de Clavijo, except what he provides in the travelogue. Clavijo was of noble origin and served in the court of Henry III of Castile as a chamberlain until being authorized the mission to the Timurid Empire in 1403. Timur began to engage the European rulers at a quite early stage. As early as 1401, Timur sent two envoys to the Byzantine rulers in Constantinople, which was being sieged by the Ottomans at that time, and made an offer for joint military actions against the Sultan. After the victory in the Battle of Ankara in 1402, more and more European rulers took the initiative. The Castile King for instance sent his first embassy to Timur in the same year, which was led by Payo Gómez de Sotomayor and Hernán Sánchez de Palazuelos and was quite well treated in Ankara. Timur not only granted them an audience but also sent his own envoys with many gifts to accompany them back to Spain. In the coming years, many similar embassies were exchanged between the European rulers such as Charles VI of France, Henry IV of England, the Genoese, and the Venetians, and Timur. The embassy of Clavijo was one of them and first and most was organized as a return visiting to pay back the courtesy of Timur's gifts.⁴⁸³ Clavijo and his companions arrived at Samarkand in September 1404 and were received with great honor in Timur's imperial court. They stayed there for five months, until the sudden death of Timur in February 1405. In Samarkand, they were not only granted an audience by Timur and his chief wife, but also were invited to

⁴⁸³ More on the relations between Timurid Empire and the Latin Christendom, see Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 235-255.

participate in various kinds of courtly festivals and ceremonies. Clavijo truthfully records what he witnessed and heard almost in a wordy manner and provides a good base for us to approach the Timurid courtly protocols and to examine in what sense they inherits or innovates the early Mongol tradition.

In similar to the early Mongol protocols, foreign envoys were under administration as soon as they entered the Timurid territories. The renowned Mongol postal system continued to function in the Timurid Empire especially between Tabriz and Samarkand. More than once, Clavijo praised the conveniences and efficiency to use it. According to him, on the Timurid territories, post stations were installed in a day or half-day distance no matter in deserts, uninhabited regions, or populous places. The horses in one post could be as many as one hundred or even two hundred. And in emergency, the foreign envoys were even entitled to use any horse whenever they came across during the journey. The son of Timur was said to give up his own horses once.⁴⁸⁴ Clavijo and his companions were also warmly hosted in Tabriz by the governor, in Soltaniyeh by Timur's son Miran Shah, and in Tehran by a son-in-law of Timur. The local hosts provided feast and accommodation and organized city-touring for the Castilian embassy. They also exchanged gifts, the gifts from the Castilian side were cloths and other things, and in return received robes, hats, and horses from the Timurids.⁴⁸⁵ It is worth noting that the dietary custom of Clavijo and his companions was fully respected. At the feast, they were allowed to eat "according to their custom."⁴⁸⁶ In Samarkand, the Muslim ruler Timur even ordered his retinues to bring wine to the lodging place of Clavijo, since he knew that the "Franks" used to drink wine every day and worried that they might not drink at ease before him.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 90, 97-98, 105-106.

⁴⁸⁵ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 90, 92-93, 98.

⁴⁸⁶ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 93.

⁴⁸⁷ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 142.

The Timurids also had a well-fledged procedure to receive, present, and display gifts. Before entering the royal palace, two officials were assigned to take care of the gifts the envoys had brought. According to Clavijo, the main duty of these two officials was to make sure that they were properly wrapped. These gifts were not immediately transferred into the imperial treasury, rather after they were delicately rewrapped and decorated, these gifts were carried in front of Timur and displayed to all the guests in a well-arranged manner.⁴⁸⁸ Timur would not open the gifts with the presence of those foreign envoys, but most likely he had already known the content of the package. We were told by Clavijo that Timur open their gifts gladly and distributed the scarlet cloth to his wives. The gifts from the Mamluk Sultan were otherwise not so lucky. They were returned to and kept by the former officials for three days until to be brought again, since “it is the custom not to receive a present until the third day.”⁴⁸⁹ For now, we have no idea what was behind this strange custom. It seems that the infidel rite fire purification of envoys and gifts was no longer practiced in the Timurid court, probably due to its collision with the new belief. Yet, these three days’ storage could have some links with the previous purification idea. The gifts of the Castilian embassy had been actually examined and transported in Tehran by a son-in-law of Timur in advance,⁴⁹⁰ therefore the rule was not applicable for them.

The obligation of genuflection was likewise preserved in the Timurid court. As a rule, before the formal audience, Clavijo and his companions were required to kneel three times before Timur. The Castilian ambassadors obeyed the rule and performed the genuflection willingly. They made a reverential bow, placing the knee on the ground, and crossing the arms on the breast three times.⁴⁹¹ Then a small conflict with ritual matters took place. After the genuflection, Clavijo offered to kiss the hand of the Turco-Mongol ruler, which was

⁴⁸⁸ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 131-132.

⁴⁸⁹ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 135-136.

⁴⁹⁰ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 100.

⁴⁹¹ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 132.

nevertheless turned down, since “it was not the custom for any great lord to kiss his hand”.⁴⁹² This episode is especially worthy of close attention. If we remember well, the audience of Rabban Sauma with Pope Nicholas IV also has a similar scene. The difference was that Sauma followed the custom to bow to the Pope and kissed his feet and hands, while the Pope gladly accepted it. One may wonder if Clavijo really transplanted his European experience into the Timurid court. Joan-Pau Rubiés has pointed out that such experience was “not entirely Eurocentric,” since “kisses also functioned as ritual acts of submission for Turkish rulers like the Ottomans”.⁴⁹³ This comment is justified, yet there were different forms of kissing during such ceremonies, including kissing the ground before the ruler, kissing the robe of the ruler, and kissing the hands of the ruler. In the Ottoman court ceremonies, kissing was not exclusively to the royal hand, more often, the attendants were required to kiss the hem of the Sultan’s robe such as the accession ritual of Sultan Mehmed II, or Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444-1446; 1451-1484).⁴⁹⁴ In 1590, after the end of the Ottoman-Safavid wars, the new enthroned Safavid king Shah ‘Abbas sent his six-year-old nephew Haydar Mirza to the Ottoman court as a hostage as a symbol of peace and submission. During the official reception, this child hostage was guided by the Safavid envoy to hold the robe of Sultan Murad III with two hands to kiss it.⁴⁹⁵ Also, we can find the same symbolic act of kiss in other Islamic courts contemporary to the Mongols. In the court of the Sultan of Mamluk Egypt, to kiss the ground before the Sultan was more commonly required. We know, for instance, an Ottoman envoy who arrived at the Court of Sultan Khushqadam (r. 1461-1467) refused to bow and kiss the ground before the sultan.

⁴⁹² Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 133.

⁴⁹³ Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Late Medieval Ambassadors and the Practice of Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1250 – 1450,” in Palmira Brummett ed., *The Book of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 93, footnote 127; and Palmira Brummett, “A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Rituals of Submission along the East-West Divide,” in Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock, eds., *Cultural Encounters Between East and West 1543–1699* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 107–131.

⁴⁹⁴ Douglas S. Brookes, “Of Swords and Tombs: Symbolism in the Ottoman Accession Ritual,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1993): 5-6.

⁴⁹⁵ Sinem Casale, “A Peace for a Prince: The Reception of a Safavid Child Hostage at the Ottoman Court,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20 (2016): 56.

This misbehavior enraged the sultan greatly.⁴⁹⁶ Whether there are considerations of political rankings behind these three different forms of kissing calls for further researches. Perhaps, a more interesting question to be asked would be why Timur refused the offer of Clavijo. I have not come across any passages in the reports of John of Carpine, William of Rubruck, or Marco Polo showing that kissing was a part of the Mongol diplomatic protocols. We might infer that it was because of the prominence of Mongol elements in the Timur's court that he avoided personal physical contact.⁴⁹⁷

After the genuflection and greetings, the formal audience began. Like the earlier Mongol rulers, a fictive kindred appellation was used between the Timurid rulers and their counterparts, as a way to establish status symbolically. Genghis Khan once stated that Khwarezmian Shah was a dear son to him, Timur did the same to the King of Castile. The passage of Clavijo is very vivid and relevant:

He (Timur) asked after the king, saying, "how is my son the king? Is he in good health?" When the ambassadors had answered, Timour Beg turned to the knights who were seated around him, amongst whom were one of the sons of Tokatmish, the former emperor of Tartary, several chiefs of the blood of the late emperor of Samarcand, and others of the family of the lord himself, and said, "Behold! Here are the ambassadors sent by my son the king of Spain, who is the greatest king of the Franks, and lives at the end of the world. These Franks are truly a great people, and I will give my benediction to the king of Spain, my son. It would have sufficed if he had sent you to me with the letter, and without the presents, so well satisfied am I to hear of his health and prosperous state."⁴⁹⁸

As the text clearly shows, the fictive relationship with the King of Castile was as part of a meticulously arranged show both for inner and external audiences. The inner audiences include his family members, amirs, and retainers. The Chagataid princes who were now in his service and the Jochid princes who otherwise took refuge under his shelter are the external audience. By boosting the power and prosperity of the King of Castile and his Kingdom, who nevertheless

⁴⁹⁶ Frenkel, "Embassies and Ambassadors in Mamluk Cairo," in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, 249.

⁴⁹⁷ This taboo seemed to be changed in the reign of Timur's son Shahrukh. It was recorded that Shahrukh allowed the Chinese envoys to kiss his hand, see Bretschneider, ed. and trans., *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, vol.2, 281 (footnote 1104).

⁴⁹⁸ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 133.

was a son to Timur, Timur's own superiority and power were likewise elevated. It is also a clear symbolic act to have those Chingisid posterities on the spot, which shows Timur was now the true successor of the great Chingisid tradition.⁴⁹⁹ Meanwhile, in Timur's court, there were also envoys from other countries. The presence of the Castilian embassy could be used to add Timur's symbolic capital, similar to what the King Sigismund of Hungary did to his Venetian adversary, while the Mongol envoys were happening at his court. The adversary of Timur now was the Chinese emperor of the Ming Dynasty and his envoys. Succeeding the formal audience, all the received foreign envoys were invited to a grant banquet. Here comes the problem of seating order:

The ambassadors were then taken to a room, on the right hand side of the place where the lord sat; and the Meerzas, who held them by the arms, made them sit below an ambassador, whom the emperor Chayscan, lord of Cathay, had sent to Timour Beg to demand the yearly tribute which was formerly paid. When the lord saw the ambassadors seated below the ambassador from the lord of Cathay, he sent to order that they should sit above him, and he below them. As soon as they were seated, one of the Meerzas of the lord came and said to the ambassador of Cathay, that the lord had ordered that those who were ambassadors from the king of Spain, his son and friend, should sit above him; and that he who was the ambassador from a thief and a bad man, his enemy, should sit below them; and from that time, at the feasts and entertainments given by the lord, they always sat in that order.⁵⁰⁰

According to Clavijo, the seat of Chinese envoys was accustomedly arranged by Timur's chamberlain in a superior place since at the time Timur was paying tribute to China. However, Timur changed it and purposely put Clavijo and his companions in superior seats above the Chinese envoys. Here, the presence of the Castilian embassy was used as symbolic capital to bargain with China. The Chinese envoys were certainly enraged and even felt being humiliated. At that time, Timur was already planning to change his policy with China. What would the Chinese side responded was out of his concerns.

⁴⁹⁹ More on Timur and his use of Mongol legacy, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (1988): 105-122.

⁵⁰⁰ Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 133-134.

In the late fourteenth century and the fifteenth century, intensive envoys and gifts were exchanged between the Timurid Empire (1370-1507) in Central and Western Asia and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in China.⁵⁰¹ According to the data provided by Wende Zhang 張文德, the Ming Dynasty sent 20 formal embassies to the Timurids, and at least 78 embassies associated with the Timurids arrived in China, although quite a few of them were not official ones.⁵⁰² Their engagements can roughly be divided into two stages with the death of Timur in 1405 as a demarcation. Under the reign of Timur, the bilateral relationship underwent a thorough change from peaceful coexistence to hostility. In the beginning, Timur seems to accept the supremacy of the Ming emperor and regularly sent embassies with gifts to Beijing. Yet, with the great success of the campaigns in west Asia and Russia, and the political upheavals in China after the death of the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368-1398), Timur started to adopt an aggressive policy. In 1395, the Chinese envoy Fu An 傅安 and his deputy Guo Ji 郭驥 were detained and so did Chen Dewen 陳德文 in 1397. Both of them were forced to stay for more than a decade and were allowed to return to China only after the death of Timur.⁵⁰³ The Timurid empire fell into turmoil for several years until Shahrukh defeated his brothers and nephew one after another and stabilized the empire after 1410. The diplomatic exchanges resumed soon. It was under such context that Chen Cheng acted as envoys to the Timurid Empire four times in 1413, 1416, 1418, and 1424.⁵⁰⁴ Although the

⁵⁰¹ The relations between the Timurid Empire and Ming China in general, see Ralph Kauz, *Politik und Handel zwischen Ming und Timuriden: China, Iran und Zentralasien im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 2005); Rajkai Zsombor Tibor, *The Timurid Empire and The Ming China: Theories and Approaches Concerning the Relations of the Two Empires* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, 2015); [Wende Zhang] 張文德, 明與帖木兒王朝關係史研究 [Studies on the history of the relationship between the Ming Dynasty and the Timurids] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006).

⁵⁰² [Wende Zhang] 張文德, 明與帖木兒王朝關係史研究 [Studies on the history of the relationship between the Ming Dynasty and the Timurids], 60, 90.

⁵⁰³ [Tingyu Zhang] 張廷玉, ed., 明史 [Ming Shi: official history of the Ming Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 8527, 8609.

⁵⁰⁴ The mission of Chen Cheng in the Timurid empire have aroused interests from many scholars, see Morris Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia," *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 62, no. 1/3 (1976): 1-34; Felicia J. Hecker, "A Fifteenth-Century Chinese Diplomat in Herat," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 3, no. 1 (1993): 85-98; Ralph Kauz, "Hofzeremoniell und Politik bei den Timuriden: Die Gesandtschaften aus

military confrontations came to an end, Chen Cheng and his companions were also treated properly by the new Timurid ruler, the symbolic competition between these two powers continued. In 1410, Ming emperor Zhu Di sent a letter to Shahrukh in the tone of overlord. The emperor praised Shahrukh for restoring peace and resuming to pay tributes and urged him to handle his nephew Khalil Sultan properly.⁵⁰⁵ Shahrukh's reply letter in 1413 is likewise fully loaded with political implications. In contrast to the previous letters sent from the Mongol rulers, this letter is mixed with Mongol and Islamic rhetoric. It bases the legitimacy of the Timurids both on the Chingisid genealogy and the Islam, and praised the deeds of the Islamic Mongol rulers such as the Jochid Uzbeg Khan and Janibeg, as well as the Ilkhanid Ghazan Khan, Öljeitü, and Abu Sa'id. In the last part, Shahrukh even urged the Chinese emperor to accept Islam.⁵⁰⁶

The writings of Chen Cheng were very well formalized since they were formal diplomatic reports submitted to the Chinese emperor. This practice of submitting reports after a mission, as we have discussed, is in line with the previous dynasties in Chinese history including Kublai's Yuan Dynasty. His 西域行程記 *Travel in the Western Region* is a somehow "logbook" and is written down almost day by day. The other work 西域番國志 *A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region* was thematically organized and each important city Chen Cheng visited in Central Asia has a chapter in it. In some sense, the report of Chen Cheng shares more similarities with that of John of Carpini. Both of them were first and most composed to provide practical intelligence information. The topics that Chen Cheng's records

China," in Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederkorn, eds., *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 349-365.

⁵⁰⁵ Zhang, ed., *Ming Shi*, 8610. A more detailed Persian version of this letter was preserved in the historical work *Matla' al-Sadin* by Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi (1413-1482), see Bretschneider, ed. and trans., *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, vol.2, 280-282 (footnote 1104).

⁵⁰⁶ [Xunzheng Shao] 邵循正, 有明初葉與帖木兒帝國之關係 [The relationship between the early Ming Dynasty and the Timurid Empire], in 邵循正歷史論文集 [Collection of Historical Essays by Xunzheng Shao] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1985), 91-93.

cover are in great diversity, including geography, administration, population, history, relics, architectures, climate, local products, markets, religion, languages, and social customs. His texts on the Timurid court life are much sketchier than Clavijo's, yet still insightful and can be supplementary to what we have analyzed. For instance, Chen Cheng noticed that Timurid rulers adored white color, which could be possibly associated with the Mongol customs, or with Islam.⁵⁰⁷ The levirate marriage was also practiced in the Timurid Empire like in the Ilkhanid Iran as remains of the Mongol customs.⁵⁰⁸ In addition, the Islam-related rituals and customs were highlighted by Chen Cheng. The male worn turban, while the female worn Niqab in a light color that only allows their eyes to be slightly exposed; the Five Pillars were widely followed by the Muslims in the Timurid society, so did the dietary prohibition of eating pork and other meats sold by non-Muslim butchers.⁵⁰⁹ All in all, the Timurid society shared great similarities with the three Islamic Mongol *uluses*.

Meanwhile, it will be useful to review the reception of Chinese envoys in the Timurid court from a comparative perspective. We are lucky to have a contemporary report from Ghiyath al-din Naqqash, a court painter who was sent by the Timurid ruler Shahrukh as an envoy to Beijing between 1419 and 1422. According to him, the Timurid embassy was honorably treated by the Ming Emperor Yongle under a well-designed protocol. The names and numbers of the members in the Timurid embassy were recorded by Chinese officials as soon as they entered the Ming territories. When they arrived at Suzhou 肅州, a major city in

⁵⁰⁷ [Chen Cheng] 陳誠, 西域番國志 [A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region], ed. [Liankuan Zhou] 周連寬 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2000), 65; Morris Rossabi, "A translation of Ch'en Ch'eng's Hsi-yu fan-kuo chih," *Ming Studies* 17 (1983): 50.

⁵⁰⁸ Chen, *A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region*, 68; Rossabi, "A translation of Ch'en Ch'eng's Hsi-yu fan-kuo chih", 51.

⁵⁰⁹ Chen, *A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region*, 68, 69, 73; Rossabi, "A translation of Ch'en Ch'eng's Hsi-yu fan-kuo chih", 51, 52, 55. The part on the veiling of the women is significantly different than Ibn Battuta's observation in the Golden Horde half a century ago and the famous passage of Clavijo on Timur's wife Cano, see Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timour*, 154-155. This discrepancy might have something to do with the social stratification, namely the noble Mongol women enjoy greater freedom in the public life of the Timurid society.

China, a formal welcome reception was waiting for them. During the banquet, the Timurid embassy was seated on the left, an honorable place according to Chinese custom. The postal system also works well in Ming China and the embassy was lodged in the post stations, where specialized officials were dispatched to take care of their needs, abundant food was served according to their ranks, and the horses for travel. Their dietary custom was generally respected. In Ganzhou 甘州, as usual, the local governor hosted a banquet for them. It happened to be in the Ramadan period, the embassy explained their religious concerns to the governor, and the latter excused them for having the food. Instead, the governor sent the food to their lodging place so that these Muslim guests could enjoy their meals after the sunset. When they finally reached Beijing and were granted an audience by the emperor, the standard of the reception was even higher and all of these envoys could receive gifts in accord with their rankings.⁵¹⁰ In recent years, more and more scholars agree that the Ming Dynasty was one of the major successors of the Mongol empire, and the Mongol legacy in the Ming courtly life has been revealed from various perspectives.⁵¹¹ The above records of Ghiyath al-din Naqqash confirm that the Ming Dynasty generally continues the Yuan courtly protocols, except for some minor details. The Persian painter for instance noticed during the New Year it was forbidden for anyone to wear white since in Chinese tradition this color was often associated with funerals.⁵¹² This regulation is a sharp contrast to the custom in the Mongol court as recorded by Marco Polo, where white was the main color in the New Year's celebration. On that day, the great khan and his subjects not only worn white costumes but also exchanged gifts in white color.⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ Wheeler M. Thackston, trans. and ed., *A Century of Princes. Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, MA: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 279-297.

⁵¹¹ The main contributor to this new trend is David M. Robinson, see David M. Robinson, "The Ming Court and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols," in David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368 - 1644)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 365-421; *In the Shadow of the Mongol Empire: Ming China and Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Ming China and Its Allies: Imperial Rule in Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁵¹² Thackston, tr. and ed., *A Century of Princes*, 292.

⁵¹³ Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 134-37.

In the Mongol empire, the white color had a special symbolic meaning of good fortune and was often associated with the Chinggisid charismatic kingship.⁵¹⁴ As Thomas T. Allsen has shown, white color had already been associated with good fortunes and political charisma in pre-Chinggisid Central Eurasia.⁵¹⁵ Regarding the Mongols, in the year 1206 when Temüjin united the whole Mongolian tribes, a white standard with nine tails was hoisted to award him the title of Genghis Khan.⁵¹⁶ Juvanyi also metaphorically called the entrapment of Genghis Khan as the banner of fortunes was raised.⁵¹⁷

In sum, both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors noticed the new religious characteristics in the Mongol royal courts after Islamization. However, their points of inquiring are significantly different. As a Muslim traveler, Ibn Battuta was interested in the Islamic culture of the Mongol society no matter in facilities, activities, or events, similar to what Rabban Sauma experienced in Latin Europe. Ibn Battuta's narratives are with significantly less exoticness or cultural shocks, except the part of the participation of the Mongol royal women in the public life without veils. As a professional bureaucrat and diplomat, the records of the Castilian envoy Clavijo are much better organized both chronologically and thematically and with less anecdotal flavor. His main concerns were the diplomatic protocols of the Timurid court and related rituals. The reports of Chen Cheng are briefly yet very well formalized since they are formal diplomatic reports submitted to the Chinese emperor. His observation on the Timurid court can be well complemented by the report of the Timurid envoy Ghiyath al-din Naqqash in Ming China. The three encountering stories show that even many Islamic flavors

⁵¹⁴ On the color symbolism in the Central Eurasia world, see Omeljan Pritsak, "Orientierung und Farbsymbolik: Zu den Farbenbezeichnungen in den altaischen Völkernamen," *Saeculum* 5 (1954): 376-83; Timothy May, "Color Symbolism in the Turko-Mongolian World," in *The Use of Color in History, Politics, and Art*, ed. Sungshin Kim (Dahlonga, GA: University Press of North Georgia, 2016), 51-78.

⁵¹⁵ Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire*, 57-70.

⁵¹⁶ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, vol. 1, trans., Igor de Rachewiltz, 133.

⁵¹⁷ Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, 22.

were added to the courtly life, the Mongol diplomatic protocols and tradition continue, including the reception of envoys and their gifts, the rites of genuflection, rigid order of seats, and gift exchanges. Meanwhile, the ideology of worldly domination has never been given up, and the symbolic competitions were never ceased but were carefully decorated with new Islamic rhetoric, as it is well represented by the letters exchanged between the Timurid rulers and Ming emperors.

*Islamic Gifts in the Diplomacy of the Mongol *uluses* in the West and Their Symbolic Meanings*

A distinctive feature after the Islamization of the three westernmost Mongol *uluses* is that Islamic items appeared more and more frequently on their diplomatic gifts package, both sent and received. In what sense did these gifts and gift-giving practices reflect the new ideology, how were they received and understood by both sides in the specific context, and to what extent did they continue or depart from the pre-Islamic Mongol tradition will be the central topics of this subchapter. Before we dealt with these gifts and their symbolic meanings, it would be helpful to retrospect the gift-giving tradition of Central Eurasia that the Mongols belong to. Gift-giving as an integrated part of the medieval Central Eurasian court culture was meticulously arranged as a scene of the courtly theatres. The materiality of the gifts was interweaved and supplemented with the carefully prepared vocal speech, spatial designation, and acts of performance. This theatricality of gift-giving is intensively represented in diplomatic occasions. Among these pre-Chinggisid Eurasian traditions, two of them should be highlighted. One is the Central Eurasian or Altaic tradition, in which the polity and society of the Mongols conceived and developed in the Mongolian Plateau. Another is the Chinese tradition, which the Mongols modeled and inherited after their conquest of the Jurchen Jin and the Southern Song Dynasty and established their own one. Meanwhile, the two traditions, as we will see below, were interacted, co-evolved, and shared in many aspects.

Scholars working on Central Eurasia tend to argue that pre-Chinggisid Central Eurasian court culture shared notable similarities. Peter Golden, for instance, after investigating extensively the cases of Xiongnu, the European Huns, Avars and Hephthalites, the Türks, the

Uighurs, the Qarluqs, the Oghuz, the Kimeks, the Qırghız, the Khazars, and the Volga Bulghārs, convincingly reveals that Central Eurasian nomads were part of a shared tradition. These rulers similarly held court in large tents or wooden halls in which there were conspicuous decoration with gold; a rigid seating order existed both for subjects and visitors; conspicuous consumption of food and alcohols; royal women enjoyed relatively high status; and envoys must undergo purification rituals before being admitted to the imperial court.⁵¹⁸ As for the medieval Chinese dynasties, the gift exchanges with foreign political entities were formally included in the so-called Chinese tribute system. The commonly exchanged gifts in this system were horses, gemstones, and exotica from the nomads in return for silks and other precious textiles, and these gift exchanges often acted as a prelude to the larger-scale commercial activities, the so-called silk/tea-horse trade.⁵¹⁹ This system, as Zhaoguang Ge rightfully points out, was ideologically based on the Confucius word view of All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia* 天下): China was held to be situated at the center of the world, and due to this consciousness of the Middle Kingdom (*Zhongguo* 中國), all the diplomatic corps from foreign political entities were regarded as paying tribute and were received in meticulously designed courtly rituals.⁵²⁰ This China-centered model of interpretation was furtherly elaborated by the prominent Sinologist John King Fairbank in 1960, in a way that for decades the paradigm of Sinicization dominated the western scholarly understanding of relations of China and the steppe world.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Peter Golden, "Courts and Court Culture in the Proto-urban and Urban Developments among the Pre-Činggisid Turkic Peoples," in *Turko-Mongol Rulers, Cities and City Life*, ed. D. Durand-Guedy (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 21–73, esp. 58–59.

⁵¹⁹ On the horse-silk/tea trade in Chinese history, see Christopher I. Beckwith, "The Impact of the Horse and Silk Trade on the Economies of T'ang China and the Uighur Empire: On the Importance of International Commerce in the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34, no. 3 (1991): 183–198; Morris Rossabi, "The Tea and Horse Trade with Inner Asia during the Ming," *Journal of Asian History* 4, no. 2 (1970): 136–68; James A. Millward, "Qing Silk-Horse Trade with the Qazaqs in Yili and Tarbaghatai, 1758–1853," *Central and Inner Asian Studies* 7 (1992): 1–42.

⁵²⁰ Zhaoguang Ge, *What is China: Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History*, trans. Michael Gibbs Hill (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018), 19–20.

⁵²¹ John King Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. J. K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1–19; J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. Têng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1941): 135–246.

Only in the past two or three decades, with the rediscovery of the work of Owen Lattimore, the Inner Asian dimensions of Chinese history were gradually revealed. The initiative of the nomads is gradually acknowledged that two alternative models take into shape. As Nicola Di Cosmo summarizes, one is the functionalist approach that stresses the lack of self-sufficiency of nomadic economy and its dependency on the agricultural zones, for the nomads plunder, tribute, and trade all acted as the forms of extortion to meet this economic need; the other is the co-evolutionist model, which states that the social organization and political cohesion of the nomads and Chinese were developed in a co-evolved manner, and they acted as separate yet competing systems to obtain a higher economic and military position.⁵²² In this line, the former received wisdom of the domination of Chinese dynasties in gift exchanges with the nomads is reconsidered. Jonathan Karam Skaff challenges the China-centered paradigm in an even more thoroughly and holistic way. In his pioneering studies on the connected history of Sui-Tang China and Turko-Mongol people, Skaff argues that “the Sinic zone of Chinese textual culture was nested inside a broader ‘eastern Eurasian’ region of political and diplomatic uniformities, which in turn was contained within a wider ‘Eurasian’ sphere via links with South Asia, West Asia, and Byzantium.”⁵²³ According to him, a similar protocol of diplomatic rituals was astonishingly shared among Tang China, Turkic Khanate, Byzantine, and Sasanian Persia. The protocol includes 1) gift and correspondence exchanges, 2) creation of splendidly decorated courts, in which audiences, meetings, and banquets took place, 3) display of status ranking of courtiers and diplomats in seating arrangements, 4) paying obedience to the monarch, and 5) lavish feasts.⁵²⁴

⁵²² On scholarship of the theories of ancient China-Steppe relations, see Nicola Di Cosmo, “China-Steppe Relations in Historical Perspective,” in *Complexity and Interaction along the Eurasian Steppe Zone in the First Millennium CE*, ed. Jan Bemmman and Michael Schmauder (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2015): 49-72.

⁵²³ Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power and Connections, 580-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2012), 7.

⁵²⁴ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 148-155.

This tendency to emphasize the general uniformity of diplomatic protocols across the medieval Eurasian world gets positive echoes from scholars working on the western Eurasian part. Walter Pohl studies the court culture of Huns and Avars, the Western Turkic Khanate, and the Mongols based on Greek and Latin diplomatic reports.⁵²⁵ He argues that these descriptions did not emphasize the exotic, bewildering, or incomprehensible aspects of the barbarian court life, rather the intense interaction between the Barbarian rulers and the envoys within words, gestures, symbols, gifts, threats, and commands were quite familiar to them.⁵²⁶ In the multi-authored chapter titled “courtly cultures” in the fifth volume of *The Cambridge World History* (2015), Patrick J. Geary and his colleagues stressed equally the shared tradition and the evolving convergence of court practices across Eurasia.⁵²⁷ They first establish a genealogy of the various court traditions: Han China and the Roman Empire were the paradigmatic court traditions for East Asia and Western Eurasia separately. The former sets the model for Japan and others, the latter influenced the Byzantine court, the papal court, and the courts of western barbarian successor kingdoms, while the Islamic courts inherited from the Roman tradition, the Sasanian Persia as well as Ancient India.⁵²⁸ Then they furtherly demonstrate that the Medieval Eurasian courts were involved in a Eurasian system of exercising and representing power, in which the courts play various roles: centers of intense competition, stages of practicing courtly etiquette, and sites of cultural production, consumption, and ritual.⁵²⁹ According to them, these Eurasian courts were never isolated from each other, but rather keeping borrowing practices and values from other court cultures, the

⁵²⁵ Walter Pohl, “The *Regia* and the *Hring*: Barbarian Places of Power,” in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. de Jong, F. Theuvs and C. van Rijn (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 439-466.

⁵²⁶ Pohl, “The *Regia* and the *Hring*,” 464-466.

⁵²⁷ Patrick J. Geary et al. , “Courtly Cultures: Western Europe, Byzantium, the Islamic World, India, China, and Japan, 500-1500,” in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 5: *Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE–1500 CE*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179-205.

⁵²⁸ Geary et al., “Courtly Cultures,” 179.

⁵²⁹ Geary et al., “Courtly Cultures,” 201.

reception of ambassadors, and the circulations of precious gifts and commodities were the pivotal links to these courts.⁵³⁰

Whether focusing on shared classical traditions, or the evolving convergence due to the exchanges of envoys and gifts, more and more scholars have agreed that the medieval Eurasian courts were connected and engaged. Gift exchange formed an integrated part and was well embodied in a largely shared Eurasian diplomatic ritual system, which also included the parts of arranging seating order, paying submission, and holding feasts. Meanwhile, gifts and tributes were often intermingled and not easy to be differentiated, and their distinctions more depended on the mutual perceptions of the giver and recipient. The Mongols, as we have shown in previous chapters, practiced a well-developed protocol of receiving and sending envoys and were certainly part of this connected Eurasian court tradition.

Now we will turn to the diplomatic gifts prepared by the Mongols. Like many other polities, the gift package the Mongol khans prepared usually serves the purpose to indicate his sphere of influence, and the contents of the package are adjusted to meet the specific needs of the recipients. Most of the gifts in package are the local rarities but the objects from afar are also highly valued. One of the most representative gifts sent from the Mongol court is a specific kind of brocade woven of gold and silk threads called *nasij*.⁵³¹ In Europe, they were also known as *Panni Tartarici*, i.e., the cloths from Tartary or the place of the Mongols.⁵³² The robes of honor the great khan bestowed to the Mongol khans in the west and the vassal rulers were mostly made of *nasij*. In 1265, Abaqa was enthroned as Ilkhan after the death of his father

⁵³⁰ Geary et al., "Courtly Cultures," 201.

⁵³¹ On the uses of *nasij* in the Mongol empire, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11-26 and "Robing in the Mongolian Empire," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 305-13.

⁵³² On the Tartar cloths circulated in Medieval Europe, see David Jacoby, "Oriental Silks Go West: A Declining Trade in the Later Middle Ages," in *Islamic Artifacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, ed. Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), 71-88; and "Oriental Silks at the Time of the Mongols: Patterns of Trade and Distribution in the West," in *Oriental Silks in Medieval Europe*, ed. Juliane von Fricks and Regula Schorta (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2016), 93-123.

Hülegü, but his formal investiture had to be confirmed by the Mongol Great Khan in China, which took place five years later. In November of 1270, the representatives of Kublai arrived at Persia and brought a writ, crown, and robe of honor for Abaqa, and Abaqa had his second enthronement soon after.⁵³³ In 1299, the king of Xianluo (modern Thailand) sent envoys to Yuan emperor Temür Öljeitü asking for a harness, white horse, and robe made of gold threads to confirm the vassal relationship. In the end, the robes of honor instead of the white horse was granted, since in the diplomatic ranking of the Mongols, the status of the King of Xianluo was not entitled to a white horse as gift.⁵³⁴ Those foreign envoys who arrived at the imperial court could possibly receive *nasij*. William of Rubruck mentioned that the chief wife of Möngke Khan was going to distribute gifts to those who were at present. A *nasij* was intended for Rubruck. Yet as a Franciscan Rubruck was unwilling to accept this valuable gift, this *nasij* was then given to Rubruck's interpreter. Thanks to Rubruck, we happen to know the afterlife of this *nasij*: it was taken by the interpreter all the way to Cyprus and sold for eighty Cypriot besants.⁵³⁵

Besides the *nasij*, the favorite gifts of the Mongol rulers include animals. Animal gifts were definitely the liveliest and eye-catching gifts exchanged in the Mongol imperial court. A great part of them was hunting animals, for instance, cheetahs and falcons. Cheetahs were originated in West Asia and North Africa, and falcons were native to the northern forest zones. Both of them had a long history to be used for hunting across Eurasia.⁵³⁶ The cheetahs that appeared in the Mongol imperial court mostly came from the Ilkhanate in Iran. They appeared

⁵³³ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jamī'at-Tawārīkh*, Part III, 535. Thomas T. Allsen states that these envoys of Kublai arrived at October of 1270, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

⁵³⁴ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4664.

⁵³⁵ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter A. Jackson, and D. O. Morgan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 190-91.

⁵³⁶ See Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 73-82 and 58-69.

in the gift lists from Ghazan Khan in 1298⁵³⁷ and from Abu Sa'id in the 1320s and 1330s.⁵³⁸ Sometimes the khans of Chagataid Khanate and the Golden Horde sent cheetahs too, as the gift lists from Kebek Khan in 1322, 1323, 1326⁵³⁹ and from Uzbek Khan in 1326 indicated.⁵⁴⁰ An earlier source from William of Rubruck also mentioned that eight leopards (or cheetahs) and ten greyhounds were sent by a sultan of India as gifts for the enthronement of Möngke Khan in 1251.⁵⁴¹ Falcons otherwise were the representative rarities of the Golden Horde. These birds frequently appeared in their gifts package sent for the Mamluk Egypt. For instance, three falcons and other gifts were sent from Uzbek Khan to Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-94, 1299-1309, and 1310-41) as return gifts to the former's embassy in 1316.⁵⁴² For the great khans and Yuan emperors, their falcons were mainly gyrfalcons, which came from the northeastern Asian forests as tributes or taxations from the local people.⁵⁴³ As early as in 1207, after Jochi (c. 1182-1227), the eldest son of Genghis Khan, conquered the forest peoples in Siberia, white gyrfalcons, white geldings, and black sables were regularly sent from there as tributes.⁵⁴⁴ In the later period, gyrfalcons were widely distributed as gifts to the generals serving the empire. A reference in *Yuan Shi* indicates that gyrfalcons were sent to the Mongol khans in the west by the Yuan emperor. In 1329, Tugh Temür (r. 1328, 1329–32) sent two gyrfalcons to the Chagataid Khan Eljigidey (r. 1326-29).⁵⁴⁵

Pack animals like horses, elephants, and camels were likewise presented in the Mongol imperial court. Horses had a strategical place in the warfare of the Mongols and other nomadic

⁵³⁷ Waṣṣāf 'Abdu-llah, "Tazjiyatu-l Amsār wa Tajriyatu-l A'sār," in *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, trans. Henry Miers Elliot and ed. John Dowson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45; Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 34.

⁵³⁸ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 667, 671, 672, 674, 675, and 678.

⁵³⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 620, 648, 669.

⁵⁴⁰ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 675.

⁵⁴¹ *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 247.

⁵⁴² Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 65.

⁵⁴³ The use of cheetahs and gyrfalcons in Mongol royal hunting will be discussed in the section **Error! Reference source not found.**

⁵⁴⁴ *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 1, trans., Igor de Rachewiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 164.

⁵⁴⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 728.

people. The Mongol horses were well known for their tameness, great strength, and excellent endurance in extreme weather. Those horses that arrived at the imperial court were certainly not Mongol horses. In Chinese sources, they were called *xi ma* 西馬, literally the horse from the West and presumably Arabian horses. There were mainly originated as gifts from the Mongol khans in the west. These horses appeared in the above-mentioned gift lists from the Chagataid Khan Kebek in 1323 and the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id in 1326 to Yesün Temür. In 1332, Tugh Temür received western horses from the Chagataid Khan Tarmashirin (r. 1331-34).⁵⁴⁶ Toghon Temür (r. 1332-70), the last emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, received three western horses from the Chagataid Khan Yesün Temür (r. 1338-42) in 1342,⁵⁴⁷ and two white western horses from Jani Beg (r. 1342-57), the Khan of Golden Horde, in 1353.⁵⁴⁸ Perhaps the most famous horse that arrived at the imperial court was the one brought by the Franciscan John of Marignolli who acted as the legate of Pope Benedict XII, which we have discussed in the previous chapters.⁵⁴⁹ The Elephants in the imperial court were Asian elephants, which were native to Southwest China, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The Mongols first came across elephants in central Asia. During Genghis Khan's campaign of Khwarezmia in 1219-21, the Khwarizmian Shah 'Ala-ud-Din attempted to use elephants to release the siege of Samarqand from the Mongols, which were obtained by the Shah from his southern Indian neighbors.⁵⁵⁰ In the later decades of the thirteenth century, the Mongols frequently encountered these huge animals in their wars in Southeast Asia with Dali (modern Yunnan province of China), Annam, and Burma.⁵⁵¹ The elephants in the Mongol imperial court were earlier booties

⁵⁴⁶ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 800-801.

⁵⁴⁷ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 837.

⁵⁴⁸ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 911.

⁵⁴⁹ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 864; Henry Yule, trans. and ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, vol. 3 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), 213-16.

⁵⁵⁰ Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, 119; Ch'ang-Ch'un', "Si Yu Ki," in *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century*, vol.1, trans. Emil Bretschneider (London: Kegan Paul, 1910), 35-108, here 79.

⁵⁵¹ For the relationship between the Mongol empire and Southeast Asia, see Francesca Fiaschetti, "Mongol Imperialism in the Southeast: Uriyangqadai (1201-1272) and Aju (1127-1287)," *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques*, 71, no. 4 (2017): 1119-35.

and later tributes from these countries. In 1278, the king of Annam sent two elephants and other local rarities to Kublai.⁵⁵² In 1297, the king of Burma sent his son to Beijing and paid submission to the Yuan emperor Temür Öljeitü (r. 1294–1307), agreed that an annual tribute included 2,500 taels of silver, 1,000 bolts of silk, 20 elephants, and 10,000 Chinese stones of grain would be sent.⁵⁵³ Camels were not very peculiar to the Mongol Great Khan, since they were native to the Mongolian Plateau and central Asia. Yet these native camels were the sort of Bactrian camels rather than dromedaries or Arabian camels. The dromedaries appeared in the above-mentioned gift lists from the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id in 1326 to Yesün Temür. John of Carpini also mentioned that a number of camels were brought from a certain governor of a province as gifts for the enthronement of Güyük Khan in 1246. No information of the type of these camels was provided, yet we are told that they were lavishly decked with brocade and saddles.⁵⁵⁴ In addition, there were some ornamental animals in the imperial court. The Yuan emperors received parrots, peacocks, gibbons, tigers, lions, and rhinoceros several times, mostly from the Southeast Asian countries.⁵⁵⁵

As with Islamization, the royal courts of the westernmost Mongol *uluses* had a more and more discernable Islamic flavor, which can also be traced in their practices of gift-giving. Islamic items appeared more and more frequently on the diplomatic gifts package of the three western *uluses*. These Islamic items were preferably used in the diplomatic engagements with their Muslim counterparts especially the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt. Among them, the Golden Horde was in the closest relationship with the Mamluk Sultanate and their engagement lasts from the 1260s to 1430s. In most periods, these two parties were in an alliance and intensive exchanges of envoys and gifts took place.⁵⁵⁶ The Ilkhanate although was in the most time at

⁵⁵² Song, *Yuan Shi*, 4639.

⁵⁵³ The use of elephants in the Mongol imperial court, see the section **Error! Reference source not found..**

⁵⁵⁴ Carpini, "History of the Mongols," 64.

⁵⁵⁵ Song, *Yuan Shi*, 214, 226, 232, 233, 245, 267, 269, 350, 351, 402, 510, 554, 678, 683, and 733.

⁵⁵⁶ General surveys on the diplomatic relationship between the Golden Horde and Mamuluk Egypt, see Marie Favereau, "The Golden Horde and the Mamluks," in *The Golden Horde in World History*, ed. Rafael Khakimov

war with the Mamluk Egypt, their diplomatic engagements and gift exchanges continued. The most typical Islamic gifts are Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs, and turbans. In the famous gift package sent from the Mamluk Sultan Baybar (r. 1270-77) to the Golden Horde Khan Berke (r. 1257-66) in 1263, a Qur'an manuscript penned by the seventh century's caliph 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan, lavishly wrapped and covered, and carefully placed in a similar delicately decorated box was the most conspicuous ones.⁵⁵⁷ A Qur'an manuscript in 60 volumes likewise appeared in the gift package sent from the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id to the Mamluk Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad in 1320.⁵⁵⁸ In 1401, when Timur and his huge army approached Damascus, the thirteenth-year-old Sultan An-Nasir Faraj asked the great historian Ibn Khaldun to act as his envoy and negotiate with Timur. One of the gifts Khaldun prepared is a Qur'an manuscript that he purchased in the local market in Damascus. It is recorded that the Turco-Mongol ruler raised this manuscript over his head to show his devotion.⁵⁵⁹ Compared to these magnificent Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs and turbans for daily uses were much more regularly included in these gift packages. In 1263, Baybar also sent prayer rugs and other different colors of rugs to Berke.⁵⁶⁰ In 1320, Abu Sa'id gave Al-Nasir Muhammad his own turban as a sign to end the hostility. In the Medieval Islamic world, recycled or used private objects as gifts were not devalued but rather added with pedigree.⁵⁶¹ As we have seen, the holy oil from the lamp at Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem was believed to have the magic power of healing and therefore was presented by the two brothers Niccolò and Maffeo Polo to Kublai Khan as gifts, the water from the holy well of al-Zamzam in Mecca meet the same destiny. In Islamic theology, the well was created by Allah

and Marie Favereau (Kazan: Sh.Marjani Institute of History of Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, 2017), 329-346, and "The Golden Horde and the Mamluks: The Birth of a Diplomatic Set-Up (660-5/1261-7)," in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 302-324.

⁵⁵⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 150-151.

⁵⁵⁸ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 66.

⁵⁵⁹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 71-72.

⁵⁶⁰ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 62.

⁵⁶¹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 31-32.

to save Ibrahim's son 'Isma'il, who was left with his mother Hajar in the desert. Water from this well is also a part of the gift package prepared by Sultan Baybar for Berke Khan.⁵⁶²

Normally, these Islamic items exchanged between the Mongols and the Mamluks signify shared belief, peace, and harmony. Yet if we go into details, delicate messages of symbolic competition can be well recognized. As Broadbridge has shown, the sense of seniority in Islam has always been the identity that the Mamluk sultans aimed to achieved and displayed in front of the Islamic Mongol rulers, partly as compensation for their own modest origins.⁵⁶³ As early as 1261, after learning of the rivals between Berke and Hülegü, Baybar sent a letter to Berke and reminded him that as a Muslim Berke must launch a *jihad* against other infidel Mongol relatives.⁵⁶⁴ The Golden Horde side responded to this letter positively and Berke Khan sent envoys to Cairo to negotiate further matters. A more dramatic scene then took place in November of the same year that Sultan Baybar imposed an Abbasid refuge on the throne of the caliph and restored the Caliphate which had been overthrown by Hülegü in 1258 after the siege of Baghdad. A meticulously designed ceremony was held and the envoys of Berke were also invited. Sultan Baybar pledged loyalty to the puppet caliph and the latter empowered the care of the whole Islamic world and the benefit of the Muslims in general to Baybar. After the ceremony, Baybar sent a letter with the famous gift package to Berke along with a copy of the new caliph's family tree.⁵⁶⁵ The new identity of the guardian of the caliph and the whole Islamic world became the new symbolic capital of the Mamluk sultans and won a favorite position in the symbolic competitions with their Mongol counterparts. The name of Berke Khan was afterward included in the sermon of Friday prayer throughout the whole Mamluk Sultanate, certainly after the place of the Sultan.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶² Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 151.

⁵⁶³ See Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, 27ff.

⁵⁶⁴ Broadbridge, "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols," 96.

⁵⁶⁵ Broadbridge, "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols," 97.

⁵⁶⁶ David Ayalon, "The Great Yāsa of Chingiz Khān. A Reexamination (Part C1)," *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972): 137-138.

Concerning the gifts in exchange, significant symbolic competition took place surrounding the donation of *kiswa*, namely, the cloth that covers the outer walls of the Kaaba in Mecca. The *kiswa* have to be renewed annually and the right to donate the *kiswa* had long been preserved as the prerogative of the caliph. After the end of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 1258 and its reestablishment in Cairo in 1261, the situation became much complex. The Mamluk Sultans, the Rasulid Sultans of Yemen, and the Sharifs of Mecca all had a role in this competition. In short, the Mamluk sultans finally ensured the title of “Servitor of the Two Noble Sanctuaries”, the rulers of Mecca and Medina became their vassals and amirs, and the prerogative of donating *kiswa* was transferred into their hands until the overturn of the Sultanate by the Ottomans in 1517.⁵⁶⁷ The Islamic Mongol rulers quite well knew the importance of the Hijaz for their legitimacy and the symbolic meaning of donating *kiswa*. They regarded it as an arena to compete with the Mamluks. In the early 1300s, Ghazan Khan had already tried to attack his enemy on religious grounds. In a letter addressed to the Mamluk Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad, he blamed the sultan for the lack of kingly conduct since, after Ghazan’s conversion to Islam, the Sultan did not send congratulations and gifts.⁵⁶⁸ Ghazan soon made his desire for supremacy in Islam into action. Before his final campaign to Syria in 1303, Ghazan issued a decree and claimed that he would be the protector of the Kaaba. Ghazan appointed one of his amirs with 1,000 full equipped horsemen to march to Medina and Mecca. The gifts this troop brought included a priceless *kiswa* for the Kaaba, a splendid *mahmal* (or litter) with Ghazan’s own name, and twelve tumans of gold as alms for the rulers, nobles, and sheikhs in Hijaz. The Mongol army was however defeated by the Mamluks in the Battle of Marj al-Saffar and this troop did not arrive at the destination.⁵⁶⁹ In 1319, the Ilkhan Abu Sa’id

⁵⁶⁷ More on the relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Hijaz region, see John L. Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2015).

⁵⁶⁸ Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, 80-85.

⁵⁶⁹ Charles Melville, “The Year of the Elephant: Mamluk-Mongol rivalry in the Hejaz in the reign of Abu Sa’id (1317-1335),” *Studia Iranica* 21 no. 2 (1992): 198-199.

made another attempt to donate the *kiswa*. He sent a militarily guarded caravan with a symbolic litter and *kiswa* for the Kaaba. His vizier Taj Al-Din Ali Shah Gilani also sent two rings with precious stones on them for the door of the Kaaba. The rings were only hung shortly before being removed, while the offer of *kiswa* was totally refused.⁵⁷⁰ The Timurid rulers were also keen to improve their legitimacy and prestige by strengthening their connections with Mecca. Under the reign of Shahrukh (1405-1447), the Timurid Empire at its zenith and won a more favorable position to negotiate the issue of *kiswa* with the Mamluks. After the death of Sultan Barsbay (r. 1422-1438), his successor Jaqmaq (r. 1438-1453) could no longer resist the requests of the Timurids. In 1444, a large embassy of 100 members including the window of Timur arrived in Cairo. They brought many gifts and a *kiswa* for the Kaaba. Sultan Jaqmaq received the embassy with high standards and great honor. He also agreed with the request of donating *kiswa* on the condition that it could not be hung within the Kaaba instead of outside the building.⁵⁷¹

Slaves, another typical gift in the medieval world, obtain new connotations in the context of gift exchanges between the Islamic Mongol rulers and their counterparts. As diplomatic gifts, Slaves received or sent were actually not very commonly seen in the imperial court of the Mongol great khan in Karakorum and Beijing. The main reason for it is that, unlike the Mamluk Egypt or other states in the Islamic world, the Mongols did not rely on a military slavery system to recruit their soldiers.⁵⁷² It is not to say that the Mongols did not use slaves in military actions, household management or manufactures. For Mongols, these slaves were

⁵⁷⁰ Melville, "The Year of the Elephant", 202.

⁵⁷¹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 76. Malika Dekkiche however argues that the donation of Shah Rukh perhaps a stronger religious intonation than ideological one, since what he concerned was only the interior cover rather than the exterior one. See Malika Dekkiche, "New Source, New Debate: Reevaluation of the Mamluk-Timurid Struggle for Religious Supremacy in the Hijaz (Paris, BnF MS ar. 4440)," *Mamluk Studies Review* 18 (2014-2015): 247-271.

⁵⁷² For the military slavery system or Mamluk Institution, see Reuven Amitai, "The Mamlūk Institution, or One Thousand Years of Military Slavery in the Islamic World," in *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 40-78.

mainly obtained from captives rather than purchases or gift exchanges.⁵⁷³ An early source from *The Secret History of the Mongols* indicated that in 1227, the last emperor of Tanguts Li Xian or Shidurghu presented himself with gifts in the camp of Genghis Khan. The gifts he brought included golden images of Buddha, golden and silver bowls and vessels, boys and girls, geldings and camels, each kind in the number of nine.⁵⁷⁴ Human gifts also appeared in the records of Ibn Battuta on the gift exchange between the Yuan Dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate in his famous travelogue. In 1342, in the imperial court of Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq, Battuta met the envoys sent by the “King of China”. They brought the Sultan valuable gifts including a hundred slaves of both sexes, five hundred pieces of velvet and silk cloth, musk, jeweled garments, and weapons. As a return, the Sultan sent an even richer gift package including a hundred thoroughbred horses, a hundred white slaves, a hundred Hindu dancing- and singing-girls, twelve hundred pieces of various kinds of cloth, gold and silver candelabra and basins, brocade robes, caps, quivers, swords, gloves embroidered with pearls, and fifteen eunuchs.⁵⁷⁵ If this record can be trusted, we may conclude that the Yuan emperor knew well to meet the expectations of Muslim monarchies.

Regarding the Mongol *uluses* in the west, human gifts both male and female were much more commonly prepared, especially in the diplomatic engagements with the Mamluk Egypt. The male slaves were provided for the private guardians of the sultan, while the females were mostly sent to the sultan’s harem. In 1263, as a confirmation to the alliance, Baybars Sultan and Berke Khan prepared valuable gift packages for each other. In addition to treasure, religious gifts, local rarities, and animals, Baybars sent female cooks, black eunuchs, and other gifts for the Khan. Berke instead returned with *mamluks*, slave girls, and other treasures.⁵⁷⁶ In

⁵⁷³ On captives in the Mongol empire, see Michal Biran, "Encounters among Enemies: Preliminary Remarks on Captives in Mongol Eurasia," *Archivum Eurasia Medii Aevi*, 21 (2015): 27-42; Gregory G. Guzman, "European Captives and Craftsmen among the Mongols, 1231 – 1255," *The Historian* 72, no. 1 (2010): 122-150.

⁵⁷⁴ *The Secret History of the Mongols*, vol. 1, trans., Igor de Rachewiltz, 199.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa: 1325-1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Routledge: London, 2013), 214.

⁵⁷⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 62-63.

1304, in order to gain military supports against the Ilkanate, Toqta Khan (r. 1291-1312) of the Golden Horde sent a great number of slaves including 200 slave girls and 400 *mamluks* to the Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad, but unluckily most of them died during the arduous trip. In 1313, Toqta sent another 80 *mamluks* and 20 slave girls to Cairo.⁵⁷⁷ As a return gift for the envoys of the Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad in 1316, Uzbek Khan prepared six *mamluks* and other gifts.⁵⁷⁸ In the 1320s, the rulers of the Mamluk Egypt and the Ilkhanate initiated a series of negotiations to ease the relationship. Among the various gifts, the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id sent several *mamluks* and slave girls in 1320, seven *mamluks* in 1329, ten *mamluks*, and two singer slave girls in 1331 to Cairo.⁵⁷⁹ In a few cases, human gifts were also presented by the Islamic Turco-Mongol rulers to the Christian rulers in Europe. It is said that two Christian ladies named Angelina and Maria were sent by Timur to King Henry III of Castile (1390-1406) in 1402. Angelina was believed to have a Hungarian noble origin and Maria was a Greek. Timur had previously obtained them from the harem of Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I after the Battle of Ankara.⁵⁸⁰

In general, the number of slaves obtained from diplomatic gifts is not significant compared to that from the thriving slave trade in the eastern Mediterranean area. The Mamluk Egypt heavily relied on the import military slaves to maintain its armies and state, the long conflicts and wars with the Ilkhanate and the Franks only strengthened such needs. Under the reign of Sultan Baybars (r. 1260-1277), the Mamluk armies doubled in size and the number of royal *mamluks* quadrupled from 1,000 to about 4,000. A new royal *mamluk* corps of Sultan Qalawun was reported to be from 6,000 to 7,000 and even as many as 12, 000.⁵⁸¹ Such a huge

⁵⁷⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 64.

⁵⁷⁸ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 65.

⁵⁷⁹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 67-68.

⁵⁸⁰ Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the court of Timour, at Samarcand, A.D. 1403 - 6*, trans. Clements R. Markham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), III-IV.

⁵⁸¹ Reuven Amitai, "Between the Slave Trade and Diplomacy: Some Aspects of Early Mamluk Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea," in Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse, eds., *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000-1500 CE)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 412.

demand can certainly not be met by diplomatic gifts, and for safety reasons, the Mamluk Egypt side endeavored to find more suppliers. These slave gifts therefore were more symbolic than practical and perhaps symbolized respect from the Mongol rulers for the Mamluk tradition. In few occasional cases, slave gifts could cause diplomatic problems when they turned out to be Muslims. In the gift package sent by Timur to Barquq in 1393, eight out of the nine *mamluks* were actually Muslims of high standing that Timur had captured during the siege of Baghdad. One of them was even the son of the chief judge of the city. This act as suggested by Doris Behrens-Abouseif was intentional in order to advocate the leadership of Timur over the whole Muslim world.⁵⁸²

In the meanwhile, some of the Central Eurasian gift-giving practices have been maintained or rather shared by Muslim polities, such as the preparation of exotic animals as gifts. Falcons, as we have seen in previous paragraphs, were the representative gifts of the khans of the Golden Horde for their sibling Mongol rulers in the east. These birds also frequently appeared in the gift packages for the Mamluk Sultans. The return gift from Berke Khan to Baybars Sultan in the 1260s consists of falcons and other birds in addition to slaves.⁵⁸³ The gift package of Uzbek Khan to Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad in the 1310s also includes three falcons.⁵⁸⁴ In 1329, the Ilkhan Abu Sa'id sent 10 birds and other gifts to the Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad, which were very possibly birds of prey.⁵⁸⁵ From the Mamluk Egypt side, one of the most eye-catching animal gifts was nothing else but giraffes, which had been frequently used as state gifts for foreign rulers including the Mongols. Giraffes were not native to North Africa but the East African savannas, yet since antiquity giraffes have been imported and used as gifts of the political entities in Egypt. Records show that the Abbasids, the Fatimids, and the Ayyubids all have the tradition to give giraffes to the rulers of their neighboring

⁵⁸² Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 70-71.

⁵⁸³ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 63.

⁵⁸⁴ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 65.

⁵⁸⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 68.

countries. One of the well-known cases is that in the 1230s Al-Kamil, the Ayyubid sultan of Egypt sent a giraffe to Frederick II, King of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick II sent a polar bear as a return gift, which he had originally obtained from the Haakon IV of Norway (r. 1217-1263) as a gift. The Mamluks inherited this tradition and continued to prepare giraffes. In the gift package sent from Baybars Sultan and Berke Khan in 1263, besides the Islamic items and slaves, there were a giraffe, an elephant, Arabian racehorses, Nubian camels, Egyptian donkeys, zebras, and monkeys.⁵⁸⁶ In 1402, Sultan Al-Nasir Faraj (r. 1399-1412) sent two envoys with a giraffe and other rich gifts to Timur (See *Figure 4*). The background of this embassy was that Timur won a decisive victory against the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara and the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I was captured and died as a captive. The Mamluks therefore wanted to be on friendly terms with the new world conqueror. This giraffe was happened to be witnessed by the Spanish envoy Ruy González de Clavijo in Timur's royal court at Samarkand. De Clavijo devoted a long paragraph to this animal and was amazed at its beauty and marvelousness.⁵⁸⁷ It is worth mentioning that giraffes even arrived at the imperial court of Ming emperors in China although not prepared by the Mamluks. It was recorded in *Ming Shi*, the official history of the Ming Dynasty, that the Ming emperors received giraffes from 榜葛剌 Bengala (in today's Bangladesh) in 1414 and 1438, from 麻林 Malin (in today's East Africa Coast) in 1415, and 蘇門答剌 Sumatera (in today's Indonesia) in 1433.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate*, 62.

⁵⁸⁷ de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the court of Timour*, 86-87.

⁵⁸⁸ [Tingyu Zhang] 張廷玉, ed., 明史 [Yuan Shi: official history of the Ming Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 8421, 8446, 8451. Also see Erik Ringmar, "Audience for a Giraffe: European Expansionism and the Quest for the Exotic," *Journal of World History* 17, no.4 (2006): 375-397.



Figure 5 *The Ambassadors of the Egyptian Sultan al-Nasir Faraj ibn Barquq Present their Gifts of Tribute, Including a Giraffe, to Timur (1370–1405), from a manuscript of the Zafarnama of Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi, Shiraz, Iran, AH Dhu’l-Hijja 839/July 15–16, 1436. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. Available at: <https://worchester.emuseum.com/objects/12366/the-ambassadors-of-the-egyptian-sultan-alnasir-faraj-ibn-ba>, accessed January 15, 2021.*

In sum, both changes and continuities of the gift-giving practices took place in the Mongol empire after Islamization. Changes are well represented by the fact that Islamic items such as the Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs, and turbans as well as slaves frequently appeared in the gift exchanges between the Mongol Muslim rulers and their counterparts. Yet continuities are somehow more remarkable. Some of the traditional gifts such as animals and local rarities were shared by the Islamic polities, and the underpinning logic of gift-giving, namely, as arenas of symbolic competitions remains the same. The Mongol Muslim rulers quite well adjusted the new Islamic ideology with their central Eurasian traditions, they exactly knew the symbolic meanings of gifts including Islamic items, and craftily used them as a tool to display their ideological demands.

Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed a variety of topics surrounding the process of Islamization and its effects on the Mongol courtly life as well as the perceptions of the contemporary visitors from different cultural and religious backgrounds. As it shows, Islamization proceeded very unevenly in different Mongol *Uluses* and within the different parts of individual *ulus* since it was coordinated by the existed structures and local religious traditions. Islamization added new favors to the Mongol royal courts and the daily life of the Mongol rulers from birth to marriage to funeral rites was significantly affected by this new belief. Nevertheless, remnants of the Mongol traditions waned but were still discernable as illustrated by the continuity of the levirate marriage. The continuity of the Mongol tradition is even more prominent in the courtly protocols during the diplomatic engagement. The new Islamic elements in the Mongol courts are very presented in the reports of the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta, the Castilian ambassador de Clavijo, and the Chinese envoy Chen Cheng, yet their

observations on the Mongol protocols like the reception of envoys and their gifts, the rites of genuflection, rigid order of seats, have no essential difference from the early reports by John of Carpine, William Rubruck or Marco Polo. Regarding the diplomatic gifts, many Islamic items such as the Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs, and turbans as well as slaves were added into the gift packages both sent and received by the Islamic Mongol rulers and their counterparts. Yet traditional gifts like animals and local rarities still consist of a considerable part, and gift-giving is still a major arena for symbolic competitions as the case of the donation of *kiswa* well reveals. At the international level, Islamization does not signify peace both for the Mongols and their Muslim fellows or non-Muslim counterparts. As the two cases of the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Egypt, and the Timurid rulers and Ming emperors demonstrate, the Mongol ideology of worldly domination was never totally changed and the new religion only added new rhetorical resources for symbolic competitions. In sum, Islamization brings no significant rupture to the Mongol diplomatic protocols and practices.

Conclusion

The studies of Mongol diplomacy have been thriving in recent years partly owing to the prevalence of transnational and global history. Scholarly fields like the relations of the Mongol empire with its massive Eurasian neighbors and the internal relations of the four Mongol *Uluses* have been examined in an unprecedented way. Even with these new signs of progress, the classical thesis that Mongols performed non-negotiation diplomacy has not been totally revisited. Under the shadow of this grand narrative, many details concerning the Mongol diplomatic protocols and practices, such as the life stories of the Mongol envoys in foreign courts, the role of diplomatic gifts in the Mongol diplomacy, the continuity or ruptures in the Mongol diplomacy after the Islamization, and in general the role of diplomacy in running the whole empire or individual *uluses* have been largely veiled. By examining the diplomatic engagement between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts as a process of symbolic communication with clear intentions for symbolic competition, and by situating them in a broad comparative Eurasian perspective, this dissertation attempts to provide some new perspectives on Mongol diplomacy.

In the early period of the empire, namely the era of the united Mongol Empire (1206-1260), the Mongols had already developed a full-fledged protocol regarding the reception of foreign envoys and their gifts. The postal system, the purifying rituals, and the rigid spatial arrangements of court events were the most essential parts of it. Many of them are in line with the central Eurasian tradition. The purified rituals were practiced in the royal courts of the Huns and the Khazars, while the order of seating is widely seen in almost every court of the Central Eurasian nomads. Since the Mongol Empire was in military expansion, both sides had not enough information of the real strength and intention of their opposites. The diplomatic engagements between the Mongol rulers and their counterparts at this stage often lead to bitter

results. By large and far, the Mongols followed the central Eurasian tradition of granting the immunities of diplomats. Even the stubborn and arrogant papal envoy Ascelin of Lombardy, who refused to prepare gifts and follow the genuflection, was allowed to leave the Mongol court safely. John of Carpine otherwise was adept and flexible enough that he respected and followed the Mongol protocols and was granted an audience by the Mongol Greta Khan. Carpine fulfilled his mission and submitted his famous report to the Pope, which provides for future envoys like William of Rubruck. In contrast, the Mongol envoys were commonly badly treated during their missions. Many of them were humiliated, detained, and even executed in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

After the dissolution of the united Mongol Empire, the eastern and western parts of the empire went into different tracks. In the east, after the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty, the diplomatic protocols and practices were refined. The rites of purification were no longer practices, and a better organized administrative system was developed in terms of gifts management. The relatively greater freedom of mobility of the foreign envoys in the Mongol camps was no longer any more since they were hosted in the special guest houses provided by the Yuan emperors. Concerning sending envoys, the Mongols practiced rigid protocols to select, prepare and assess their embassies, including the qualifications and identities of the envoys, the functions and size of the embassies, the credential and rights of the envoys in travel, the prepared diplomatic gifts, the obligations, and other follow-ups after returning from the mission. Many foreigners served in the Mongol courts as envoys out of complicated considerations of identities and interests, such as the Nestorian Christian Isa Kelemechi and Rabban Sauma, the Catholic Christian Isolo di Anastasio, Guiscardo de' Bastari, David of Ashbly, and certainly Marco Polo, and the Chinese Confucius literati Li Bangrui, Wang Ji, Zhao Bi, Hao Jing, Chen Fu, Liang Zeng, and Zhao Lidao, etc. They actively participated in the preparation of the diplomatic letters with carefully devised rhetoric speeches that can be

easily accessible to those addressed foreign rulers. To appoint foreigners as envoys and to other administrative positions not only reflects the cultural tolerance and pragmatism in the Mongol royal courts, but also expresses strongly the identity of universal ruler of the Mongol Great Khan and constitutes a part of the symbolic competitions with other rulers.

In the west, the three Mongol *uluses*, namely, the Ilkhanate, the Golden Horde, and the Chagatai Khanate, underwent Islamization from the end of the thirteenth century on, and another successor state the Timurid Empire is also an Islamic polity. Islamization added new favors to these Mongol royal courts and the daily life of the Mongol rulers from birth to marriage to funeral rites was significantly affected by this new belief. Nevertheless, remnants of the Mongol traditions waned but were still discernable as illustrated by the continuity of the levirate marriage. The new Islamic elements in the Mongol courts are well represented in the reports of the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta, the Castilian ambassador de Clavijo, and the Chinese envoy Chen Cheng. The Mongol diplomatic protocols and tradition nevertheless continue, including the reception of envoys and their gifts, the rites of genuflection, rigid order of seats, and gift exchanges. Regarding the diplomatic gifts, many Islamic items such as the Qur'an manuscripts, prayer rugs, and turbans as well as slaves were added into the gift packages both sent and received by the Islamic Mongol rulers and their counterparts. Yet traditional gifts like animals and local rarities still consist of a considerable part, and gift-giving is still a major arena for symbolic competitions as the case of the donation of *kiswa* well reveals. Islamization brought new ideological resources for symbolic competitions as seen in the diplomatic engagement between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Egypt, and between the Timurid rulers and Ming emperors.

To conclude, the idea of world domination, the physical conflicts in military battles, and the symbolic competitions in diplomatic occasions were intertwined and entangled together throughout the whole history of the Mongol empire. The previous scholarship overstates the

insistence of the Mongol rulers in the former two areas and underestimates their maneuver in the symbolic field. The Mongol rulers were much flexible in using diplomacy as a part of statecraft to run their empire. After the establishment of the vassal relations, diplomacy even became the main approach to sustain the imperial system besides the coercion of using military power. The Mongol rulers had diplomacy, they valued the symbolic competitions in diplomatic rituals and gifts, and meticulously practiced a well-set protocol regarding the receiving and sending of diplomats and diplomatic gifts. The received wisdom regarding the Mongols, such as their greediness in demanding gifts, their mistreating of foreign envoys, and their clear-cut strategy of submission vis-à-vis devastation, certainly have their supporting evidence, are not necessarily the whole picture and should be reconsidered. As far as the role of diplomacy as statecraft is concerned, the Mongol diplomatic protocols and practices are essentially no alien to their predecessors or counterparts in Eurasia and beyond.

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Appendix: Rulers of the Mongol empire and its *Uluses*⁵⁸⁹

GREAT KHANS AND REGENTS OF THE UNITED MONGOL EMPIRE

Chinggis Khan 1206–1227

Tolui (regent) 1227–1229

Ögedei 1229–1241

Töregene (regent) 1242–1246

Güyük 1246–1248

Oghul Qaimish (regent) 1248–1251

Möngke 1251–1259

EMPERORS (GREAT KHANS) OF THE YUAN DYNASTY

Kublai 1260–1294

Temür Öljeitü 1294–1307

Haishan 1307–1311

Ayurbarwada 1311–1320

Shidebala 1320–1323

Yesün Temür 1323–1328

Khoshila 1328–1329

Tugh Temür 1328, 1329–1332

Irinchinbal 1332

Toghon Temür 1332–1370

⁵⁸⁹ Timothy May, ed., *The Mongol Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 2* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 259-261; Christopher P. Atwood, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2004), 625-626.

THE ILKHANS

Hülegü 1256–1265

Abaqa 1265–1282

Ahmad Tegüder 1282–1284

Arghun 1284–1291

Gaykhatu 1291–1295

Baydu 1295

Ghazan 1295–1304

Öljeitü 1304–1316

Abu Sa'id 1316–1335

KHANS OF THE GOLDEN HORDE

Jochi d. 1225

Batu 1225–1255

Sartaq 1256–1257

Ulaqchi 1257

Berke 1257–1266

Mengü Temür 1267–1280

Tuda Mengü 1280–1287

Talabuga 1287–1291

Tokhta Khan 1291–1312

Uzbek 1313–1341

Tinibeg 1341–1342

Janibeg 1342–1357

Berdibeg 1357–1359

Qulpa 1359–1360

Nawroz 1360

Khidyr 1361

Temur 1361

Murid 1362–1364

Aziz 1364–1367

Mehmet 1367–1370

Mamai (kingmaker) 1370–1380

Toqtamysh 1380–1398

Timur Qutlugh 1391–1393, 1398–1400

Shadibeg 1400–1407

Pulad 1407–1412

Timur Khan 1412–1415

KHANS OF THE CHAGHATAY KHANATE

Chagatai d. 1242

Qara Hülegü 1242–1246

Yesü Möngke 1246–1251

Orghina (regent) 1251–1260

Alghu 1260–1265/6

Mubarak Shah 1265/6–1266

Baraq 1266–1271

Negübei 1271

Toqa Temür 1272

interregnum

Du'a 1282–1307

Könchek 1307–1308

Nalighu 1308–1309

Esen Buqa 1309–1318

Kebek 1318–1327

Eljigidei 1327–1330

Töre Temür 1330–1331

Tarmashirin 1331–1334

Buzan 1334–1335

Changshi 1335–1338

Yesün Temür 1338–1341/43

'Ali Khalil 1341–1343

Muhammad 1342–1343

Qazan 1343–1346/47

EMIRS OF THE TIMURID EMPIRE

Timur (Tamerlane) 1370–1405

Jahangir Mirza 1405-1407

Miran Shah 1405-1409

Shahrukh Mirza 1405-1447

Mirza Muhammad Tāraghay 1447-1449