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Lesson Plan: Mongol Dynasty

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Yuan Dynasty 1279-1368 A.D

- One of two times that all of China was ruled by a foreign power; the Mongols.
- China was part of the Mongol Empire, during the Yuan Dynasty. The Mongols were lead by Genghis Khan, defeated much of China, and his grandson, Kublai Khan became the emperor and founder of the Yuan dynasty. The Mongols conquered China because of their superior military capabilities.

Yuan Dynasty- Kings/Kingdoms

- Yuan Shi Zu (1,277 - 1,295 A.D.)
- Yuan Chen Zong (1,295 - 1,308 A.D.)
- Yuan Wu Zong (1,308 - 1,312 A.D.)
- Yuan Ren Zong (1,312 - 1,321 A.D.)
- Yuan Ying Zong (1,321 - 1,324 A.D.)
- Yuan Tai Ding Di (1,324 - 1,328 A.D.)
- Yuan Wen Zong (1,328 - 1,333 A.D.)
- Yuan Sun Di (1,333 - 1,368 A.D.)

Mongols

- Culturally, the Mongols were very different than the Chinese.
- The Mongols and the Chinese differences included different languages, different forms of dress and other different customs.

Mongol Conquest of China

- The Mongol conquest of China came in a series of stages.
- While time of Mongol rule is called a dynasty, it was in fact a government of occupation.
- The Western Xia kingdom in the NW was attacked between 1205 and 1209.
- The Jin Empire of North China was first overrun between 1211 and 1215.
- Afterwards, the Mongols turned to the west and took over the Western Liao Empire, the state founded by the remains of the Qidan.
- In 1234, the Jin Empire was destroyed, the remains of the Nanzhao kingdom in the SW fell in 1253. Korea was conquered by 1258. The Yuan dynasty was established in 1272 and the Southern Song capitulated in 1279.

Four Class System

- The Mongols imposed a four class system on China that divided the population into four separate ethnic groups.

- Based on descending order of privilege and were to become a cause of much contention.
- The Mongols were first.
- Then Western and Central Asians who were known as semu ren.
- Next were the Han ren, who were the people of Northern China and conquered in 1234. These included Chinese and Qidan, Jin and others.
- The final group and of the lowest order were the nan ren, the people who had been ruled by the Southern Song and brought into the new Mongol Empire in 1279.
- The class distinctions were not rigidly enforced.
- They did have exceptions when it came to privileges, appointments and taxation.
- In the Yuan period Mongols and semu ren were tried according to Mongolian or Central Asian laws, while the Chinese were tried according to Chinese law.
- This resulted in a diverse system of punishments.
- Special courts were established to deal with cases involving more than one ethnic group..

Genghis Khan (1162-1227) - Rise to Power

- Genghis Khan was born in 1162. He was born as the son of the chief of the Yakka Mongols.
- His father was poisoned to death when he turned 10. Upon his death, Genghis became chief. When he did, all of the tribe members deserted him.
- Afterwards, he lived a harsh lonely existence, digging roots for food and only owning seven sheep.
- Three years later, he was talking to a group of his former tribe members, explaining his military and political beliefs. They liked his ideas and many more people began listening to them. He used these audiences to form alliances and the alliances into armies.
- Genghis used strict discipline and tough training to organize a superior army.
- He wrote the first Mongol code of laws called Yasa.
- The laws stated that he had to pick his officers and rank by achievement, not familial connections
- The laws also said his officials must remain loyal to their leader.
- Genghis then resolved to leave the world in better condition than that in which he found it.

Genghis Khan- Conquests

- His next big goal was to take over all of China. He did so by conquering the three main empires that made up China. First, Xi Xia, which was the smallest. Then the Qin. And finally the largest, Na-Chung.
- When he first attacked Xi Xia, he conquered it easily by defeating two armies of 50 people each.
- The Qin Empire conquest was much more challenging. The process of getting there involved a lot of work. He had to break through the weakest spot of the Great Wall of China, which was up north from where they were.
- Genghis started on his greatest challenge of all, conquering the Empire of Na-Chung! It took three years, but Genghis' armies chewed up everything in their paths killing over 60,000 people finally conquering the Na-Chung Empire.

Kublai Khan

- 1238: Kublai Khan established the Imperial Library at Beijing.
- 1260: Kublai Khan becomes Great Khan
- 1271: Kublai Khan Becomes emperor of China.
- 1280: Yuan Dynasty is founded after all of China is conquered.
- 1274: First attempt to invade Japan

- 1275-1292: Marco Polo travels in China
- 1281: Second attempt to invade Japan.
- 1300-1368: White Lotus Society, White Cloud Society and Red Turbans lead rebellions against Mongol rule.

Yuan Philosophy

- The single most striking aspect of the Yuan is not only the survival of Chinese culture under a vastly foreign rule, but its singular vitality and growth.
- The Yuan had steadily adopted Chinese ways of thinking. Before the conquest of China, Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai (1189-1243), an advisor to the Mongol Khan Ögödei, reformed the financial administration along the lines of its Chinese form.
- In 1271, Kublai Khan adopted a Chinese dynastic name.
- The traditional philosophies and religions of China continued unabated under Mongol rule.
- Buddhism in particular found a welcome home among the Mongols who had in part adopted it.
- Taoism remained vital throughout China, and Confucianism continued.
- The foreign rule of the Mongols allowed for a certain amount of revolution and renewal in Chinese thought. The Mongols held Confucianism in contempt in the early years of their rule.
- The Mongols, though Buddhist, did not really support or patronize Buddhism, which was largely left to its own devices.
- Mongols favored Tibetan Buddhism but really did not financially support the monasteries.
- When the Mongol rulers decided that too many Buddhists were escaping military service, they instituted a literacy test on Buddhist scriptures. Anyone who couldn't demonstrate literacy in the scriptures lost their military exemption.
- This put the Mongol rulers in direct conflict with the major Buddhist masters; the central school of Buddhism was Ch'an, or "Meditation" Buddhism.

Yuan Religion

- They practiced a form of shamanism, the Mongols did not impose this on their subject races.
- During the Yuan period there was religious freedom albeit with some degree of favor to one group at the expense of another.
- The Taoist leader, Changchun, who had a famous meeting with Genghis Khan in 1219, gained privileges for his followers over Buddhists.
- Public debates held between 1255 and 1258 to settle difference between Taoists and Buddhist.
- The Tibetan lama, Phags-pa, major player in debates and as his form of Buddhism had more appeal to the Mongols.
- He was appointed State Preceptor in 1260. Tibetan Buddhism took a firm hold in China and the Mongol Emperors were to receive Buddhist legitimization.

Social Economy

- Following their invasion, the Mongols confiscated a vast amount of arable land and turned it over to pasture.
- State owned land was often granted to Mongol aristocrats and to Buddhist monasteries. Along with this, harsh taxes took its toll on peasant farmers, many then migrated to the South.
- The Mongols neglected river flooding and the Yellow River shifted its course resulting in large loss of life.

- The incorporation of China into the Mongol empire did little to help their economy as so much trade was under foreign control.
- Under Kublai, things were improved. He brought together groups of fifty households to develop land for agriculture, to improve flood defenses and irrigation. This encouraged silk production.
- He also promoted the interests of artisans and merchants.
- Towards the end of his reign, economic problems rose. Kublai employed a series of semu finance ministers who were very unpopular as a result of their taxation methods. His successors continued to suffer from financial problems.
- To fix this they raised revenue and currency manipulation.

Significance of the Yuan Dynasty

- The traditional view of Chinese historians was that the Mongol conquest was a disaster.
- The Mongols devised a system of economic exploitation and practiced racial discrimination. This was ultimately the reason that the Mongols were in China.
- The Mongol occupation proved to be a setback to the development of Chinese society due to the ending of the progress achieved during the Song period.
- This led to the fact that the flourishing Ming dynasty became an introverted and non competitive state.
- It has also been suggested that the Mongol rule introduced a level of brutality into government that had not previously existed.

Fall of the Yuan

- The Yuan was the shortest lived of the major dynasties. From the time that Kublai occupied Beijing in 1264 to the fall of the dynasty in 1368, a mere hundred years had passed.
- Kublai was a highly successful emperor as was his son, but the later Yuan emperors could not stop the slide into powerlessness.
- The Chinese never accepted the Yuan as a legitimate dynasty but regarded them rather as bandits, or at best an occupying army.
- The failure to learn Chinese and integrate themselves into Chinese culture greatly undermined the Mongol rulers.
- As with all Chinese dynasties, nature conspired in the downfall; the Yellow River changed course and flooded irrigation canals and so brought on massive famine in the 1340's.
- The decline of the Yuan coincided with similar declines in all the other Khanates throughout Asia.
- Finally, a peasant, Chu Yuan-chang, led a rebel army against the Yuan.
- He had lost most of his family in the famine, and had spent part of his life as a monk and then as a bandit leader.
- He took Beijing in 1368 and the Yuan emperor fled to Shangtu. When he drove the Yuan from Shangtu back to Mongolia, he declared himself the founder of a new dynasty: the Ming (1369-1644).

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