

# The Positive Impact Asserted by the Mongol Empire to Central Eurasia

## -- From the Narration of A Religious Traveler

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### Abstract

**This article centrally discuss the advantage and effort made by the Mongol Empire toward central Eurasia regrading the Economy. The discussion and reasoning are based on a travel account named Travels of Chang Chun, an account narrating the traveling experience from North China to Hindu Kush. The perspectives of the article include transportation, population diaspora and agriculture, providing reasoning of the advantage of Mongol economy.**

### Keywords

**Economy, Economy History, Central Asian History, Mongol Empire, Demography.**

## 1. Introduction

In the chaos of the 13th century, different nomadic groups were eager to take over central Eurasia. Jin kingdom or Xixia kingdom are both competent competitors to this powerful position. Nevertheless, those nomadic kingdoms are just cruel and crude, being unable to rule the residents of the rival countries stably. At that time, everybody failed to expect a ruler making difference. Then, the Mongol Empire came to debut at the stage of history as a completely different ruler compared to other nomadic polities and show their outstanding talent at conquest and ruling.

The conquest led by the Mongol empire, in the 13th century, is the most important and influential event in world history, creating the arithmetically greatest empire in human history. Mongol empire's territory includes from Korean Peninsula to Poland and Hungary, from Siberia to Indochina. All the lands taken by the Mongol Empire were deeply impacted by them. Therefore, this paper is going to discuss the positive economic impacts asserted by the ruling of the Mongol Empire. To fully support the arguments, This passage mainly uses a travel account written by a religious traveler in the 13th century, which is the travels of Chang Chun. The Travel of Chang Chun is a travel account written by Li Zhi Chang, narrating a Taoist Zhi Chang's experience with his teacher Chang Chun in the Journey to visit Genghis Khan in the Hindu Kush.

The reason why I choose to research the economy of the Mongol Empire is the political success of the Mongol Empire. According to Dr Cunliffe, "The sudden rise of the Mongol empire was, by any standards, a remarkable phenomenon."(1) Their economy system has to be successful to run the whole empire. Besides, the source I choose is a travel account written by a religious traveler, which implies that this log should be religion-focus. However, Li used lots of words in describing the economy like transportation, agriculture, or population diaspora. Thence, the economy may be impressive that even religious account has to record the economy.

## 2. Transportation

Bridge construction is a very labor-intensive job in the ancient period. Without the help of large-scale engineering machines, we have to do all laborious work by humans' hands, which implies that the bridge construction could be a both technologically and financially difficult project. In the previous nomadic dynasties, transportation is not a central or emphasized theme in its proposal making. We see very few famous bridges in the Liao dynasty. Also, the network of the bridge was not developed. Nevertheless, the Mongol Empire completed a different job in comparison to the Liao kingdom. Professor Allsen, a great scholar studying about Mongol Empire, pointed out that the officials in Mongol government were actually assigned lots of work in maintaining bridge (2). From the Travel of Chang Chun, we can see lots of details mentioning the bridge network constructions such as mountain bridges and floating bridges. In this log, Li narrated, "The second prince, who was with the emperor at the time he went to the west, first made a way through these mountains, cut through the rocks, and built forty-eight bridges with the wood cut on the mountains." (3) From the text in the source, it's told that the second prince of the Mongol Empire led people to do the construction work of building forty-eight bridges. Because it's led by royal personnel which is the second prince, this construction was supported and encouraged by the Mongol government. On the other hand, "cut through the rock" is a huge work in that period because it takes a long time and it's dangerous, indicating the strong willingness of establishing a strong and accessible bridge system. Besides, mountain bridges are a rarity in China before the Yuan Dynasty because the terrain in Yellow river valley is typical plain. We cannot see so many mountain groups in that region. Therefore, people would not like to build so many mountain bridges. However, the Mongol Empire would like to build so many mountain bridges was because a huge amount of its territory, in central Eurasia, comprises mountainous areas. So, the mountain bridge will greatly help the transportation of mountainous areas, making the expense of the movement of goods cheaper and faster. Moreover, Li, in the next part of the quote, describes "The bridges are so wide that two carts can pass side by side." The use of the word "cart" in describing the width of the bridge is an implication of the main usage of the bridge, which passing carts with goods. Therefore, the construction of those mountain bridges led by the Mongol Empire largely facilitated the economic influx in central, making the commercial activity in central Eurasia more frequent and accessible.

For the Song Dynasty, the idea of building a transportation network has been initially developed. Song started to try to build some post stations in their developed area like the capital district in north China and the delta of the Yangtze River in southern China. And the result indeed implies the success of this station system. However, due to Song's policy of "focus on bureaucracies instead of generals", Song failed to enhance its military level and keep confronting the nomadic kingdom in northwest China. As a result, the Song Dynasty nearly have no land power in Central Eurasia and be unable to maintain a territory as huge as the Ha Dynasty. Because of the smallness of the territory, the Song government decided that they wouldn't enlarge their stations to those remote and barren areas. Nevertheless, the Mongol empire is an exactly different country in comparison to Song. As we all know, the Mongol Empire completes a huge conquest in human history and this conquest allows the territory of Mongolia to almost cover the whole land of the continental silk road. Therefore, Mongolia came to plan for the establishment of the station network in central Eurasia which is the core region of the silk road and they indeed established lots of stations in Central Eurasia. Chang Chun and Li experienced lots of stations in central Eurasia like Yin Shan. In their description of the length of a certain part of the Journey, they even use stations as a measure, which implies that stations are widely allocated around central Eurasia for travelers to stay. Except for travelers, we can see that these

stations were likely to be used by mobile merchants. And it's easily inferred that the economy of central Eurasia is strongly stimulated by facilitating those mobile merchants.

### 3. The diaspora of Chinese Population

From the first dynasty in Chinese history, the Xia dynasty, Chinese people have gathered around north China, the Yellow River valley. And that valley is, in most of the Chinese history textbook, the origin of the civilization of Ancient China. On this rich delta, lots of ancient Chinese tribes, such as Lantian people and Dali people, originated here. And Chinese people simply gathered around it. The North China plain gradually became the political, economic, and demographic center of east Asia. At the end of the west Jin dynasty, the first wave of southward appeared due to the chaos created by nomadic polities. Lots of people moved to South China and Japan to escape from being involved in warfare and they bring the advanced technology and idea of management to undeveloped south China to build civilizations there. From West Jin to the Song dynasty, although the technical center of China is the yellow river valley, its status tended to be moved to the south. In the south Song dynasty, the capital of China was even set in the south part of China for the first time. And that's probably the largest range the Chinese people could migrate and assert influence on. However, in the ruling of the Mongol Empire, the Chinese were seen everywhere, from Peking to the Hindu Kush. In the travels of Chang Chun, they met lots of Chinese people and disciples of Chinese ethnic religion. Zhi Chang narrates, "On the 25th of the seventh month, a number of Chinamen, artisans and workmen, who lived there, came in procession to see the master." In this quote, the use of the expression "a number of" is a key point that reflects the scale of the Chinese squad. Through the text analysis of this expression, the scale of the squad should be huge, which indicates that Chinese people have already possessed a steady status in central Eurasia that they can impact the local society. In this kind of situation, even Chinese ethnic earns a respectable position around central Eurasia. The author narrates, "The wang (ruler or prince), the officers, the people, the Buddhist and Taoist priests, came long distances out of the city to meet the master. We lodged in a vineyard west of the city. The relatives of the wang of the Hui-ho brought wine made of grapes, various fruits, &c. The devotion the people felt for the master increased from day to day. In his company were seen Buddhists, Taoists, and Confucianists." In this quote, Li juxtaposes Taoist priests with the Wang ("king" in Chinese), which implies that the religious worker, in central Eurasia, actually got the position to stand along with the local ruler. And that helped to illustrate the impact of the redistribution of Chinese talent. The reason why Chinese religion can get on an unusually high status is probably that Chinese people used their exceeding technology and ideas to speed the development of the central Eurasian economy, which help Chinese and their religion earn the respect from the residents in central Eurasia.

In my previous words, I mentioned that in the southward migration of Chinese, people brought several advanced technologies and excellent methodologies, such as the technology of water conservancy, cattle farming, and rattan paper to the south of Yangtze River. After the migration, the economic core position was gradually shifted to the south. The national diaspora of Chinese resembles the southward migration. The author narrates, "The country has many plains, and the people are employed in agriculture and breeding of silkworms. They make wine from grapes. The fruits there are about the same as in China." This text showed that Ta Shi Lin-ya was deeply affected by the Chinese agricultural pattern. They practice those silkworms and fruits which is actually from China, which implies that the country in central Eurasia practiced Chinese agriculture and gained economic and production benefits. Also, some Chinese tools are very beneficial and popular in central Eurasia. The author narrates, "When they saw our Chinese pail for drawing water, they were much delighted, and said: " You T'ao-hua-shi are very able men." They call the Chinese T'ao-Hua-shi." In this sentence, the central Eurasian showed

great joy when Li's group picked out their Chinese pail, which gives a hint that Chinese technology and tools have been very impactful and advantageous in central Eurasia.

#### 4. Agriculture

As we all know, the Mongol Empire is an extremely successful nomadic polity in world history. From the Ohoh River, the origin of the Mongol Empire, Mongolian has started their pastoral practice just as any of the nomadic kingdom or tribe at that time. In the unification war of the Mongol region, Mongolians developed lots of military formation and tactics massively using horsepower and bow attacking. On the other hand, the popular cuisine in the Mongol empire is also very "pastoral". Mutton, steak, and dairy products like cheese or yogurt are almost all of the Mongol dietary culture. Therefore, it's really hard to say that the Mongol empire would like to develop sedentary agriculture in the area they conquered. Nevertheless, according to the description in the Travels of Chang Chun, the Mongol Empire paid a huge effort in developing agriculture, especially the marginal and barren area.

From the feudalism in the past several millenniums, bureaucracy has been the main ideology in Chinese society for an extremely long time. It started in the Zhou dynasty that the King assigned different parts of the territory to different people who are distinguished and talented. Also, those people who are assigned territory can make the assigned territory a part of the legacy, and their family could be the actual king of this land forever. The offsprings of the initiator of the family career, however, succeeded the territory with supreme arrogance and they failed to stand with people and develop the production. However, in the Mongol Empire, the officers, especially in the barren area like central Eurasia, would like to lead people to practice agriculture. The author narrates, "The next day Chen-hai arrived from the northern side of the A-Bu-Han mountain. Chang Chun said to him that he was much surprised at seeing the people ruled by Chen-hai carrying on agriculture, for in the desert this is a rarity." In this text, Chen-hai ruled people to practice agriculture in the desert area. It's widely known that desert area is very hard to maintain agricultural production. However, officer Chen-hai, from the Mongol Empire, still paid lots of efforts in agricultural production. In this aspect, we can see that the Mongol Empire focused a lot on agriculture, making the local bureaucrat stand with people to carry on agriculture. Also, the use of the word "rarity" could express the surprise and happiness from Chang Chun, illustrating impressiveness of the agricultural work in the desert, maintaining the dynamics and stability of the economy in central Eurasia.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the current age, people would not like to explore a lot in the economic nature of the nomadic empire, especially the Mongol empire. Before I read the Travels of Chang Chun and lots of relevant sources, I cannot even imagine that the so-called barbarians could so successfully maintain the running of a huge, civilized, economic-based empire. However, they indeed complete this epic work, ruling the hugest Empire in human history for nearly four hundred years. To maintain their polity, Mongolians paid lots of effort in improving their economy. In the transportation aspect, they helped to build lots of bridges to connect the influx between segregated places and stations network. Also, through the improvements in transportation, the diaspora of the Chinese started to be found around central Eurasia, bringing Chinese excellent products, technology, and religion to their community. Besides, the officers of the Mongol empire worked a lot to lead people to work on agriculture in central Eurasia, improving the variety and stability of the economy in Central Eurasia. In researching the history of nomadic polities, their actions in enhancing the central Eurasian economy provide us lots of new insight that we should focus more on its civilized part instead of its military or physical tactics. This

research provides new aspects for the analysis of the value of Mongol Empire and Mongol Eurasia.

## References

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