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Mongol loyalty networks: cultural transmission and Chinggisid innovation

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Citation

Jones, T. X. (2023, January 24). *Mongol loyalty networks: cultural transmission and Chinggisid innovation*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3513016>

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Mongol Loyalty Networks: Cultural Transmission and Chinggisid Innovation

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,

volgens besluit van het college voor promoties

te verdedigen op dinsdag 24 januari 2023

klokke 10.00 uur

door

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geboren te Puyricard, Frankrijk

in 1987

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Abstract:

This dissertation focuses on the creation of loyalty networks in the Mongol Empire and its successor states during the 13th and 14th centuries. It uses the framework of ‘categories of loyalty’ to examine how political actors made loyalty decisions. These categories can be broadly divided into two types: ideal loyalties and loyalties of self-interest. This work shows how these loyalties interacted, and how people explained their decisions, as well as how contemporary historians framed these actions. It analyses the methods in which Persian historians in particular talked about loyalty, the language they used and the Turco-Mongol customs which they sought to explain. This study indicates how these historians made use of Mongolian words in Persian in order to elucidate the actions of their rulers, giving us a glimpse into the complex world of Mongol ritual and ceremony, as well as Mongol rulers’ expectations of their subjects.

The thesis goes on to show how Turco-Mongol custom was adapted through the actions of the founder of the empire, Chinggis Khan, who created new institutions and ideals which competed with existing norms, such as the *törü*, the unwritten divine law passed down through various steppe empires. It contends that these new institutions, which arose out of necessity, gave the Mongol Empire its youthful vigour when they worked in tandem, but also provided avenues for political actors to create their own loyalty networks, which contested with each other and served to break down the unity of the Mongol Empire.

Finally, this study analyses one of the successor states to the Mongol Empire, the Ilkhanate of Iran (1265-1335 CE), and how the loyalty networks there adapted to the new situation of being faced with several hostile, but genealogically related, Mongol states. It contests many of the recently posited views about the propagandistic efforts of the most famous Ilkhanid historian Rashīd al-Dīn, using the categories of loyalty to show how Turco-Mongol elites undermined the rule of the Chinggisid family in Iran. The assertion of non-Chinggisid power would pave the way for later rulers such as Temür, who created the Timurid Empire (1370-1506), to create their own states, which paid lip service to Chinggis Khan and his family, but ruled on their own terms. This study of loyalty gives us a better understanding of steppe cultures and the social dynamics which underpinned them. Through it we gain a viewpoint of the intrinsic mechanisms of power, stability and adaptation in Eurasia.

Acknowledgements

PhD dissertations at the best of times can be a stress-filled experience, but throw a two year COVID on and off lockdown into the mix and it's a recipe for disaster. Luckily, I had the support of a great project team, whose presence, even if only online, was vital to me finishing my thesis and maintaining a degree of sanity. We suffered together, and somehow that made it easier!

To my supervisor Gabrielle van den Berg, thanks go to the opportunity to join this wonderful project in the first place. Your advice, constructive criticisms and encouragement of me have always been a positive influence in my career, and you are always looking out for me.

To my second supervisor Elena Paskaleva, thank you for your precise examination of my work to make sure the finer details are in order. This is an underappreciated merit, but one that is of immense help when composing a large work such as this.

To my colleague and fellow Yank(ish) Nicholas Kontovas, thank you for your sense of humour and ability to make me smile at the most inopportune moments. Your great help with the many languages I struggled with in this dissertation was invaluable, and you bore with my horrible pronunciation of many names and places! Also thanks for your wonderful Chaghatai class and contributions to our courses.

To my colleague and *murshid* Sara Mirahmadi, I don't think I could have done this without you! Your help with examining the minutiae of Persian texts and correcting my constant issues with translation and transliteration cannot be underestimated. I also very much enjoyed your Classical Persian class, I would love to do that every day!

To the members of the Serving the Khan workshop, Anne Broadbridge, Bruno de Nicola, Florence Hodous, Michael Hope, Stefan Kamola, and Josephine van den Bent, thank you for participating and providing me with great feedback, career advice and fascinating conversation, as well as all of your excellent contributions to the field of Mongol studies. Hopefully soon we can meet again!

To my family far and wide, your love for me has shown itself time and again when I needed a pick up or excitement about my work. It has been so tough to be separated from you all for so long, but I know how deeply you care for me.

And last, but as far from least as can be, to the love of my life, Sarah Moine, not only have you made the necessity of working from home a delight, you have given me love, encouragement and a shoulder to cry on every step of the way. You have also shown a tremendous interest in my work, even though it is not your field, and shown me the best way to improve it from an outsider's perspective.

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Transliteration

Transliteration is somewhat of a minefield when working on the Mongols due to the multiplicity of source languages, many of which penetrated each other at this time. For Arabic and Persian I have conformed to the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*' system. Mongol names however have been spelled in their more 'Mongol' form rather than the Persian: ie, Öljeitü and not Ūljāytū. Similarly, for Turco-Mongol terms appearing in Persian I have used Gerhard Doerfer's *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* transliteration in the English text, but I have stayed faithful to the Persian original in the transliterated sections. However for certain terms, I have adapted to current conventional usage: so khan instead of *qan*, qa'an instead of *qaghan*, and khatun instead of *qatun*. For other Mongolian terms, I have made use of Igor de Rachewiltz' translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols*. For Chinese I have used modern pinyin. For well-known dynasties and place names I use the simple forms, thus the Timurids and not the Tīmūrids, and Khurasan, not Khurāsān. I have preserved the original transliteration forms of translations and secondary works in quotation.

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