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On Worshipped Ancestors and Pious Donors: Some Notes on Mongol Imperial and Royal Portraits¹

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In this paper I would like to present some of the choices made by the Mongols in the uses and representations of their sovereigns' portraits in both sculpture and painting. By taking examples of preserved portraits or those known about through textual descriptions, from the Mongol Empire to the Ch'ing dynasty, I will try to understand why the portraits were made and their symbolic role in state ideology compared to other material representations of power. The dramatic destruction of the Mongol artistic heritage means that it is almost impossible to draw up a chronological account from a reliable corpus. The history of Mongol art can only be reconstituted on the basis of a few scattered works.

STATUES OF GREAT MONGOL ANCESTORS

The Mongols worshipped anthropomorphic portrait statues of their former rulers. The oldest known representations of the Mongol emperors were lifelike portrait statues of Chinggis Khan, written about 20 years after his death by two 13th-century travellers: Benedict the Pole, who encountered Batu on the Volga in 1246,² and John of Plano Carpini, who visited Güyük's court in Central Mongolia in 1245.³ The statue described by Plano Carpini was gilded or made of gold – the colour of power in the nomadic world – and stood on a cart in front of the imperial tent where it was worshipped every day as their "god."

¹This paper is the text of a lecture given at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, on April 17, 2007, thanks to the invitation by the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and the Institut Français of Taipei. I am greatly indebted to Fabienne Jagou for the organization of the lecture. An extended version of this article will be published in *Governing through Representations in ancient Inner Asia*, Western university Washington Press, forthcoming.

²*The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Dawson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 80.

³*Histoire des Mongols*, French translation and annotation by Dom F. Becquet and Louis Hambis (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1965), 36-37.

Literary accounts give us other examples of emperors' statues kept in shrines. According to the Persian historian Rashīd ad-Dīn, images of the deceased Khans were also worshipped in the "Great Forbidden Sanctuary (Ikḥ Khorig)," the cemetery for Chinggisid nobility in the Khentii mountain range in Mongolia.⁴ The images could have been located in the memorial temple at or near Burkhan Khaldun, built by Kammala (1263-1302), the grandson of Khubilai Khan, where rituals were performed up until the 15th century.⁵ Other statues of Chinggis Khan are mentioned in 17th-century chronicles. Temples with statues of great ancestors still existed in the 20th century, such as the two temples dedicated to the *sūld* (the soul or vital energy), the spirit of the standart of Chinggis Khan in Mongolia.⁶

No statues of Mongol rulers have survived but hundreds of 13–14th century life-size stone statues still stand in the vicinity of tombs, especially in Shilingol League (Cheng-lan 正蘭旗 and Abaga banners 阿巴嘎旗) in Inner Mongolia, and in Sūkhbaatar (Dariganga sum), Dorngov', and Dornod provinces in Mongolia (Fig. 1).⁷ They remind us of the stone figures of the Türk (T'u-chüe 突厥, 552-742) and early Uyghur (744-840) found on the Eurasian steppe. The Mongol stone men were not erected on the grave itself but at some distance from it, in funerary enclosures. Their proximity to burial sites contrasts with what we know of the tombs of the Mongol aristocracy that were kept in a secret place.

One of the most impressive sites is Yang-ch'ün-miao 羊群廟, 35 km northwest of Khubilai Khan's capital, Shang-tu 上都 in Cheng-lan banner,⁸ where four large marble seated statues, each protected by a ruined temple-like structure stand before a rammed-earth sacrificial platform in a walled precinct.⁹ Because the *History of the Yüan Dynasty* (Yüan-shih 元史) mentions a sacrificial site and statues near Shang-tu, and because the robes of two of the statues are decorated with five-claw dragons – an imperial design (Fig.

⁴Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami'u't-tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles, Pts 1-3, A History of the Mongols*, English translation and annotation by Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998-1999), 464.

⁵Igor de Rachewiltz, "Searching for Cinggis Qan: Notes and Comments on Historic Sites in Xentii Aimag, Northern Mongolia," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 71, fasc. 1-4 (1997): 252, n. 38.

⁶Rinchen, "Zum Kult Tschinggis-khans bei den Mongolen," in Tibor Bodrogi & Lajos Boglár, *Opuscula Ethnologica Memoriae Ludovici Bíró Sacra* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiadó, 1959), 9-22.

⁷D. Bayar, *Mongolchuudyn Chuluun Khörög: XIII-XIV Zuun*, 2nd edition (Ulanbaatar: ORBIS Pub., 2002 [1994]); Kai Shan-lin 蓋山林, *Meng-ku-tzu Wen-wu Yü K'ao-ku Yen-chiu* 蒙古族文物與考古研究 (Liao-yang: Liao-ning Min-tzu Ch'u-pan-she, 1997), 323-355; A-mu-erh Pa-t'u 阿木爾巴圖, *Meng-ku-tzu Mei-shu Yen-chiu* 蒙古族美術研究 (Liao-yang: Liao-ning Min-tzu Ch'u-pan-she, 1997), 245-246.

⁸Nei-meng-ku Wen-wu K'ao-ku Yen-chiu-so 內蒙古文物考古研究所 and Cheng-lan-ch'i Wen-wu Kuan-li-so 正藍旗文物管理所, "Cheng-lan-ch'i Yang-ch'ün-miao Yüan-tai Chi-szu-chih Chi Mu-tsang 正藍旗羊群廟元代祭祀址及墓葬," in *Nei-meng-ku Wen-wu K'ao-ku Wen-chi* 內蒙古文物考古文集 1, ed. Li I-yu 李逸友 (Beijing: Chung-kuo Ta-pai-k'o Ch'üan-shu Ch'u-pan-she, 1994), 610-621. See the layouts of the sacrificial platforms.

⁹Wei Chien 魏堅 and Ch'en Yung-chih 陳永志, "Cheng-lan-ch'i Yang-ch'ün-miao Shih-tiao-hsiang Yen-chiu 正藍旗羊群廟石雕像研究," in *Nei-meng-ku Wen-wu K'ao-ku Wen-chi*, ed. Li I-yu (Beijing: Chung-kuo Ta-pai-k'o Ch'üan-shu Ch'u-pan-she, 1994), 622-629; Nei-meng-ku K'ao-ku Yen-chiu-so and Cheng-lan-ch'i Wen-wu Kuan-li-so, *op. cit.*, 1994.

1) – the archaeologists believe that Yang-ch'ün-miao could be the main sacrificial site of the Yüan dynasty, where the emperors sacrificed to the Sky and to their ancestors.

The Mongol stone men are believed to represent dead noble Mongols but their ethnic identity is still under discussion – they could have been erected by the Önggüd, the Qonggirad, or by the Yüan nobility.¹⁰

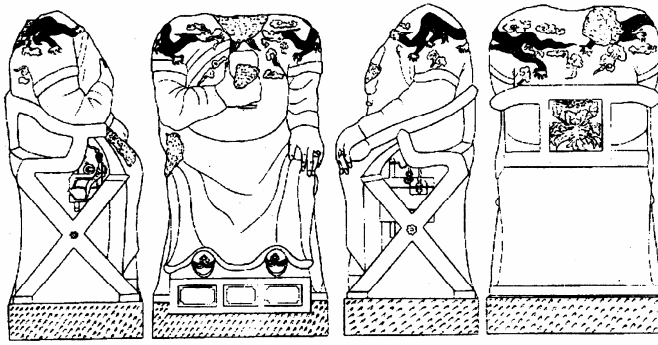


Fig. 1. One of the marble statues wearing a dragon robe at Yang-ch'ün-miao, Cheng-lan banner, Inner Mongolia, Yüan dynasty. Kai Shan-lin, 1997, 347.

FEEDING THE ANCESTORS, FEEDING THE ONGON 翁衮

These statues were worshipped during sacrificial rituals and were fed with meat and milky products. The statue of Chinggis Khan mentioned by Plano Carpini received offerings of food. The Yüan dynasty stone statues generally hold a cup, like the Turkic statues, and it is believed that the cup would contain food or an alcoholic offering. They were also given offerings such as coins, cattle bones, and *sapeques* found in small pits by the statues' side. According to a Yüan dynasty poem, a statue that might be one of the Yang-ch'ün-miao effigies had wine poured in its mouth and its body coated with fat, while a horse was cut up in front of the statue as the sacrificial meat, and an officiant sang and beat time with his feet. This poem recounted the sacrifice made by the powerful imperial (ch'üan-ch'en ch'in-ch'ai-jen 權臣欽差人) legate Temür 鐵木爾 from Yen 燕 (Ho-pei 河北 province) to the marble statue of a deceased Great Preceptor (hsian-t'ai-shih 先太師), 70 li 里 northwest of Luan-tu 灤都 (i.e., Shang-tu).¹¹

These statues were fed like *ongon* so that the ancestor could receive the sacrifice. Small bronze *ongon* dating from the Mongol Empire hold a cup in their hand (Fig. 2) like the life-size stone statues. *Ongon* are zoomorphic or anthropomorphic supports made of various materials (such as felt, wood, metal etc.) to feed the spirits.¹² Human spirits that

¹⁰Bayar, *op. cit.*, 2002.

¹¹Hsü Yu-jen 許有壬, "P'ei Yu-t'ai-fu T'ai-p'ing-wang Chi-hsian-t'ai-shih Shih-hsiang 陪右太夫太平王祭先太師石像," in *Chih-cheng-chi* 至正集 (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1985), chüan 卷 6.

¹²D. Zélénine, *Le Culte des Idoles en Sibérie*, translated from Russian by G. Wetter (Paris: Payot, 1952 [1936]), chap. 5.

could dwell in an *ongon* were either angry and potentially dangerous human spirits, or great ancestors. The Mongols used to feed their *ongon* by smearing their mouth and sometimes the whole face with fat and cooked meat, by sprinkling and fumigation. In exchange, the spirit would protect the household or clan, bestow prosperity, and ensure success in hunting. The most important feature in the definition of an *ongon* is the food: the spirit remains within as long as it is fed. Therefore the stone statues can also be included in the category of *ongon*.



Fig. 2. Three ongon, bronze (5 cm, 4,8 cm and 4.3 cm), Mongol Empire, excavated in T'ung-liao 通遼 Municipality, Inner Mongolia. From: Ta-han Te Shih-chieh: Meng-yüan Shih-tai Te To-yüan Wen-hua Yü I-shu 大汗的世界：蒙元時代的多元文化與藝術, eds. Shih Shou-ch'ien 石守謙 and Ko Wan-chang 葛婉章 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2001)

INHABITED STATUES

As a consequence, Mongol effigies generally belong to the category of "inhabited portrait," that is, images serving as a support for the soul. Human representation was restricted to a few powerful personalities and was the object of a certain number of precautions and prohibitions. It was never used in less important contexts, such as decoration. In Ordos traditions, "a man's representation was regarded to be the man himself. To get hold of a drawing or a photograph of someone would give magic power over him."¹³ Effigies used as a substitute for the ill person, or for the spirit of the illness, were made for healing rituals in connection with a ceremony for ransoming from death.¹⁴

An animated statue can also act by itself and even kill. A thangka portrait of Chinggis Khan in a 17th-century description was said to kill if exposed or if denied proper sacrifices.¹⁵ In the 15th century, it was said that the Western Mongol leader Togon Taishi

¹³Antoine Mostaert, *Dictionnaire Ordos* (Peking: Catholic University, 1941-1944), 220b.

¹⁴Charles R. Bawden, "The Supernatural Element in Sickness and Death According to Mongol Tradition. Part I," in *Confronting the Supernatural: Mongolian Traditional Ways and Means* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1994 [1961]), 237.

¹⁵N. Hurcha, "Attempts to Buddhicize the Cult of Chinggis Khan," *Inner Asia* 1/1 (1999): 47.

defied Chinggis Khan in front of his statue at the Eight White Tents in Ordos, and was inexplicably struck down. An arrow of the statue's golden quiver was found stained with blood and a wound looking like an arrow wound was discovered in his back.¹⁶

To sum up, the Chinggisids worshipped personalized portraits of their ancestors by offering them sacrifices. The portraits served to legitimize and sacralize the ruling power, and were worshipped as gods. The spirit of the Mongol sovereign (*süld*) could also dwell in other supports, such as the standard, the relics (objects that once belonged to the Khan), the burial place, etc. These objects protected the state and helped to defeat its enemies. The possession of these supports (including the statues) and the ability to perform rites for them gave legitimacy and authority to the living Khan.

TWO-DIMENSIONAL PORTRAITS OF EMPERORS KEPT IN TEMPLES DURING THE YÜAN DYNASTY

Paintings of rulers cannot be directly fed, so they cannot be called *ongon*, but they are considered to be a support for an ancestor's soul. During the Yüan dynasty, Ancestors' temples (*t'ai-miao* 太廟) were built in the capital to enshrine tablets of the deceased emperors as well as two-dimensional portraits,¹⁷ and painted portraits of Mongol emperors were also placed in the Han-lin-yüan 翰林院.¹⁸ The Mongol emperors therefore adopted an ancestor cult based on Confucian lines.¹⁹

During the reign of Emperor Ch'eng-tsung 成宗, ancestral shrines called Halls of Imperial Portraiture (first called Ying-t'ang 影堂, and then Shen-yü-tien 神御殿 or Yü-jung-tien 御容殿) were built not as independent temples, but within the main imperial Buddhist monasteries of Beijing (such as the Ying-t'ang in the monastery of the Ta-sheng-shou wan-an-szu 大聖壽萬安寺 built by Temür for Khubilai and Jingim/Chen-chin 真金).²⁰ After an emperor died, his own Ying-t'ang was installed for him and his ancestors in the temple he had built. Buddhist and sacrificial rites to the deceased emperor and empress were performed in front of these portraits.

¹⁶Sagang Sechen 薩囊徹辰, *Erdeni-yin Tobci*, 1662, Urga manuscript, 102 fol., Gō Minoru, Igor de Rachewiltz, John R. Krueger and B. Ulaan (eds.), *Erdeni-yin Tobci ('Precious Summary'): A Mongolian Chronicle of 1662*, vol. I. (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1990), fol., 53 v°-54 r°.

¹⁷*Yüan-shih*, *chüan* 74, Chi-szu 祭祀 3, Tsung-miao 宗廟 (Beijing: Chung-hua Shu-chü, 1976), 1370, 1831 sq.

¹⁸"Preface," in *T'u-hui Pao-chien* 圖繪寶鑑, ed. Hsia Wen-yen 夏文彥 (Shang-yü-lo-chen-yü 上虞羅振玉, 1914), 1365, *chüan* 5: 4a sq; *Yüan-shih*, *chüan* 75, Chi-szu 4, Shen-yü-tien 神御殿, 1876. The portraits commissioned by Khubilai Khan, who ordered court painters to make a portrait of his son and heir apparent Jingim/Chen-chin 真金 and portraits of Chinggis Khan and his sons Ögödei 窩闊臺, and Tolui 拖雷, are the earliest recorded portraits.

¹⁹Paul Ratchnevsky, "Über den Mongolischen Kult um Hofe der Grosskhane in China," in *Mongolian Studies*, ed. Louis Ligeti (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1970), 417-443.

²⁰*Yüan-shih*, *chüan* 75, Chi-szu 4, Shen-yü-tien, 1875.

Portraits of the past emperors and their consorts called *yü-jung* 御容 were kept in the Ying-t'ang. These portraits were of large dimensions: 245x210 cm (9.5x8 ft in Yüan measures). They were made from textile (usually *k'e-szu* 刻絲), an innovation that was highly valued but extremely costly and difficult to make. Khubilai's woven portrait, commissioned after his death by Temür in 1294, took more than three years to complete.²¹ The chapter on paintings and sculpture in the *Handbook of Governing* (Ching-shih-ta-tien 經世大典) records several orders for portraits to be painted and converted to woven silk.



Fig. 3A. Portrait of Khubilai Khan, album leaf, ink and color on silk, 59.4x47 cm, China, Yüan dynasty, from *Portraits of the Yüan Emperors* (Yüan-tai Ti pan-shen-hsiang 元代帝半身像), Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

Fig. 3B. Portrait of Chabi, album leaf, ink and color on silk, 61.5x48 cm, China, Yüan dynasty, from *Portraits of the Yüan Empresses* (Yüan-tai ti-hou pan-shen-hsiang 元代帝后半身像), Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

The large portraits of emperors and empresses have not been preserved. But a painted album that could have served as the model for enlarged portraits has been preserved: *Portraits of the Yüan Emperors and Empresses* (Yüan-tai ti-hou-hsiang 元代帝后像; now in the National Palace Museum; Figs. 3A-3B). Although the models in the album are half-length, the enlarged, finished portraits were full figures in a seated position (on a chair?) destined for the Ying-t'ang. The art historian Ching An-ning 景安寧 believes that the portraits of Khubilai and Chabi on the Taipei album may have been original works

²¹Yüan-shih, chüan 134, Lieh-chüan 列傳: T'ang Jen-tzu 唐仁祖, 3253-3254.

by the Nepalese artist Arniko (A-ni-ke 阿尼哥, 1245-1306).²² The later portraits have been done in a similar style, by Chinese artists, such as Li Hsiao-yen 李肖岩 for the faces, and lesser craftsmen for the hats, hair and robes. The costumes, hats and hair braided into loops are all characteristic of the Yüan dynasty.²³

Other isolated half-length portraits that have been preserved, include a portrait of Chinggis Khan rediscovered in the Beijing History Museum in 1953,²⁴ and a portrait of Khubilai from a 13th century original preserved in the Confucius Temple at Ch'ü-fu 曲阜 (Shantung 山東 province).²⁵ These portraits, as well as the figure of Khubilai in the painting *Khubilai Khan Hunting* (Yüan-shih-tzu ch'u-lieh-t'u 元世祖出獵圖), allow us to say that the likeness of the portrait was relatively important.

It is not known if the emperor's portraits were consecrated or not, but their location in the temple show that they were considered as something between Buddhist icons and Chinese ancestor paintings. The enlarged portraits were produced in triplicate and distributed to Buddhist monasteries across China as formal public displays of the sovereign's image. There was therefore a multiplication of two-dimensional images of deceased emperors, sculpture being apparently excluded.



Fig. 4A and 4B. Mandala of Vajrabhairava, k'e-szu, 246.1x208.3 cm, China, ca. 1328-29 or after 1332, The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York (Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1992 (1992.54). Detail: two emperors, Tug Temür and Khoshila, on the lower left of the thangka and their respective consorts Budashiri and Babusha on the lower right.

²²Jing Anning (Ching An-ning), "The Portraits of Khubilai Khan and Chabi by Anige (1245-1306), a Nepali Artist at the Yüan Court," *Artibus Asiae*, 54:1/2 (1994): 40-86.

²³Yü Hui 余輝, "Yüan-tai Kung-t'ing Hui-hua-shih Chi Chia-tso K'ao-pien 元代宮廷繪畫史及佳作考辨: Part II," *Ku-kung-po-wu-yüan Yüan-k'an* 故宮博物院院刊 89 (May 2000): 32; *Ta-han Te Shih-chieh: Meng-yüan Shih-tai Te To-yüan Wen-hua Yü I-shu*, eds. Shih Shou-ch'ien and Ko Wan-chang (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2001), 288.

²⁴Tung-t'ang 東堂, "Ch'eng-chi-szu Han Hua-hsiang-pa 成吉思汗畫像跋," *Wen-wu* 文物 144 (Oct. 1962): 17-18.

²⁵Arthur Waley, *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (London: Ernest Benn, 1923), Pl. XXX.

In the Ying-t'ang were also displayed thangka mandalas the same size as the individual imperial portraits, also in *k'e-szu*, and woven in the same imperial workshops as the portraits.²⁶ One of these mandalas – the Vajrabhairava mandala – has been preserved in The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York (Figs. 4A-4B). In the bottom left and right corners of the thangka, two emperors (Tug Temür – Emperor Wen-tsung 文宗, r. 1329–1332, and his elder brother Khoshila who reigned briefly in 1329 as Emperor Ming-tsung 明宗) and their respective consorts, Budashiri and Babusha, are identified by Tibetan inscriptions.²⁷

TWO-DIMENSIONAL PORTRAITS OF PRINCES DURING THE NORTHERN YÜAN (1368-1635)

Three temples preserve portraits of Mongol Khans of the Northern Yüan dynasty. The first is a painting of donors in Maidariin juu (Mei-tai-chao 美岱召), west of Hohhot 呼和浩特, where the Chinggisid nobility is represented below a 7-m high painting of Tsongkhapa on the west wall of the back shrine of the Assembly Hall (Fig. 5).²⁸ The two princesses who patronized this monastery – one of the oldest of the Buddhist revival – are both represented: on the right, Jönggen Khatun (known in Chinese as San-niang-tzu 三娘子), Altan Khan's famous third wife (ca. 1550-1612) faces her third husband, who bends towards her in a respectful attitude (Fig. 6). On the other side of the painting, the princess Machag Khatun (or Uran Beiji, ca. 1546-1625) faces the Maidar Khutukhtu. Both princesses were identified as emanations of Green Tārā and White Tārā in the colophons of sutras' translations. They are surrounded by 58 laymen and monks of much smaller size and two divinities. The scene is laden with Buddhist symbols.

This painting provides evidence of the incontestable authority of San-niang-tzu and her legitimacy to rule the Tümed Mongols. It is at the same time a painting of Buddhist donors, a painting for the worship of San-niang-tzu as the emanation of a bodhisattva, and a commemorative, funerary painting. The temple preserved the funerary stupa of one of princesses (in the Ling-t'a-tian 靈塔殿).

Other thangka-like paintings of 16th-century nobles have been lost, such as a portrait of Altan Khan with his standard, and eight portraits of San-niang-tzu on hanging scrolls.

²⁶Yüan-tai Hua-su Chi 元代畫塑記 (Beijing: Jen-min Mei-shu Ch'u-pan-she, 1964), 1.

²⁷James C. Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardell, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 95-100, cat. no. 25.

²⁸Isabelle Charleux, "La Peinture des Donateurs du Temple de Maitreya en Mongolie Méridionale," *Arts Asiatiques* 54 (1999): 85-102.



Fig. 5. Mural painting representing Buddhist lay donors and monks of Altan Khan's family, main temple of Maidariin Juu, H: 2 m, L: 16 m, 17th century. © Chin Shen



Fig. 6. *San-niang-tzu*, detail of the right part of the Maidariin Juu donors' painting. © Jean-Claude Poncin

The second example is a series of three paintings of Abatai Khan (1554–1588), the Tüüshet Khan of Khalkha Mongolia, painted on a wall at Erdene Juu monastery (in present-day Mongolia). They are known from copies made by Dendev in 1950 (Fig. 7): the originals have not been preserved.²⁹ The Khan is depicted sitting cross-legged alone, or with his wife, and receiving the homage of monks and laymen. Abatai Khan, the founder of the monastery (1585–1586?), was buried there: Erdene Juu, like Maidar Temple, became a funerary shrine after the death of its founder. His large tent preserving his throne, weapons, and statues was worshipped there (and later transferred to Khüree).



Fig. 7. One of the three paintings representing **Abatai Khan**, copy by Dendev of a mural painting (not preserved) of Erdene Juu, H: 150 cm, L: 100 cm. Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts, Ulan-Bator. From Tsultem, 1986, 150.

A third example comes from the Arjai Caves 阿爾寨石窟 (Pai-yen-yao shih-k'u 百眼窯石窟) in Otog banner in Ordos territory. The caves were decorated since the Northern Wei 魏 dynasty (386–534), and were probably a Hsi-hsia 西夏 monastery before the Mongol conquest. A painting allegedly representing Chinggis Khan's family in Cave 28 caused much ink to flow (Fig. 8). The Chinese archaeologists imagine Arjai as a major Chinggisid sacrificial site under the Yüan dynasty, perhaps a shrine to perform rituals for Chinggis Khan. The painting of Cave 28 would be comparable to an imperial portraiture (*yü-jung*) for the sacrificial rites.³⁰ It is believed to represent Chinggis Khan surrounded by his main wife (on his right), his two concubines (on his left) and his four sons (farther on his left). In front of them is a table full of offerings. A hundred lay worshippers in procession bend or kneel towards the altar.

²⁹ N. Tsultem, *Development of the Mongolian National Style Painting: Mongol Zurag in Brief* (Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House, 1986), 150.

³⁰ Pa-t'u Chi-jih Ka-la 巴圖吉日嘎拉 and Yang Hai-ying 楊海英, *A-er-chai Shih-k'u: Ch'eng-chi-szu Han Te Fo-chiao Chi-nien-t'ang Hsing-shuai-shih* 阿爾寨石窟—成吉思汗的佛教紀念堂興衰史 (Tokyo: Fukyosha Pub., 2005), 81-82; Wang Ta-fang 王大方, Pa-t'u Chi-jih Ka-la and Chang Wen-fang 張文芳, "Pai-yen-yao Shih-k'u Te Ying-chien Nien-tai Chi Pi-hua Chu-yao Nei-jung Ch'u-lun 百眼窯石窟的營建年代及壁畫主要內容初論," in *Nei-meng-ku Wen-wu K'ao-ku Wen-chi*, ed. Li I-yu (Beijing: Chung-kuo Ta-pai-k'o Ch'üan-shu Ch'u-pan-she, 1994), 573-574.



Fig. 8. Painting of donors, detail, south wall, lower register (120x50 cm), right to the entrance, Cave no. 28 at Arjai (Otog, Ordos). Drawing by I. Charleux

It is important to notice that this painting covers only a small part of the south wall (to the right of the entrance) of the cave, which is dedicated to tutelary deities (*vidam*) and to Tibetan masters. Its location indicates that Chinggis Khan was not the main object of worship: Chinggis Khan, if it is him, is represented as a Buddhist lay donor (although it could also be a Tantric priest because of his three-fold crown). The conical hats, costumes and general style and composition suggest a much later date (Northern Yüan or Ch'ing dynasty).

In Cave 31 dedicated to Śākyamuni, monks and laymen are depicted under a painting of Vaiśravaṇa to the left of the door. They also figure as Buddhist donors worshipping the Buddha on the north wall. Arjai was above all a Buddhist monastery, where Chinggis Khan may also have been worshipped.

PAINTINGS OF MONGOL RULERS IN THE CH'ING DYNASTY

Ch'ing dynasty Mongol portraits came under the influence of Sino-Manchu and Buddhist arts:

The religious portraits made of various materials (painting, silk appliqué, statuary, embalmed corpses) saw important developments, while the lay portraits were reduced to a few small donors at the bottom of the paintings.

The couple portraits of rulers disappear, sometimes replaced by Sino-Manchu-style individual ancestor portraits, such as the portraits of *jasag* lineages kept in the Ancestor Hall of their residence.

Thangka-like portraits of a few great ancestors are also found. Chinggis Khan, who was incorporated in the Buddhist pantheon during the 17th century as an incarnation of Vajrapāṇi and a son of Buddhist deities, is represented in the form of the deity Süld tengri.

Three Ch'ing dynasty "thangkas" deserve a special mention. The two first examples are Buddhist paintings; the third is strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhist thangkas:

Abatai Khan is represented at the centre of a thangka in an imaginary palace surrounded by miniature scenes from his life (Fig. 9).³¹ Below him stands his monastery, Erdene Juu. The central figure and his attendants are in fact copied from the one of the above mentioned paintings of Abatai Khan at Erdene Juu. But here, Abatai has a *vajra*-topped hat and holds lotuses that carry a sword and a *vajra*: the king is depicted with the attributes of a bodhisattva. His position, palace and courtiers mirror that of the king of Shambala in 19th-century thangkas.



Fig. 9. *Abatai Khan*, central part of a cloth thangka, unknown painter, 62x86 cm, Central Museum, Ulan-Bator

In a thangka, which is the main object of worship in the ancestors' shrine of Khutugtai Sechen khong taiji (1540–1586) and Sagang Sechen (1604-?) in Ordos (now in Shan-hsi 山西 province), Chinggis Khan is depicted as a fierce protective deity, topped by three lamas (Fig. 10). Below him stands Khutugtai Sechen khong taiji, and on the right, breaking the general symmetry, sits Sagang Sechen, the author of the *Erdeni-yin Tobci* (Meng-ku yüan-liu 蒙古源流), smaller than his grandfather. The distinction between the fierce *dharmapāla* Chinggis Khan surrounded by flames, and his two famous descendants, depicted as motionless human-like ancestors, is striking.

A vertical painting of the imperial family, said to be a copy of a late Yüan painting preserved in the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum at Ejen Khoroo 伊金霍洛旗, Ordos (Fig. 11), represents Chinggis Khan with his main wife surrounded by sons or courtiers. Because of the thangka format, the individual thrones with headboards, the Buddhist halo, the Buddhist-style offerings such as jewels, and the hats and costumes so different from Yüan models, this painting can probably be dated from the Ch'ing dynasty.

³¹Tsultem, *op. cit.*, Fig. 152.



Fig. 10. Thangka worshipped at Sasa (Ta-fen-t'an 大墳灘), Üüsin banner, now in Shan-hsi province. It represents **Chinggis Khan as a dharmapāla**, below are Khutugtai Sechen khong taiji and Sagang Sechen. From Qasbiligtü C. and M. Qasbaγan-a, *Ordos-un soyol-un öb*, Baotou: Yi meng minjian wenxue yanjiuhui, 1987.



Fig. 11. Chinggis Khan, his main consort and his family. Copy of a Yüan dynasty painting preserved in the Mausoleum of Chinggis Khan, Ejen Khoroo banner, Ordos (probably Ch'ing dynasty). From Walther Heissig, "Les religions de la Mongolie", in Giuseppe Tucci and Walther Heissig, *Les Religions du Tibet et de la Mongolie*, transl. from German by R. Sailley, Paris: Payot, 1973 (*Les Religions de l'humanité*) [Stuttgart, 1970]: 421, fig. 11 (from Dylykov, S. D.,

Edzen-choro, Moscow: Filologija i istorija mongol'skich narodov, 1959. The cup of the Khatun is visible on the painting but had been forgotten in the drawing.

BETWEEN ANCESTORS AND WORSHIPPING DONORS

The Mongol sovereigns were depicted in three different roles:

As the main subjects of the painting, they are depicted alone (Figs. 3A-3B), surrounded by courtiers, servants or sons presenting offerings (Fig. 11); or in the middle of a complex *thangka* (Fig. 9). This last example showed that Buddhism played a prominent role in legitimizing Mongol rule: Abatai Khan is explicitly depicted with the specific attributes of a bodhisattva, and recalls the *thangkas* of the emperor Ch'ien-lung, depicted as an emanation of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.

As Buddhist donors, they are depicted in a three-quarters view, turned towards a larger painting of Buddha. They are of small size, often at the bottom of the painting. This is a classical subject in Buddhist painting, long before the Mongols appeared. In Mo-kaos caves at Tun-huang (Cave no. 332) for instance, Yüan dynasty Mongol donors are painted on both sides of the entrance, lined up behind each other, and facing the main Buddha image. These portraits commemorate their donations, showing their generosity to the public. In the mandala of Vajrabhairava, in contrast with the large imperial portraits, the emperors are represented as very small-scale worshippers, joining their hands in prayer, on the same level as the *dharmapāla*, under a large Buddhist figure (Figs. 4A-4B).

In a third category, the Mongol Khan appears as a Buddhist donor in the bottom of a larger Buddha image, and at the same time as an ancestor worshipped by smaller characters. He adopts the frontal position of the *cakravartin* king, and the monks are in a position of inferiority in relation to the Chinggisid aristocracy.

In Maidaiin Juu, San-niang-tzu sits in a frontal position. Her jewellery, the yellow colour of her robe, her large earlobes, the *amrita* vase she holds, and the two small monks on her sides evokes a bodhisattva or a Buddha (Fig. 7). The location of the donors' painting at the same level as the viewer's eyes, as well as its large size (16x2 m), shows the donors' importance. The main character of the Arjai painting in Cave 28 sits frontally; the others, slightly turned towards him, make the worshipping *mudrā* (*anjali mudrā*; Fig. 8). The painting of Abatai Khan at Erdene Juu was probably located under a larger painting of Buddha: in one of the scenes, 10 men pay homage to what was probably a Buddha or a divinity, sitting or kneeling in a respectful attitude, presenting cups full of offerings. Abatai and his wife are the only frontal characters. In Fig. 10, Khutugtai Sechen is depicted as a divinized ancestor but his location below the divinized Chinggis Khan makes him a kind of emanation of Chinggis Khan, while Sagang Sechen discreetly stays in the background.

The iconic frontal representation and size of these Northern Yüan and Ch'ing ancestors-donors seems to be an innovation in Buddhist painting, and contrasts with the usual three-quarters posture of Central Asian, Chinese and Tibetan donors, as seen in the Tun-huang and Turfan caves, the temples of Western Tibet (of Ku-ke 古格), and in Tibetan *thangkas*.

THE ENTHRONED COUPLE

The Mongols made eclectic choices when representing their rulers, borrowing themes from the Chinese, Turkic, Uyghur and other traditions, and rejecting others. For instance, the Mongols of East Asia chose not to represent their monarch on horseback, in contrast to Turkic kings, a theme taken over by the Ilkhanid rulers as can be seen in the book-paintings from the Ilkhanid period. The Mongol king wears no weapons and is shown enthroned, peacefully ruling his empire. Unlike the Turkic stone men, the Mongol stone figures are unarmed.

The Khan is often painted on a throne with his main wife. The Khatun has the same size and sits on an equal footing with the Khan. It shows the importance of the couple, or of the whole family dominated by the couple, depicted as equals. A similar arrangement, found in Ilkhanid manuscript paintings, shows the enthroned king with his queen in an open air courtly reception, especially in the *Jami 'al-tavarikh* by Rashīd ad-Dīn (Figs. 12-13).



Fig. 12 (left). Enthronement scene depicting the ruler and his consort surrounded by members of the court, detail, *Jami 'al-tavarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles) by Rashīd ad-Dīn, illustration from the Diez Albums, ink, colors and gold on paper, Iran (possibly Tabriz), early 14th century, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung (Diez A fol. 70, S. 10)

Fig. 13 (right). **Tolui** and his court, *Jami 'al-tavarikh*, 14th century, by Rashīd ad-Dīn, Ms Sup persan 1113, folio 164v, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

The representation of couples is also found in several Yüan tomb paintings uncovered in northern China and Inner Mongolia (Figs. 14-15). These portraits of the tomb occupants

follow a Khitan/Liao 遼 and Jürchen/Chin 金 tradition of tomb decoration, itself modeled on a Chinese tradition. The man and his wife face inward in a three-quarters pose and sit on stools or on a folding chair. In the P'u-ch'eng-mu 蒲城墓 Tomb, the tomb mistress is a Sino-Mongol wearing the *bogtag* (Ku-ku-kuan 姑姑冠). The other women all appear Chinese by their garments, headdress and pose. These couples are probably partly sinicized Mongols, mixed-race couples, or Mongols who chose to be depicted in the Chinese fashion.



Fig. 14. Portrait of the tomb couple on the north wall, P'u-ch'eng tomb, Tung-erh 洞耳 village, P'u-ch'eng District, Shen-hsi province, 1269. From Liu Heng-wu 劉恒武, *P'u-ch'eng Yüan-mu pi-hua so-i* 蒲城元墓壁畫瑣議, *K'ao-ku yü wen-wu* 考古與文物 (2000-1), 67-70.



Fig. 15. Painting of the tomb occupants, detail, Yüan-pao-shan 元寶山 Tomb, north wall (L: 2.43 m; H: 0.94 m), Ch'ih-feng Municipality. From Hsiang Ch'un-sung 項春松, *Nei Meng-ku Chifeng shih Yüan-pao-shan Yüan-tai pi-hua mu* 內蒙古赤峰市元寶山元代壁畫墓, *Wen-wu* 文物 1983-4, 40-46.

At court as well as in the yurt, Mongolian women traditionally sat to their husband's left, the right being the honorific place. In the Taipei album, the emperors' faces are slightly turned to the right and the empresses' faces to the left, so we can assume that the emperors and empresses portraits were hung side by side or facing each other, forming an equal pair, the wife seated at her husband's left (Figs. 3A-3B).

The reverse, seen in two tomb murals (San-yen-ching 三眼井, Ch'ih-feng 赤峰 Municipality, Inner Mongolia, and Pei-yü-k'ou 北峪口, Wen-shui 文水, Shan-hsi), seems to be an "anomaly," probably a Chinese influence. In a political document depicting Altan Khan and his wife (probably San-niang-tzu), the Khatun sits on the Khan's right (Fig. 16).³² The switched position might have been intended to fit with Chinese customs, and to please the Ming emperor. Or the letter was rewritten and redrawn by the Ming officials before being presented to the emperors, as was usual for this kind of document. In other cases, the position of power of a woman such as San-niang-tzu, or her great age, can reverse the usual gender position. A related question is the fastening of garments on the right that served as a basic ethnic marker distinguishing Mongols from Chinese.



Fig. 16. Altan Khan and his wife in a yurt in front of Hohhot and the Ta-chao 大召 (Hung-tz'u-szu 弘慈寺), painting which accompanied a letter written on a horizontal scroll, dated August 17, 1580, addressed to the Ming emperor. Institute of Eastern Studies, attached to the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. © Isabelle Charleux

But why choose to paint the couple to represent the Khan's power? The explanation can be found in the role of women in Mongol society and in the conception of power. The Mongol queens enjoyed a certain authority, independence and privileges, appeared in public with the ruler, participated in feasts and took part in the assemblies. A few

³² Aleksej M. Pozdneev, "Novo-otkrytyj Pamjatnik Mongol'skoj Pis'mennosti Vremen Dinastii Min," *Vosčnye Zametky* 14 (1895): 367-381; Isabelle Charleux, *Temples et Monastères de Mongolie-Intérieure* (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques & Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, 2006), 48-49.

"remarkable women" of the imperial family, especially widows, played a decisive role in Mongol politics, or even ruled the domain (such as Töregene Khatun, and, later, San-niang-tzu). Their representation on the throne could be the recognition of their political influence. It must be noted that although the majority of Mongol rulers were polygamous, only one spouse is usually depicted: the first wife sat on the throne with her husband in official banquets. Only the Arjai Cave 28 and Hou-te-sheng 後德勝 Tomb (Liang-ch'eng-hsien 涼城縣 district, Inner Mongolia) paintings show the Khan with several wives.

I have another interpretation: it seems that a double, diarchic principle, male and female, is inherent in the representation of power in the Mongolian world, as it is in the supernatural world (as seen in the binary figures of deities, such as the two complementary ancestors Bulagat and Ehirit of the Buriats, or the Gods of the left and right wings in the old pantheon). The portraits of couples disappear after Mongolia is incorporated within the Sino-Manchu Empire.

FROM THE THREE-QUARTERS VIEW TO THE FRONTAL VIEW

In 13th–15th century portraits, the ruling couple is depicted in a three-quarters view, looking at each other. They often adopt a relaxed position, asymmetric and nonchalant that conveys familiarity and humanity.³³ In Ilkhanid manuscripts and Yüan tomb paintings (Figs. 12-15),³⁴ the main characters have their hands on the knees, or one arm rests on the armchair; legs are open, or one of the legs is slightly folded, a posture close to the "royal ease posture" from Buddhist paintings of kings. They generally sit on a folding chair (*chiao-i* 交椅) – a symbol of prestige and power in Chinese society – favoured by the Mongol nomadic elite.

Post-Yüan portraits show a frontal view that can be called "a rigid iconic posture" (Figs. 5-11). The frontal view is certainly an influence of Buddhist painting, because it appears along with a profusion of Buddhist attributes and objects (halos, *khatag*, ritual scarves, jewels, eight auspicious symbols, wish-granting jewels, *cintāmaṇi*, etc.). The frontal posture shows that the main characters are worshipped as Buddhas (especially when they have a halo) and/or as ancestors. Power seems to be more impersonal and strict. They generally sit cross-legged on a throne or on a cushion: in Buddhist Mongolia, the cross-legged position is the most honorific posture.

Secondary figures, depicted in small dimensions following the principle of "hieratic scale" in Buddhist art, can either be sons, courtiers, servants, and/or worshippers. They adopt a posture of humility expressing deference or subordination: standing or kneeling to offer a gift in a three-quarters posture. They join their hands in worshipping, present a jewel, hold Buddhist symbols, and play music.

³³See also the illustration in *Shih-lin Kuang-chi* 事林廣記, ed. Ch'en Yüan-ching 陳元靚, vol. 2 (Beijing : Chung-hua Shu-chü, 1963), 1330-1333.

³⁴We know that traditions from the Mongolian court of China may have made their way at Central Asia through book-printing.

THE CUP, THE STANDARD, AND OTHER OLD SYMBOLS OF ROYAL POWER

The standard, one of the main symbols of power in the Mongolian world believed to embody the soul of the Khan, is seen in one of Abatai Khan's painting in Erdene Juu and in the painting of Chinggis Khan and Khutugtai Sechen khong taiji (see bottom left, where four standards surround a fifth one; Fig. 10). In the paintings of Ejen Khoroo (Fig. 11) and Erdene Juu, attendants holding a quiver with arrows, a bow and a horse, are reminiscent of ancient Türkic compositions. Bows, arrows and quivers were also symbols of royal power in the Türkic world (but are never seen in the sovereign's hands). These paintings seem to be representative of an ancient style. But these ancient symbols are mixed with Buddhist symbols in Buddhist or *thangka*-like paintings.

The Mongol sovereign often holds a cup or a bowl at breast level, raises the cup to drink it, or offers it to his Khatun (Figs. 1, 11). The cup seems to be the most characteristic non-Buddhist attribute. It is linked with the fact that the couple receives a cult and is fed.

The stone men's cup belongs within a funerary context and is obviously a heritage of the Türkic period. Corpses were also found with a cup near their hand in tombs. The stone men's cup is thought to contain (symbolically or materially) alcohol, water, or perhaps offerings of fat, burnt meat. It may be an allusion to the funerary banquet given to the deceased.

Alcohol is a fundamental element of Mongol rituals: libations are offered in cups to feed the spirits, gods, and ancestors. Sprinklings made towards Heaven and the four cardinal points remain a daily gesture of rural Mongols. At the end of a sacrifice, after the offering of alcohol and meat, they are shared and consumed by the participants (see the sacrifice to Chinggis Khan at Ejen Khoroo). Receiving a share of meat and drink means that the participants are securing the blessing of the ancestors or of the divinity.

The cup in the hands of a monarch in regalia (on a throne) also evokes the "cup-rite" performed in enthronement ceremonies, in the investiture of a vassal (oath of allegiance), and (blood brotherhood of unrelated men in an equal relationship), and wedding rituals in the Inner-Asian nomadic world since 1000 CE.³⁵ The "communion" (drinking the same beverage at the same time) seals a contract between two parties (alliance, marriage) or between a king and his subjects. In Mongol paintings, cups are also raised by courtiers paying homage to the monarch. The gesture of offering a cup, and the kneeling posture, meant servitude, acceptance of vassalage, and worship.

So here, funerary rites and worshipping rites paralleled the cup-rite of royal ceremonies; these distinct ceremonies visually converge in commemorative paintings where enthroned kings and queens are worshipped as ancestors. But with the 16th-century Buddhist renaissance, the cup, at least in the Khan and the Khatun's hands, is often replaced by a Buddhist attribute such as a *khatag* (Fig. 7), a rosary (Figs. 5, 17) or a *cintāmaṇi* (Fig. 5).

³⁵ Robert Bleichsteiner, "Zeremonielle Trinksitten und Raumordnung bei den Turco-mongolischen Nomaden," *Archiv für Völkerkunde* VI-VII (1951-1952): 181-208, p. 192 sq.; Emel Esin, "The Cup Rites in Inner-Asian and Turkish Rites," in *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens: in Memoriam Kurt Erdmann*, ed. Oleg Grabar (Istanbul: Istanbul üniversitesi edebiyât fakültesi, 1969), 224-261.

CONCLUSION

As in medieval Europe, the portrait developed from funerary statues to a political and religious symbol linking the past sovereign to the present ruler. Sculpted portraits were supports for the soul, used to feed and worship the ancestors. Under the Buddhist influence of Khubilai's reign, the *ongon* were replaced by painted and woven portraits, and statues were reserved for Buddhas and holy lamas.

The evolution of these portraits reveals the convergence between traditional beliefs in the deceased protector ancestors, the importance of family and clan, Chinese-style ancestor worship, and Buddhist ideas of a *cakravartin* ruler. Chinggis Khan was worshipped first as an ancestor, then as a deity, and later forcibly integrated into the Buddhist pantheon. Other Mongol rulers were represented as bodhisattvas and donors at the same time. The various meanings of the rulers' portraits were often interwoven: commemoration, veneration of a divinized ancestor, legitimization of a living ruler through his ancestors' portraits, and exaltation of the devotion of Buddhist donors.

Originally created to serve the ancestor worship of their descendants, once exposed within Buddhist monasteries, they became relatively public objects exposing the Khan's power, domination and privileges to visitors' eyes. The Ilkhanid illustrated manuscripts exalting the history of the Mongols such as the *Jami 'al-tavarikh* also had political and propagandist aims.³⁶

The ancient Inner Asian heritage of frontal representation and cup-rites had to compete with three-quarters and relaxed postures and with Buddhist attributes. But in any case, the Mongols chose a pacific representation of the sovereign, with his main wife, and often his whole family. These portraits also give us much information on self-representation, costume, gender status, ancestor worship and conventions, reflecting the highly personalized nature of politics for Mongols.

³⁶Robert Hillenbrand, "The Arts of the Book in Ilkhanid Iran," in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, eds. Linda Komaroff and Steffano Carboni (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 134-167.