Name: _____

Date: _____

Kublai Khan and the Mongol Empire

From Kublai Khan was born into the family of Genghis Khan and grew up a warrior on the Mongolian steppe. After decades of rivalry among Genghis's descendants, Kublai emerged as the empire's most powerful ruler. Unlike his grandfather, who spent his life conquering new lands, Kublai faced a different challenge: governing the vast territories the Mongols had already won.

The First Foreign Ruler

For more than a century before Kublai's time, the Song Dynasty had been retreating south as it lost territory in the north. In 1271, Kublai completed the conquest, becoming the first foreign ruler to govern the entire country.

But Kublai did not rule like a foreign conqueror. While Genghis Khan had governed from a mobile court across the steppe, Kublai established a permanent capital at Beijing. The city lay closer to the Mongol homeland than the old Chinese capitals farther south. From there, he could govern China while remaining connected to the world from which the Mongols had come.

Governing a Vast Empire

By Kublai's time, he and other descendants of Genghis Khan controlled the largest land empire in history, stretching from the Korean Peninsula in the east to Hungary in the west and as far south as Vietnam. The Mongols did not try to control every town and village directly. Instead, they demanded loyalty, taxes, and obedience while allowing many local rulers to remain in power. This network of messengers, roads, and trade routes helped hold the vast empire together.

A merchant traveling from China to Persia might pass through many cultures and languages, but he moved through territory ultimately under Mongol rule. Bandits, rebellious governors, and rival armies all risked drawing the Mongols' wrath.

Keeping the Empire Together

A specialized communication system linked these distant parts of the empire. Emissaries carrying official badges could obtain fresh horses at relay stations, allowing messages and orders to travel quickly across thousands of miles.

While the illiterate Genghis Khan relied on captured scribes, Kublai grew up in a palace surrounded by scholars and officials. This upbringing fueled a genuine interest in the cultures he ruled. He welcomed visitors from many cultures. Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and traditional Mongol priests were all respected. Instead of forcing everyone to become Mongol, Kublai borrowed any idea that worked. His flexibility was his strength.

One Emperor, Two Cultures

Many Chinese people admired Kublai's ability to bring stability after years of warfare, but to many others, Kublai was an outsider. They resented the Mongols as a privileged ruling class who held advantages ordinary citizens lacked. Kublai created one of the most powerful empires in history, a feat that would prove difficult for his descendants to maintain.

The Fall of the Mongols

Kublai outlived his son, so his grandson, Temür Khan, inherited power in 1294 and continued Kublai's policies. Later rulers proved less capable. Soon, a series of natural disasters beset China. The Yellow River flooded repeatedly, washing away millions of acres of farmland and killing an estimated six million people. This famine and disease, combined with corruption among the ruling class, convinced many Chinese people that the Mandate of Heaven no longer favored the Mongols. In 1368, a Buddhist peasant who later became Emperor Hongwu led a rebellion that drove the foreigners from China, beginning the Ming Dynasty.

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Fill in the Blanks

The Mongols lived on the s__e__pe, a vast g__a__s__a__d stretching from Eastern E__r__pe to M__n__o__ia. It was in this h__r__h environment that T__m__j__n was born in _____ CE. After his f__t__er was p__i__o__ed, his tribe a__a__d__n__d the family, forcing them to survive by s__a__e__g__ng. As a young man, T__m__j__n gained loyal followers and built a growing ar__y. When a rival tribe k__d__a__p__d his wife, Temujin organized an a__l__a__ce and r__s__u__d her, demonstrating that he could u__i__e different groups. He rewarded l__y__l__y rather than *f__m__ly background. By 1206, Temujin had u__i__ed most of the M__n__ol tribes and was proclaimed G__n__h__s K__an, or "U__i__e__s__l Ruler." Genghis Khan never learned how to r__ad, but he was a military g__n__us. He organized the Mongols into a d__s__i__l__n__d fighting force. As they expanded their empire, Genghis Khan's w__r__i__rs often offered cities a clear choice: s__r__e__d__r peacefully or face d__s__r__c__i__n. When Genghis Khan died, his empire stretched from the P__c__f__c Ocean to C__n__r__l Asia.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Why does the text argue that it was necessary for the Mongols to be self-reliant and brutal?

*2. How did an event that occurred when Temujin was nine-ears-old influence the rest of this life?

3. What does Genghis Khan mean? Was that an appropriate title for Temujin?

*4. In your opinion, was Ganghis Khan a good leader? Was he a good person? Use facts from the article to defend your answer.

*Higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

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