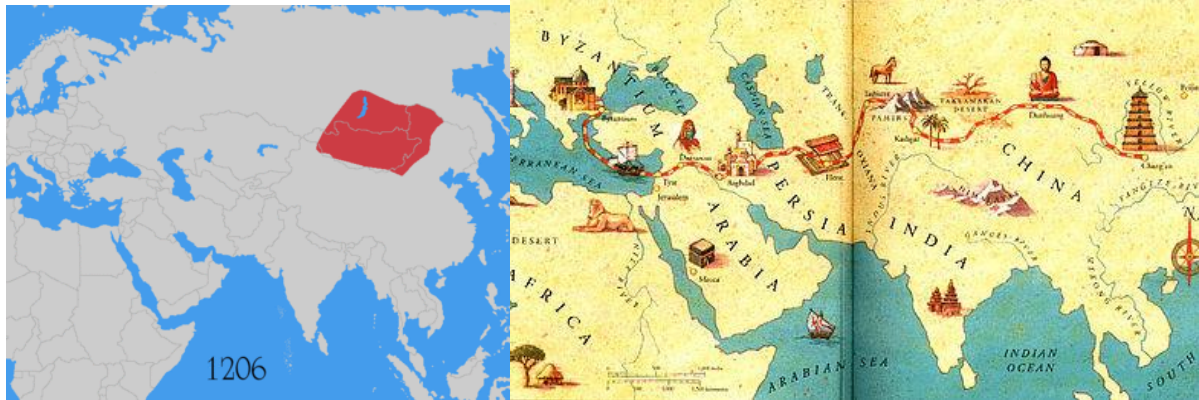


# MONGOL EMPIRE



**Mongol Empire Map**

**Silk Road**

## **Mongols 1: Everyone Else: Dead**

### **The Mongol Empire**

**(1206-1294)**

Generations after Genghis's death and his sons and grandsons have picked up where the big Khan had left off. The Mongol Horde had pushed into Russia and Egypt in the west; finally making it to the city of Vienna in Austria where, finding not much of value to loot, turned around and went home. They even conquered the Song Dynasty of China, which not even Genghis had been able to achieve.

The Silk Road was the lifeline of the empire. Spices, pearls, cotton, and lapis lazuli (a blue gem), came from India and Central Asia. Europe supplied salt, furs and iron. China supplied the silks and fancy pottery. But the old Silk Road could be a dangerous place for caravans loaded with priceless goods. If the weather didn't kill you then the bandits probably would.

The Mongols solved such problems by creating services stations, called yams, every twenty miles to protect travelers and provide a place to get a hot meal and place to lay your head. The yams were part motel, part post office, and part military barracks. They made traveling the Silk Road safe and efficient which is always good for business. It is said that in the time of the Mongol Empire a caravan loaded with gold could travel from one end of the Silk Road to the other without needing a bodyguard. And that is exactly

how the Mongols wanted it. The Mongols also created the world's first passport that travelers hung around their necks. Each passport was made of a different material engraved with a symbol that told how important the traveler was.

### **The Silk Road: Information Superhighway**

To the Persians, Europeans, and Chinese the Mongols were nothing more than barbarians. But these barbarians didn't go around burning libraries and using scholars for target practice. No, they were a new breed of enlightened barbarians. The Mongols embraced new ideas and technologies. Whenever they conquered a city, they divided the people into groups based on their skills. Doctors, teachers, engineers, and scientists were sent back to Mongol Headquarters to put their knowledge to good use. The same thing happened to those who were good with their hands. The Mongols always had a use for blacksmiths, furniture makers, jewelers, and scribes. Even if you didn't have a skill, no worries, the Mongols always found a place for you. You could either join the Mongol army or if you were unfit for even that type of work the Mongols would drive you in front of their armies so that your body could fill the moat, making it easier to attack the walls. It's nice to be needed.

The Mongols were unlike many of their historical barbarian brothers in that they embraced education as way of moving their empire forward. Genghis Khan never went to school a day in his life, and neither did any Mongol for that matter. But that didn't stop him realizing the value of writing. The Mongol script was adopted from the Muslim Uyghur people of western China, using Arabic as its alphabet. On the steppes the Mongols could pass down their laws through campfire stories but an empire is too big for that. Using scribes (abducted from a city they had conquered), the Mongols had books from all over the empire translated into Mongol. The Mongols brought Chinese doctors to the Middle East and Islamic scholars went the other way. Ideas like acupuncture and the use of Chinese herbs were taught to Arab doctors. Indian, Arab, and Greek surgical knowledge helped to improve Chinese medical practices.

The Mongols carried new inventions back and forth across Eurasia. The Middle invention of the triangular plow helped to revolutionize agriculture in China while the Chinese blast furnace made European metal working easier and stronger. Astronomy, mathematics, engineering, banking, there was no field of knowledge that the Mongols didn't get involved in: except perhaps AP Calculus, curiosity has its limits after all.

All of this knowledge was recorded on another Chinese invention; paper. Paper was lightweight and unlike the animal skins (parchment) being used at the time, were cheap and easy to make. Paper mills spread along the Silk Road and revolutionized the way information was transmitted. Think of it as the internet revolution of the 13th century. The invention of paper also came with another handy Chinese idea: the printing press. The Chinese invented the idea of a movable type printing press around 1041. This handy invention made writing books by hand obsolete. The Europeans wouldn't discover this technology until 1451 when a German inventor named Johannes Gutenberg created a movable type printing press.