Lecture 15. The Mongol Interregnum and the Ming Reaction

Mongol confederation formed under Chinggis (ca. 1163-1227), elected Great Khan in 1206
--Chinggis solely interested in conquest and booty
--Successors persuaded that taxing rich sedentary societies more profitable than plunder
--Division of Mongol empire into four parts (Central Asia, China, Persia, Russia)

Khubilai Khan (Great Khan, r. 1260-94)
--Focused on creating Chinese-style empire; declared himself emperor of Yuan 元 Dynasty in 1271
--Moved great khan’s capital to Dadu 大都 (site of modern Beijing)

Revival of Silk Road Trade
--Muslim merchants chief beneficiaries; formed partnerships to finance caravan trade
--Ortoq: financial agents to Mongol rulers; tax-farming privileges in China
--Maritime commerce also thrived under Mongol rule in China

Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in China
--Khubilai completed conquest of Southern Song territories in 1279
--Mongol strategy of rule founded on policy of ethnic hierarchy
   (1) 72 Mongol tribes
   (2) “affiliated peoples” (semuren 色目人): non-Chinese groups who served Mongols
   (3) “Han” 漢人: former subjects of Jin empire in north China
   (4) “Southerners” 南人: former subjects of Southern Song
--Privileges awarded strictly on basis of this ethnic classification
--Mongols also created hereditary occupational castes: soldiers, artisans, priests, scholars

Fall of Yuan and Rise of Ming (1368-1644)
--Mongol rulers of Yuan never shed steppe origins; remained a regime of conquerors
--Popular unrest in 1340s-50s led to civil war
--Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (Hongwu 洪武 Emperor, r. 1368-1644) restored Chinese rule under Ming dynasty
--Growth of absolutism under early Ming rulers
--Zhu deeply hostile to market economy; saw himself as defending welfare of people from rapacious officials & oppressive landlords/moneylenders
--Sought to create autarkic village economy insulated from marketplace
--Fiscal system based on in-kind taxation of land; labor service instead of money taxes; hereditary military and artisan castes
--Banned foreign trade; created pure fiat paper currency