

FYS 525, Topic 5: The Mongol Empire

Background: The Mongol Empire was, at its time, the largest in human history. The Mongol population was remarkably small, making its conquests even more improbably. The Mongols were especially successful at integrating newly conquered peoples into their empire.

Core Concepts:

1. Gains to trade. Voluntary trade benefits both parties. The concept of *comparative advantage* helps us understand trading patterns. Nations have started wars in order to open new markets to trade.
2. Institutions. Institutions refer to structures that promote better economic performance. These include courts, the rule of law, political systems, property rights, etc. The relationship between economies and institutions is complicated. Better institutions help economies but wealthier economies are able to afford better institutions. This makes understanding causation challenging.
3. Kinship. Different family structures (*e.g.* whether most marriages are to cousins or non-relatives) can have important economic impacts.
4. Kumis. This is fermented mare's milk. The Mongols drank it in abundance. OK, this isn't really a core concept, but it is striking how often it appears in first-hand sources from the time.

Key Questions:

1. How did the Mongols, with a population around 1 million, forge the largest empire the world have ever seen, and how did it last for 150 years?
2. Although the Mongols are best remembered for their military conquests, the Mongol empire also ushered in an extraordinary of trade and migration within the empire, and sometimes with other economies. Why was trade so important to the Mongols and why did it flourish within the Mongol empire?

3. The Mongol empire lasted 150 years, a very long time for such a small population. Its impact, however, would be far reaching and some historians consider it an integral part of the Black Death/Colombian Exchange/Industrial Revolution nexus that brought about the modern era. Why do they make this case?