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| Until about 20 years ago, most scholars of Mongol-era China emphasized the destructive influence of Mongol rule.One major scholar of Chinese history even wrote: "The Mongols brought violence and destruction to all aspects of China's civilization. [They were] insensitive to Chinese cultural values, distrustful of Chinese influences, and inept heads of Chinese government." This assessment fits in with the traditional evaluation of the Mongols as barbarians interested primarily in maiming, plundering, destroying, and killing.As a 13th-century Persian historian wrote of the Mongol campaigns: "With one stroke a world which billowed with fertility was laid desolate, and the regions thereof became a desert, and the greater part of the living, dead, and their skin and bones crumbling dust, and the mighty were humbled and immersed in the calamities of perdition."It is true that the Mongols, in their conquest of both North and South China, did considerable damage to these territories, and that great loss of life certainly ensued. The population of North China did decline somewhat, though earlier estimates that there was a catastrophic decline in population have subsequently been revised.It is also true that the Mongols eliminated one of the most basic of Chinese institutions — the civil service examinations. The examinations remained banned until 1315, and even after the ban was lifted, they were no longer the only means to officialdom for the Yuan Dynasty, the dynasty that the Mongols founded in 1271 C.E., as they had been in the past.The Mongols perceived China as just one section of their vast empire. And they classified the population of their domain in China into a hierarchy of four groups — with the native Chinese at the bottom. The Mongols, of course, were at the top; then came the non-Han, mostly Islamic population that was brought to China by the Mongols to help them rule; third were the northern Chinese; and at the very bottom of the rung were the southern Chinese.

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| Ghengis Khan and his Mongol armies rose to power at the end of the twelfth century, at a moment when few opposing rulers could put up much resistance to them.  The vast Mongol empire he created stretched from China to Europe, across which the Silk Routes functioned as efficient lines of communication as well as trade. Protected under the so-called *Pax Mongolica*, the Routes were particularly safe from raiders or aggressive tribes in this period, and great expeditions, such as the famous journey of Marco Polo in the late thirteenth century, became possible.

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| The Mongols promoted inter-state relations through the so-called "Pax Mongolica" — the Mongolian Peace.Having conquered an enormous territory in Asia, the Mongols were able to guarantee the security and safety of travelers. There were some conflicts among the various Mongol Khanates, but recognition that trade and travel were important for all the Mongol domains meant that traders were generally not in danger during the 100 years or so of Mongol domination and rule over Eurasia |

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The Mongol rulers were somewhat distrustful of the Confucian scholar-officials of China because they represented a different path for China than that which they themselves had conceived. These scholars, and other native Chinese, thus were not eligible for some of the top positions in the ruling government. |

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| The Mongol dynasty's relation to Islam, in particular, had tremendous impact on China's relations with the outside world.The Mongols recruited a number of Muslims to help in the rule of China, especially in the field of financial administration — Muslims often served as tax collectors and administrators. They were accorded extraordinary opportunities during the Mongol period because Khubilai Khan and the other Mongol rulers of China could not rely exclusively upon the conquered Chinese to help in ruling China. They needed outsiders, and the Muslims were among those who assisted Khubilai.The Mongols in China also recognized that Islamic scholars had made great leaps in the studies of astronomy and medicine, and they invited many specialists in those fields to come to China. Among those to make the trip was the Persian astronomerJamal Al-din, who helped the Chinese set up an observatory. Bringing with him many diagrams and advanced astronomical instruments from Persia, Jamal Al-din assisted the Chinese in developing a new, more accurate calendar.The Mongols were also impressed by the Persians' advances in medicine. They recruited a number of Persian doctors to China to establish an Office for Muslim Medicine, and the result was even greater contact between West Asia and East Asia |

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**The Mongol Invasions; Russia Breaks Free**

In the middle 1200’s the Mongols reached Kiev. They quickly overran the Russian state, killing many people. The Mongols held control of the area for more than 200 years. The Mongols had been fierce conquerors, but they were not harsh rulers. As long as the Russian people did not rebel, the Mongols let them keep their customs, including their Eastern Orthodox religion.

The Mongols made the Russians pay tribute, a sum of money that was owed every year. They used the Russian nobles to collect *tribute*. One of those nobles, Alexsander Nevsky, gained power. His *heirs* became princes of Moscow. They later used the city as their base of power.

Control by the Mongols had important effects on Russia. It isolated the Russians from western Europe. Russian society developed in its own way. Rule by the Mongols united many different areas of Russia under one central authority. Mongol rule also led to the rise of Moscow, which had a good location near three major rivers-the Dneiper, the Don, and the Volga.

Ivan I increased the influence of Moscow. Over time, Ivan and his successors added to the land that Moscow controlled. In the late 1400’s, under **Ivan III**, Russia grew to be a mighty empire. In 1453, the Byzantine Empire had fallen, defeated by the Turks. In 1472, Ivan married the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. From that time on he called himself czar-the Russian version of Caesar. In 1480, Ivan finally broke with the Mongols.