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TURKISHNESS AND ISLAM AMONG THE QARA KHITAI

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Among many of the contemporary Turkish Muslim people such as the Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Bashkirs, Nogais, Qara Qalpaks etc. one finds clans or tribes named Khitai/Khatai or Qara Khitai/Khatai, and no doubt they are parts of the building blocks of the modern Muslim Turkic people. Yet originally the Khitans were neither Turks nor Muslims. Their Turkicization and Islamization occurred only in the Mongol and post-Mongol periods and it can be seen as part of a more general process in which steppe people (such as the Uighurs, Tanguts, Qipchaqs or Khitans), who in the pre-Mongol period had a long and celebrated history were either assimilated in the sedentary civilizations surrounding them or reduced to clan or tribal units in the new collectivities which emerged in post-Mongol Central Asia, collectivities that form the basis of the contemporary Turkish people in the region. This process, which still awaits a detailed inquiry, attests to the tremendous effect of the Mongol period on the ethnic configuration of the modern Turkish world, as well as to the vitality of the Turkish-Muslim civilization, which eventually absorbed both the Mongols who arrived at the Islamic world and most of the Inner Asian people which accompanied them.¹

The Khitans are a particularly good case study for the process in question, for two reasons. First, throughout their pre-Mongol history they displayed a unique ability to retain their distinct Khitan identity (e.g., language, script, nomadic way of life, tribal religion, high position of women). And secondly, their geographical location on the eve of the Mongol period enables one to compare the processes of acculturation and identity changes in different parts of the Mongol Empire.

Originally a Manchurian people, the Khitans had a long and celebrated history that can be traced from the 4th century CE onwards. In the early 10th century they conquered Manchuria, Mongolia and parts of North China and established the Liao dynasty (907-1125). The word Cathay, the name by which China was known in

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¹ For this process see P.B. Golden, "I will give the people unto thee,": The Chinggisid Conquests and their Aftermath in the Turkic World" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Series 3, 10 (2000), 21-41; Allsen, "Ever Closer Encounters", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1 (1997), 16-18; Biran, "Mongols, Turks and Chinese," 1-3.

medieval Europe and in Western and Central Asia, originated from the ethnic affiliation (Khitai) of the Liao rulers. When the Liao were vanquished in the early 12th century by another wave of Manchurian invaders, the Jurchens, most of the Khitans remained in north China under the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115-1234). Some of them, however, followed a Khitan prince, Yelü Dashi, who preferred to move westward, and soon established in Central Asia the Qara Khitai or Western Liao dynasty (1124-1218), that ruled over a mostly Turkish-Muslim population. Throughout their rule in north China as the Liao dynasty, and in Central Asia as the Qara Khitai, and during the century they were subject to Jin rule in northern China, the Khitans retained a distinct Khitan identity which they were quick to adapt to their changing circumstances. Yet although they were close allies of the Mongols, and despite their crucial role in the shaping of the Mongol world empire, the Khitan ethnic identity did not survive the upheavals of the Mongol period.

This paper will concentrate on the fate of the Khitans in Central Asia, known as the Qara Khitai. It seeks to explain why the Qara Khitai managed to retain a non-Muslim non-Turkic identity in Central Asia throughout their rule there (1124-1218),² and mainly why this unique identity did not survive the Mongol upheavals, leading to the eventual assimilation of the Qara Khitai in the Turco-Muslim world. First, however, a few introductory remarks on the Qara Khitai are in place here:

Less than a decade after he escaped from the Jurchens who conquered north China, Yelü Dashi succeeded in setting up a new empire in Central Asia that was known there as the Qara Khitai (the Black Khitans) and in China as the Xi Liao (Western Liao). Dashi and his successors bore the Inner Asian title *Gürkhan* (universal khan) but were also designated as Chinese emperors and have Chinese reign titles. The Western Liao is the only Central Asian dynasty, which is considered a legitimate Chinese dynasty by traditional Chinese historiography, and its rulers were often called Chinese by Muslim authors as well. The dynasty existed for nearly 90 years, and was finally vanquished by the Mongols in 1218.³

After concluding their conquests in 1142 the Qara Khitai ruled over nearly the whole of Central Asia, from the Oxus to the Altai mountains, and until 1175 even further eastward into the territory of the Naiman and the Yenisei Qirghiz. This vast empire, roughly equivalent to most of modern Xinjiang, Qyrghyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and south Qazaqstan, more or less equaled the territory of the Jin and the Song in China.

² For a more detailed treatment of this question see M. Biran, "True to their Faith: Why the Qara Khitai did not Convert to Islam," in R. Amitai and M. Biran (eds.), *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 175-199; M. Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World*, forthcoming in Cambridge UP.

³ For the political history of the Qara Khitai see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," pp. 36-176; see also Ji Zongan, *Xi Liao shi lun: Yelü Dashi yanjiu* (Urumchi, 1996); Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi gao*, (Beijing, 1991); Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu* (Ningxia, 1987); G.G. Pikov, *Zapadnye Kidani* (Novosibirsk, 1989); WF, pp. 619-74; V. V. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion* (4th ed., London, 1968), pp. 323-80.

Internally, the Qara Khitai empire was divided between the Central territory, under the direct rule of the Qara Khitai, which was organized around their capital, Balasaghun, in the Chu valley of modern north Qyrghyzstan, and the territories of the subject kingdoms and tribes: the eastern Qarakhanids around Kashgar and Khotan; the Western Qarakhanids in Transoxania, the Gaochang Uighurs, and Khwārazm, a more outer vassal than the other kingdoms. It also included the realm of the subject tribes: the Qarluq principality of Qayaliq and Almaliq, and, at least till 1175, the territories of the Naiman and the Qangli.

The population of this vast empire was multi-ethnic and heterogenous. Apart from the Khitans, who were a small minority in their empire, it was mainly composed of Turks (including Uighurs), Iranians, Mongols and a few Han Chinese.⁴ Most of the population was sedentary, though most of the Khitans, the Mongols and some Turkic tribes were nomads. In terms of religion, while the empire included a flourishing Buddhist, Nestorian and even Jewish communities, most of its population, including a notable part of the people at the Qara Khitai central territory, were Muslims.⁵

Why were the Khitans able to retain their distinct identity even in Central Asia and among its mostly Turko-Muslim population? First, because they were the rulers, who since the 1130s secured their military dominance over their subjects and neighbors. While talented individuals of different religious and ethnic backgrounds filled important posts in Qara Khitai court and administration, and non-Khitans played a leading role in Qara Khitai armies, the military leading positions were kept only to noble Khitans, thereby ascertaining the maintenance of this military and political superiority.

Second, the Chinese-Liao tradition that the Khitans brought with them to Central Asia was essential for retaining a separate identity. This tradition distinguished them from other "non-imperial" nomads; was useful for consolidating their empire (e.g. by elevating the position of the rulers, who used all the trappings of the Chinese imperial traditions; eliminating most succession problems by appointing a heir apparent; securing several administrative devices such as census). Moreover, the Chinese cultural capital the Khitans brought with them proved to be extremely useful in the new environment as well even among their Muslim subjects: In Muslim Central Asia, China, although vaguely known, was closely connected with notions of grandeur and prestige, and the memory of former Chinese sovereignty was still alive even in the Western Liao westernmost province, Transoxania. Chinese trappings were therefore useful for ruling the Western Liao heterogeneous population, despite the fact that the realm of the Qara Khitai was far from China-proper and included only few ethnic Chinese. In fact the Chinese tradition fulfilled for the Qara Khitai the same functions Islamic tradition rendered for other

⁴ For the Han Chinese in Western Liao's realm see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," p.190, n.23. Cf. Wei Liangtao, *Xi Liao shi yanjiu*, pp. 181-83.

⁵ For a description of the different religious communities see Biran, "China, Nomads and Islam," pp. 350-56.

nomads, namely communal identity, means of statehood and legitimation. This explains why, unlike their predecessors and successors in Central Asia, throughout their Imperial rule the Qara Khitai never embraced Islam.⁶

Yet Qara Khitai ability to gain legitimation among their subjects and to retain their identity was also closely connected to the nomadic facet of their rule, not only to the Chinese one: after all aside from being Chinese emperors the Qara Khitai were also Gürkhans, the allegedly universal rulers of the nomads. Again, this facet of their legitimation proved useful not only in the eastern part of their empire but also in the west, where most of the rulers were former-nomadic Turks who ruled over partly turkicized populations. The consolidation of Qara Khitai rule was further facilitated by the common features they shared with those Central Asian Turks, features due to which Muslim authors often designated them as "the infidel Turks." The Qara Khitai shared social values, such as the important role of warfare in everyday life and the high position of women and merchants. They shared certain aspects of political culture, such as the importance of marriage alliances, the policy of holding subjects as hostages, the practice of hunting as a royal sport, and certain aspects of military and administrative organization. Moreover, during their stay in Central Asia the Qara Khitai were further influenced by the local setting. These affinities (combined with the broad religious tolerance they gave their subjects and the economic prosperity they kept for most of their rule) again contributed significantly to the Qara Khitai ability to achieve legitimation in their new realm. The dual Chinese-Nomadic character proved to be highly effective in their multi-cultural milieu of the Qara Khitai and enabled them to retain a separate identity as rulers of a prosperous empire until the rise of Chinggis Khan.⁷

What happened when the Mongols arrive? Even though the Khitans and Qara Khitai were hardly physically harmed by the Mongols, their ethnic identity did not survive the upheavals of the Mongol period. This was mainly due to the collapse of their political unit; the crumble of China before the Mongols; their geographical dispersion in the Mongol armies, and their affinity to Mongol and Turkic norms.

The collapse of the Qara Khitai Political Power : The disintegration of the Qara Khitai empire began even before the Mongol conquest: Eastern vassals like the Uighurs and the Qarluqs began to desert to Chinggis Khan already in 1209, and in 1210 the Khwārazm Shāh Muḥammad conquered Transoxania. These developments contributed to the mutiny in the Qara Khitai court where in 1211 Gūchūlūg, a Naiman prince escaping from Chinggis Khan who had found refuge in the Gürkhan's court and even married his daughter, captured the Qara Khitai throne. His short-lived attempt to revive the declining empire was cut short in 1218, when Chinggis Khan's generals executed him, in order to annihilate any chance of Mongol opposition to the Great Khan. The Mongol conquest of the Qara Khitai

⁶ See Biran 2004, Biran forthcoming for a broader analysis.

⁷ Again, for more see Biran, forthcoming.

was uncharacteristically benign, yet it put a definite end to their imperial status in Central Asia.

The Khitans tried twice to establish a state under Mongol rule: in Manchuria, Yelü Liuge, a scion of the Liao royal house who had served the Jin in North China, surrendered to the Mongols in 1212 and gained permission to establish the Great Liao state at the Khitan original homeland. This state retained the ethnic markers of the Khitans and the Chinese imperial tradition, yet Liuge's inability to secure support from his kinsmen as well as Mongol desire to secure the steppes of Liaodong for themselves led to the early dissolution of this state, which was abolished by Ogödei, Chinggis Khan's successor, in 1236.⁸

A more enduring political entity was established further westwards in Kirmān, in south Persia, by Baraq Īājib, a scion of the Qara Khitai royal house. Captured by Khwarazm Shah in the early 1200s, Baraq's talents bought him an important post of a chamberlain of a Khwarizmian prince. In the early 1220s, after a quarrel with the prince, Baraq reached Kirmān, defeated and replaced its governor, and asked for the Abbasid Caliph's recognition of his new position. Both the Caliph and the Khwarazm Shah confirmed his position, as did the Mongols later on when Baraq submitted in the early 1230s. It should be noted that even before advancing to Kirmān, Baraq converted to Islam, as this was a necessary step in order to win a leading post in Khwarazm, and later, the support of the population west of Central Asia, where his Chinese or Liao cultural capital held little appeal. The legitimization of his dynasty was therefore Muslim and Persian, as attested both by the appellation *Khusrānī* (Khusraw-like) associated with Baraq, and by the Persian language used for recording the history of the dynasty.⁹ Yet throughout its rule the Kirmānid dynasty continued to be known as the Qara Khitai, probably due to the prestige the name still had in the eastern Islamic world and among Kirmān's new overlords, the Mongols. The state also retained some of the Khitan identity makers, notably the unique position of women, as will be discussed below.

The Qara Khitai of Kirmān remained vassals of the Mongol Great Khans, and later of the Ilkhans, until the early 14th century. They had matrimonial relations with the Ilkhans, as well as with the Chaghadaid Mongols and with the neighbouring dynasties of Yazd, Luristān and Fāris.¹⁰ Yet when in 1306 the last of the Qara Khitai of Kirmān had neglected to pay his dues to the Mongol treasury, the Ilkhan Öljeitü deposed him without delay, appointing a simple governor over the

⁸ On Yelü Liuge and his short-lived state see e.g. Biran 2002, 2003; YS, 1/16, 19, 20; 149/3511-4; Rashid/Thackston, 1:220-222; Tu Ji, 31/1-4; Yanai Wataru, *Yuan dai jingluo Dongbei kao* (On Manchuria in the Yuan dynasty) (Taipei, 1963), 76-90; Liu Pujiang, "Qidan Yimin," 158-160; D.H. Martin, *The Rise of Chingis Khan and his Conquest of North China* (Baltimore, 1950), 150-158; 195-203, 215-18, 236-7, 283-4.

⁹ *Simj al-ʿulā*, 22. Khusraw was a famous Sasanid king, whose name became a symbol for the just Persian-Muslim ruler.

¹⁰ Minorsky, "Kutlugh Khānids," *EI2* 5(1986):554; *Majmaʿ al-ansāb*, 195ff; Naṭanzī, *Muntakhab*, 22; Lambton, *Continuity*, 276-87.

province. Descendants of the Kirmanid Qara Khitai were still active at the court of the Muzaffarids (1314-93), since the daughter of the last Kirmanid rulers became the wife of Mubārriz al-Dīn Muhammad, the founder of the Muzaffarid dynasty. In 1340, when Mubārriz al-Dīn took Kirmān, his historian described the event as the reestablishment of the Qara Khitai court,¹¹ and even as late as 1375 Mubārriz al-Dīn legitimize his conquest of Luristān by the kinship between his Qara Khitai wife and the Atabegs of Yazd.¹² Yet individuals identified as Qara Khitai are extremely rare in the Muzaffarid chronicles, and Quthlugh Khan's sons, who became the Muzaffarid rulers, are never designated that way. With the dissolution of the Kirmānid dynasty by Ōljeitū, the Qara Khitai, therefore, ceased to exist as political entity,¹³ thereby losing the strongest incentive for ethnic preservation.

The Crumbling of China and the Success of the Mongols: The Qara Khitai dynasty of Kirmān was already Muslim and there is no evidence of the retaining of Chinese trapping there. This was not only due to the new location, but also due to the crumbling of the Chinese states before the Mongols. Throughout Qara Khitai rule in Central Asia, Jin was the strongest military power around, a much more formidable military and political force than the divided Muslim states or the nomadic tribes surrounding the Qara Khitai (until the rise of Chinggis Khan), and its stronger political power was meaningful in determining the orientation of Qara Khitai acculturation. Mongols' attacks on the Jin (and later on the Song) and their subsequent subjugation led to decline in China's position and prestige. This caused the Qara Khitai to underscore the nomadic component in their identity, thereby bringing them closer to the Turks and Mongols.

Moreover, the unprecedented success of the Mongols led many people, including the Khitans, to call themselves Mongols in order to take part in the former's achievements, as attested by Rashid al-Din:

Now (presumably the early fourteenth century) it has come about that the people of Khitai, Jurchen, Nankiyas (i.e. south China), Uighur, Qipchaq, Turkmen, Qarluq, Qalaj, and all the prisoners and the Tajik races that have been brought up among the Mongols are also called Mongols. All that assemblage takes pride in calling itself Mongol.¹⁴

Incorporation in the Mongol Armies and Geographical Dispersion: The tendency of identifying with the Mongols was further assisted by a more practical aspect of Mongol policy, namely their incorporation of the conquered people in their military

¹¹Kutubī, *Tarīkh-i āl-i Muzaffar* (Tehran, 1968), 42..

¹²Kutubī, 72.

¹³Minorsky, "Qutlugh Khānids," 554; see also, Wang Zhilai, "Guanyu "Hou Xi Liao," *Xinjiang shehui kexue* 1983/1:91-2.

¹⁴Rashīd/Alizādah, 1:163-4; Rashīd/ Thackston; 1:44. The "Khitai" probably refers to the Qara Khitai as well.

units that were sent to fight across Eurasia: Desertions of Qara Khitai vassals and troops into the ranks of Chinggis Khan began even before the annihilation of Güchülüg in 1218, and a segment of the Qara Khitai troops or of their auxiliary forces was fighting with the Mongols against him.¹⁵ Like the Khwārazm Shāh, Güchülüg did not try to confront the Mongols, but escaped westwards, and the Mongol army pursued him rather than engaged the Qara Khitai army. Therefore after Güchülüg's capture, most of his army, Naimans and Qara Khitai, seems to have been incorporated into the Mongol army without problems.¹⁶ At least some of these forces formed part of the Mongol force that attacked the Khwārazm Shāh in 1220, and most of the troops of the Qara Khitai's former eastern vassals (the Uighurs, the Qarluqs, and the remnants of the Eastern Qarakhanids) were part of the troops that followed Hülegü westwards in the 1250s.¹⁷

Another important segment of the Qara Khitai army, estimated as comprising 70,000 men, were incorporated since 1210 in the Khwārazmian army, where they retained their separate units.¹⁸ Although the Qara Khitai had fought the Mongols in Bukhara,¹⁹ after the Mongols conquered Transoxania and the Khwārazm Shāh proved incapable of stopping them, the Qara Khitai were less enthusiastic to fight for him. Around 1220, after a failed attempt (perhaps initiated by the Caliph) to assassinate the Khwārazm Shāh the Qara Khitai in the Khwārazmian army chose to join the Mongols,²⁰ although it is quite hard to determine at which stage of the Mongol invasion this took place. As Khwarazm later became part of the Golden Horde realm, it's quite possible that this segment of the Qara Khitai ended up in the Golden Horde ranks.

Incorporating in the different Mongol army units, which were sent to fight all over Eurasia and often became a new focus of loyalty and identity,²¹ led to a further geographical dispersion of the Khitans and to closer contact with the Turco-Mongol population, which was a strong incentive for assimilation. The process is better documented for the Khitans in Yuan China (where the remnants of a garrison sent by Qubilai Khan to Yunnan in South China still identify themselves today as Khitans).²² In the west it can mainly be deduced by the occurrences of toponyms and clan names in which the name Khatai/Khitai/Qara Khitai appears. Toponyms including the name Khitai appear in the fourteenth century in the region of the lower Don, near the Caspian

¹⁵YS, 120/2969. This was in addition to the Uighur troops who also took part in the Mongol force. YS, 122/3000; Yu Ji, *Daoyuan xue gu lu* (Shanghai, 1937), 24/403.

¹⁶See the careers of Naiman and Qara Khitai in the Mongol Army, Kadyrbaev, 110; Rashīd/Boyle, 315.

¹⁷YS, 120/2969-70; Juwaynī, 1:63, tr. Boyle, 82.

¹⁸*Mir'āt al-zamān*, 8/2:593; whence Abū Shāma, 109-10; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, 62:14, 19; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 22:231; Ibn al-Dawādārī, 7:189; Ibn 'Arabshāh, 237; also Jūzjānī/Habībī, 1:275. See Ch. V, sections 2, 3a.

¹⁹*Guzīda*, 520; Juwaynī, 1:80, 2:211, tr. Boyle, 103, 476.

²⁰*Mir'āt al-zamān*, 8/2:609; Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh*, 62:326, 335.

²¹Allsen, "Ever Closer Encounters," 16-18.

²²Yuan Mengdong, 1995.

sea; in the sixteenth century in the Ob region in western Siberia; in modern Bashkiria, on both sides of the Ural mountains. In the steppes of southern Moldavia, formerly inhabited by the Qipchaq tribes, where there is even a place called Qara Khitai.²³ Two villages in modern Tajikistan, called Khitai and Khitai reza, are also described as originating in the Qara Khitai period.²⁴ A village near Tashkent is called Qara Khitai and in Khwarazm (modern Qara Qalpaqstan in Uzbekistan), between Manghit and Gurlen there is another village called Khitay.²⁵ Villages with such names occur also near the northern Black Sea among the Nogais.²⁶

Clans and tribes called Qara Khitai, Khitai or Khatai appear among the seventeenth century Afghans, where the ancestors of this tribe are said to have come from the region of Khitāi and Khotan;²⁷ from the sixteenth century among the Uzbeks, Qazaqs, Bashkirs, the Crimean Tatars, Qara Qalpaqs and the Nogais, as well as among the modern Qyrghyzs who live in the region of the Qara Khitai central territory.²⁸ The wide geographical dispersion attested by these toponyms and clan names led to reducing the Khitan identity into a secondary component in the new collectivities which emerged after the Mongol conquests.

Affinity to Mongol norms: Identifying with the Mongols was easier for the Khitans, who were described as nomads "adjacent to the Mongol nomads and their language, physiognomy and customs are quite similar."²⁹ But while in China, especially from Qubilai's time, the Mongols were less willing to accept the Khitans as Mongols, classifying them as Han ren, i/e/ with the northern Chinese not with the Mongols or even with the other steppe people, known as *Semu*, in the Muslim world the Mongols were eventually absorbed themselves (from the mid 14th century) in the Turkic-Muslim population, of which the Qara Khitai also became a part, which resulted in the creation of a new Turco-Mongolian elite in the region that lay between the Tian shan and the Volga and in most of the Middle East. This elite was Muslim, spoke Turkish and honored the traditions of the Mongol empire.³⁰ Later on parts of it coalesced mainly around the name of a certain Mongol or Turkic prince (Uzbek, Nogai, Uthman, Chaghadai etc) to create the modern Turkic people.³¹

The inclusion of the Khitan in the Turco-Mongol elite and in Muslim society in general was facilitated by the norms the Mongols brought with them to Iran.

²³ Sinor, "Western Information," 264-7.

²⁴ B.I. Bushkov, "Formirovanie sovremennoj etnicheskoj situatsii v severnom Tadjikistane," *Sovietskaya Etnografika* 1990/2:34.

²⁵ Bregel (trans), Firdaws al-Iqbal, 294, 631.

²⁶ R. Kh. Kereitov, *Etnicheskaia istoriia Nogajtsev* (Stavropol', 1999), 68-9.

²⁷ Ni⁶ mat'allāh Harawī, *Ta'rikh-i khān Jahān* (Dacca, 1960-2), 2:649-50.

²⁸ ZK, 112-13; Sinor, "Western Information," 264-7; Karaev 1996; Kereitov, 68-9.

²⁹ Rashid/Thackston, I, 214; for other sources stressing the similarity of Khitans and Mongols see Biran, 2000, ch. 5 and YS, 149.

³⁰ Beatrice F. Manz, "Historical Introduction," in *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, ed. B.F. Manz (Boulder, 1994), 6.

³¹ Golden, 2000.

These norms, which were similar to the Khitan ones, enabled the Khitans to preserve some of their ethnic markers even though those were not always in accord with Muslim law. In the case of the Qara Khitai of Kirman, the obvious example is the position of women: The Muslim sources written under the Kirmanid Khitans strive to present them as good Muslim, yet the extremely important role of women in Kirmanid politics - two out of nine rulers of the dynasty were queens, including the most long-lived and celebrated ruler Qutlugh Turkan (r.1257-1282) – and the marriage arrangements of these queens, which included levirate marriages and political marriages to non-Muslims (mainly Mongol princes) were certainly not in accord with Muslim law. They were, however, quite common among the Mongols and were therefore accepted both by them and by the Khitan Muslim subjects.³² Thus the similar norms of the Khitans and Mongols facilitated the assimilation of the former in the sedentary civilization around them, a phenomenon which, again, is much better documented in the Chinese side.

To sum up, Mongol conquest and rule led to dramatic change in the ethnic configuration of its nomadic subjects. In the case of the Qara Khitai the result of the loss of their independent political unit; the crumbling of China in front of the Mongols, their inclusion in the ranks of the Mongol army and the geographical dispersion that accompanied it, combined with their original affinities with the Mongols, led to the disintegration of the Khitan ethnic identity. The Qara Khitai were reduced to clan or tribal units in the new Turkic-Muslim collectivities, which emerged in post-Mongol Inner Asia.³³

Whether the post-Mongol Khitai tribes and clans, including these that still exist today, retained any connections or traditions of their pre-Mongol past, is a question worth further pursuing, and I hope the audience could help in directing me to find an answer for.

³² For the Khitan queens and their marriages see Biran, 2000, ch.5; A.K.S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* (London, 1988), 258-88; for levirate under the Mongols in Iran see e.g. R. Amitai-Preiss, "Ghazan Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamluk Sultanate." *BSOAS* 59 (1996): 1-10.

³³ While we can document the disappearance of the Khitans ethnic identity to the mid 14th century, there is a huge lacuna in the sources before tribes and clans bearing the name Khitai began to be documented in 16th centuries Uzbek chronicles. This is partly due to the lack of indigenous historical writing from the Golden Horde, from which most modern Central Asian people originated, and by the lesser importance ascribed to tribal identity during the Timurid period in Central Asia.