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THE DALI STELE¹

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Standing just outside the ancient city walls, facing the city gates across a dusty highway, the stele commemorating Qubilai Khan’s 1252 conquest of Dali, the strategic capital of the region, is hidden from the passing traffic by a string of ramshackle buildings clustered along the coastal highway. The stele, originally engraved in 1304, was discovered in 1962 and then in 1991 set up in its small commemorative compound not far from the three pagodas for which Dali is renowned. The presence of a commemorative stele is hardly an unusual sight in China since much of Chinese history has been recorded in stone engravings, and these stone records, the steles, which seem to clutter up every provincial museum in the country, form the basis for the later chronicles and historical biographies and records that were traditionally compiled and written up by each succeeding dynasty. The Ming compilers of the *Yuan Shi* seem to have gleaned their information on Yunnan’s Mongol past from this particular stele and its very memorable record which describes Qubilai’s pacification of the province employing peaceful means and resisting the use of violence even in the face of extreme provocation.

In the eighth year of Dade of Yuan (1304), a high-ranking Mongol official Ye Su Da Er (Yesudaer, governor of Yunnan) known in Chinese as Pin Zhang Zheng Shi,

¹ Thanks are due to Professor Yao Jide, Director of Iranian Studies, Yunnan University, Kunming, for the transcription of the Dali Stele. The translation was undertaken by a SOAS student of mine, Mahria Yan Ma and subsequently checked by colleagues in SOAS’s history department Dr Lars Laarman and Dr Andrea Junka.

proposed the erection of a commemorative stele in memory of Qubilai Khan (Yuan Shi-zu) and his pacification of Yunnan. The stele was composed by Cheng Wen-hai, a native of Huizhou, Anhui province, an official in the prestigious Han Lin academy, and describes the process of pacification of Yunnan and the establishment of prefectures and counties there by Qubilai Khan, Yuan Shi-zu, the founder of the Yuan dynasty. The successful pacification of Yunnan saw a change in the tactics of conquest used by the Mongols in keeping with the vision and practices of the Toluids and ensured the peaceful incorporation of the province into the emerging Yuan Empire. In fact the conquest of Dali not only represented a change in Mongol tactics but also signalled a change in the traditional methods of regional domination as practiced for many centuries by the Han Chinese on their neighbours prior to these events. Non-Han people had been viewed by the dominant Han Chinese as barbarians deserving the most barbarous and savage treatment and as a consequence the history of the region had been marked by the most brutal of attacks and hostility on the part of the dominant northerly Han neighbours. Sichwan and Yunnan had both experienced centuries of brutality from the Han and therefore this new approach initiated by Qubilai would have been most welcome and indicative of a clear break with the past. Song troops had been encouraged to use excessive force and submission to *jimizhou* or ‘haltered-and-bridled’² status was sought through intimidation. The prize was the natural resources of Sichwan and Yunnan and the indigenous people had to be subdued at any costs including terror, deceit, and massacre.³

² Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 37.

³ For an in-depth study of Song expansion into Sichwan and the south-west see von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes*; Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of Southwest China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.

Despite the success of the Yuan dynasty in co-opting the people of Yunnan, the Ming regime returned to this traditional barbarity following the demise of the Mongols in China.

However, welcome as this negotiated approach might have been on the ground, recent studies have suggested that this negotiated occupation resulted in a far from stable regime and even encouraged unrest and rebellion in the neighbouring states of the southwest long after other parts of China had been subdued.⁴ John Herman argues that having opted for negotiation over traditional brute force and terror, the Mongol commanders were forced to rely on local rulers and collaborators whose loyalty could not be guaranteed and who were not necessarily accepted by the indigenous people either. The reverence in which the Mongol appointed leaders, most particularly Sayyid ‘Ajall, have been held since their appointment suggests that the Mongol leadership achieved at least some measure of success. With the seizure of power by Möngke Khan, the House of Tolui now dominated the Mongol Empire and in China and Iran the Toluid ‘philosophy’ of inclusion and the development of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural elite, the younger brothers of the Qa’an, Hülegü and Qubilai, were able to put into practice the Toluid alternative to the traditional brute force of the steppe.

After the upheavals of the actual conquest of the province, the Toluid Mongols appointed a trustworthy official whose family, originally from Bokhara, had been in their service since the 1220s. Sayyid ‘Ajall Shams al-Dīn ‘Umar Bukhārī (1211-79) had served the Mongols in a variety of positions and locations. Mongol rule through the offices of this Central Asian Muslim, Sayyid ‘Ajall, also saw the establishment of a strong Muslim

⁴ John Herman, “Mongol Conquest of Dali: the Failed Second Front,” in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola di Cosmo. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 295-335.

presence in Yunnan which has persisted until the present day. Strategically Dali, the capital of the region, dominated access to the southern Silk Road through Mien (Burma) and to the lands of Annam (North Vietnam 安南) and the position of governor demanded not only administrative ability and considerable political sensitivity but loyalty and trust. Yet again the Mongols had turned to the Muslims of Turkistan to find such an appointee.

In the 1250s the Sung were still a presence in the south and Möngke Qa'an planned to launch military operations against the rump state from the Dali area, using Yunnan as a bridgehead.⁵ The Sung had managed to maintain their pressure on the northern front and Möngke felt the prestige of the Empire was being challenged by his failure to subdue the Chinese. By opening a second front the Sung would be forced to divert military resources from the north and in so doing weaken their whole military strategy. In addition Dali was an important source of horses for the region and the Sung in particular prized the horses which had been reared for centuries in this area and for which the Dali kingdom's predecessor, the Nanzhao kingdom, had also been famous. The market town of Yushi owed its considerable prosperity to horse trading and the Mongols aimed to cut the town's source of livelihood.⁶

the Dali horse has a shape (that is) quite magnificent. They stand low with a muscular front, very similar to the shape of a chicken. The diaphragm is broad, shoulders thick, waist flat and back round. They are trained to squat on their rear ends like a dog. They easily climb steep terrain on command, and possess both speed and agility in chase. They have been raised on bitter buckwheat so they require little to maintain. How could a horse like this not be considered a good horse?⁷

⁵ Thomas Allsen, *The Mongol Imperialism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 4.

⁶ Herman, "Mongol Conquest," pp. 300-01.

⁷ Tian Wen, *Qian Shu* (1690), *juan* 3, p.76, cited in Herman, "Mongol Conquest," p. 301.

Horses along side mineral products such as gold, silver, and copper swelled the Yushi bazaars and fed the appetite of the Sung merchants and it was this lucrative market and supply line that the Mongols intended to disrupt. By crippling the Sung's supply lines in the south, the Mongols hoped to disable their war machine in the north.

The conception of the strategy to attack the Sung using the people of the southwest is credited to Guo Baoyu, a Han Chinese from Shaanxi who had been serving with the Chin at the time of the early Mongol conquests in the North. At an audience with Chinggis Khan recorded in Guo Baoyu's biography in the *Yuan Shi*, the strategist warns against under-estimating the strength of the Sung heartlands and he advised employing the tribes of the south-west against the enemy. "The bravery and fierceness of the tribes of the southwest should be put to use by first subjugating them, and then using them to surround the territory."⁸

The process of conquest in this region especially the initial occupation saw the adoption of radically different tactics on the part of Qubilai himself which reflected the influence of his Chinese advisers and also belatedly his mother, Sorqaghtani, who had played such a central role in his own up-bringing and education and that of his brothers. It was under his mother's tutelage that the future Toluid emperor had learned the merit of enlisting Chinese scholars as administrators and the value of the Han literati as political allies in his long quest for political ascendancy.⁹ In the *Yuan Shi*, the account of the Dali

⁸ "Biography of Guo Baoyu" *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 149, p. 3521; cited in Jacqueline Misty Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall Shams al-Din: A Muslim from Central Asia, serving Mongols in China, and bringing Civilization to Yunnan," (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss. Harvard University, 1996), p. 151.

⁹ Wang, E. *The Fall of the Jurchen Chin*. Ed. Hok-lam Chan (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), pp. 10-12.

campaign is given at the beginning of Qubilai's biography which could suggest that for the royal prince the campaign represented his coming of age as a Mongol warrior and statesman. It was essential that the native population accepted and supported the invading forces and Qubilai's Han Chinese advisers were adamant that he should resist all provocation and desist from any general massacres. The Dali Stele is a testament to the success that those advisers enjoyed.

The main events following the decision to invade Yunnan are set down on the Dali Stele and confirmation can be found in other sources. The following is from the Dali Stele.

Thus in Ren Zi year, one year after the coronation of Xianzong (Möngke) emperor, the Shizu (Qubilai) emperor, who was the brother of the Xianzong (Möngke), had received the order to crusade against Yunnan. Our troops were dispatched in September. They crossed the Huanghe river in December, passed through Ningxia the next spring, Xiaguan in April, and were stationed at Liupanshan Mountain; then they crossed the Tao river, passed through Tubo. Our troops were divided into three parts, and slaughter, plunder and arson were forbidden. We sent a diplomatic envoy to Dali to summon the enemies to surrender but failed due to the blockage of the road. In October, after crossing the Dadu River, our emperor led the cavalry, which are the middle troops of three parts, to advance ahead. In November, our troops had crossed Lushui River (the upper Jinshangjiang River), everywhere our troops passed through submitted to our country. Again, a diplomatic envoy was sent to Dali to summon the enemies to surrender, but our envoy was killed by them. In December, our troops approached the capital of Dali, which is surrounded by Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake, firm and solid. Duan Zhishan, the king of Dali and his minister Gao Taixiang led their troops and went out, defeated utterly by our army. Our emperor sent out diplomatic envoys three times, but they were refused by the king of Dali. Then our emperor gave the order to attack. Meanwhile, the west and east troops had arrived in Dali. Our emperor looked down on the city from the top of Cangshan Mountain. Our army breached and occupied the city that night. Duan Zhishan escaped to Shanchan (Kunming), and Gao Taixiang was captured and decapitated in Yaozhou (Yaoan county), to warn the people who dared to resist. The Mongol army moved on to another place; everywhere except Shanchan surrendered. In the next spring, our emperor led part of his army on a return north, and General Uriyangqadai was left in charge. Before long, Shanchan city was

captured and Duan Zhishan was caught and escorted to our capital. Our emperor did not execute him, but released him instead.

Accounts of the invasion can be found in various Chinese sources primarily the *Yuan Shi* but other documents such as the chronicles of You Zhong also record the stages in the conquest. In July 1252, Möngke had ordered the advance south and Qubilai had summoned Chang Wen-ch'ien to serve as his military adviser along with various Han Chinese assistants including Yao Shu and Liu Ping-chung. He planned a three pronged advance with Uriyangqadai Noyan leading the western column south from Lintao, Gansu province, through eastern Tibet, Wang Dezhen (d.1259) with the imperial princes Corqa (Chaohe) and Yezhilie¹⁰ leading the eastern column through Sung dominated areas of Sichwan, and himself leading the middle column along the mountain trails of Kham. Assembling their armies in Shaanxi in October, 1253, they first traversed the mountainous province of Sichwan in order to reach the waters of the Kincha river which feeds northern Yunnan. Crossing the river in rafts they were met by submissive tribes but after so many gruelling months on the road, he and his army under the command of Uriyangqadai, son of the great Noyan, Sübe'etei (d. 1248), arrived 'hungry and naked.'¹¹ It was on this occasion that Sayyid 'Ajall, possibly in his capacity as a *keshig*, served his commander so admirably that his future fortune was ensured. At the time of Qubilai's advance on Yunnan province, Sayyid 'Ajall was charged with securing provisions and funding for the imperial armies and it was his efficiency and timely actions at this time

¹⁰ "Biography of Qubilai Khan", *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 4, pt. I, pp. 58-60, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 154.

¹¹ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-Tavārikh*. Eds. Muḥammad Rawshan and Muḥammad Afā Mūsavī (Tehran: Elbruz, 1994), Vol. 2, p. 914.

which so fortuitously came to the notice of the prince and ensured his subsequent future.¹²

Rashīd al-Dīn's text seems confused about the identity of the official suggesting that it was Sayyid 'Ajall's grandson who welcomed the army. However, this would have been impossible since at forty Sayyid 'Ajall is unlikely to have had a serving grandson. Similar confusion surrounds the background of this very significant figure in the Chinese sources. Grandfather, father, and grandson are merged in the biographical account given in the *Yuan Shi*. However the following can be deduced.

Sayyid 'Ajall's namesake, his grandfather Shams al-Dīn 'Umar Bukhārī (Saidianchi Shan siding Wuma'er), reputedly a descendant of the prophet through 'Alī b. Abī Ṣālib, had surrendered with his charges, a thousand horsemen, and gifts of a striped leopard and white falcons to Chinggis Khan when the conqueror swept into Bukhārā in 1220. The grandfather and his troops joined the Mongol armies while his son, Kamāl al-Dīn became a 'hostage' serving in the elite royal guards, the *keshig* and eventually earned distinction as one of Chinggis Khan's personal bodyguards.¹³ It was Kamāl al-Dīn who presumably earned the title Sayyid 'Ajall which was then passed down to his son, a very young *keshig*, who first appears in the sources *ca.* 1229 when he was appointed by Ögö dai (r.1229-41) as a *darughachi* to the prefectures of Feng, Ching, and Yün-nei on the Sino-Mongol frontier. Later he was promoted to the position of *yarghuchi*, an arbitrator or judge, in the old Chin capital of Chang-tu.¹⁴

¹² *Yuan Shih*, "Biography of Sayyid 'Ajall," translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 19.

¹³ Igor de Rachewiltz et al., *In the Service of the Khan. Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period 1200-1300*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), p. 467.

¹⁴ de Rachewiltz et al., *In the Service of the Khan*, p. 470.

The *Yuan Shi* details more of the travails endured by Qubilai Khan and his operational commander, Uriyangqadai Noyan (1201-72), on the Dali campaign, and the respected scholar and official, Yao Shui, the nephew of Yao Shu,¹⁵ recounts the even more arduous return trek after the successful conclusion of the initial campaign. The mountainous terrain which greeted the advancing army after their gruelling advance of several hundred miles across Gansu and Sichuan is some of the most ferocious in China and yet their military tactics maintained their hallmark decisiveness and subterfuge. A surprise attack was launched after a forced march through the mountains followed by the crossing of the icy cold waters of the Jinsha River which is fed directly from the melting snow of the Himalayas. The army crossed the treacherous waters with individual soldiers clinging to inflated animal skins and so achieved their objective of surprise. But such ambitious and gruelling enterprises came at a cost and according to Rashīd al-Dīn out of a force of ten *tumans* (100,000) only two *tumans* arrived. Many tribes submitted without resistance. “The leader of the Mosuo barbarians came to welcome them and submit; his territory was located 400 *li* north of Dali.”¹⁶ The Baiman, however, as the Mongols arrived at the Daguo fortress attempted to conceal a cache of weapons while their commander negotiated submission. Qubilai felt obliged to attack and he slaughtered the leaders but left the people untouched. The Baiman people eventually conceded defeat and ‘with great sincerity, sent presents and submitted.’¹⁷ In his biography of his uncle, Yao Shu, Yao Shui records that Qubilai considered this trek across Sichuan so arduous and

¹⁵ See Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 156.

¹⁶ *Yuan Shih*, “Biography of Qubilai Khan,” translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.153.

demanding that he promised the survivors of the campaign honours to equal those his grandfather had awarded the legendary participants of the Baljuna covenant.¹⁸

As was prescribed custom, envoys had been sent to the capital, Dali, offering terms for submission. However, since no response had been forthcoming the siege of the city was ordered. Before the Mongol armies were able to take Dali, the two brothers Gao Xiang, the prime minister, and Gao He, both of whom had been politically dominant in the province for some time, fled from the city under cover of darkness. The king, Duan Hsing-chih (r.1251-53) and the Duan clan who had traditionally ruled Qarajang from their capital at Dali had seen their power eclipsed by the Gao brothers, saw the arrival of the Mongol armies as their opportunity to regain their former power and glory. However, Qubilai's first concern was with the fate of his three envoys, Yu Lushu, Wang Junhou, and Wang Jian, and he ordered his trusted advisor, Yao Shu, to search the city for his envoys. During the search all land charts and census records that were unearthed were collected for future consultation and use. The bodies of the envoys were subsequently discovered and Yao Shu performed burial sacrifices in their honour. The generals Ye Gu and Batu'er were sent in pursuit of the Gao brothers who were soon discovered in Yaozhou and were subsequently beheaded. In response to advice from the Chinese aides and presumably Liu Shizhong, the newly appointed Pacification commissioner, retribution was not sought from the people of Dali and their king's family was allowed to return.¹⁹

¹⁸ Yao Shui, *Muan Ji*, *juan* 15, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 156.

¹⁹ Yao Shui, *Muan Ji*, *juan* 15, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 154.

The feared and respected general Uriyangqadai dominated the early period of Mongol rule in Yunnan and it is not certain that he continued with Qubilai's more humane policies now that he was in control. Qubilai greatly respected his general and the two had jointly led the campaign in the south. After Qubilai departed in the spring of 1254, Uriyangqadai continued with the pacification of the province marching on Shanshan or Yachi to the Mongols (Kunming) while, according to one historian, 'all along the way slaughtering (yantu tusha) the Luoluo (Yi) and Bai people of Helazhang (present-day Chuxiong and Luoci region) and Shuicheng (present-day northwest Luquan county).'²⁰ In fact the Duan king had not initially submitted to Mongol rule and after Dali fell he made a last stand of defiance from Shanshan (Kunming), fortifying the city and organising resistance. The city was surrounded on three sides by Lake Dian leaving only one gate to be defended but for Uriyangqadai this did not present a problem.

Continuously pounding the drums and gongs (which signal troop movements), for seven days and seven nights, they repeatedly advanced to attack or feigned attack, till the point that the enemy was completely disorientated and unable to respond.²¹

The *Yuan Shi*'s biography of Uriyangqadai claims that a bloodbath ensued after the king was found to have escaped the city for the mountains where he was subsequently tracked and captured. His followers were killed but he was taken alive and eventually placed on his throne again. The *Yuan Shi*'s biography of Qubilai seems to contradict the more brutal aspects of this account.

²⁰ You Zhong, *Zhongguo Xi nan minzu shi*, Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985; translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 156.

²¹ *Yuan Shi*, "Biography of Subotei (and Uriyangqadai)," translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 157.

The great general Uriyangqadai stayed behind to protect and guard, Liu Shizhong was appointed pacification commissioner, the Duan clan was allowed to settle in peace in Dali and then the victorious army returned home.²²

The Dali Stele stresses Qubilai's foresight and restraint in sparing the king. No mention is made of massacres and the suggestion strengthened by an anecdote in the *Yuan Shi*, concerning the influence of Qubilai's Confucian advisers, is that such killing did not occur.

The king of Dali was obstinate, he refused to submit to our country and killed our envoy, and our emperor had reason to kill all the Dali people but did not do so. Instead, he released the king of Dali and absolved the Dali people. Without the highest virtue, he would not have done so.

The historian, You Zhong, along with the biographer of Uriyangqadai, are the sources for the accounts of excessive bloodletting which would accord with the picture commonly given of the self-promoting general and therefore not necessarily reliable.

In 1255 Duan Xingzhi and his uncle, Xin Jufu, were presented to Möngke at the imperial court where they were each honoured as a 'Bearer of the Tiger Tablet.' Such treatment of defeated kings had precedent. Chinggis Khan had initiated the Mongol tactic of adopting the vanquished monarch into the ruling elite and the vanquished troops into the Mongol army. The Korean king had been treated thus in 1238. The next year Möngke demonstrated his confidence in King Duan Xingzhi by awarding him the title of *Maharaja* and made him the 'leader of all the barbarians, the Baiman and the other tribes'

²² *Yuan Shi* "Biography of Qubilai" Juan 4, part 1, pp. 58-60, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 154.

while presenting him with a map of the region and formally requesting that he should pacify the whole area and implement a taxation regime.²³ Möngke further made the king's uncle, Xin Jufa, head of the army while the king appointed his younger brother, Xin Juri or Duan Shi, prime minister. To solidify their alliance with the Mongols, *Maharaja* Duan Xingzhi 'together with Xin Jufu set off leading the Bo and Cuan armies, to join up with Uriyangqadai to assist him in his campaign against Jiaozhi (northern Vietnam).²⁴ The military alliance proved crucial for Uriyangqadai's success in the province whereas the *Yuan Shi* suggests that the prime minister was not so successful in achieving unity among the political appointees in his brother's administration and court.

With the fall of Shanshan (Kunming) and the establishment of the Duan led court in Qarajang (Yunnan), Uriyangqadai began campaigning in the neighbouring regions. When he temporarily fell ill his son, Ashu, took over and demonstrated the same ruthless efficiency as his father. The town of Chengjiang (Qiandege) decided to resist the Mongol siege only to have explosives placed all around the city walls and its moat filled with combustibles and dried grass. Chengjiang went up in flames and the citizens were unable to withstand the house to house fighting which ensued. As regions fell so Uriyangqadai's army increased in size with the conquered troops enlisting in the Mongol army's ranks. With his widespread campaigns in ethnically diverse Yunnan, Uriyangqadai's army absorbed many indigenous people with a noticeably large number of Bai soldiers enlisting. Just as many Central Asian troops arrived with Qubilai and later with Sayyid

²³ *Yuan Shih*, "Biography of Xin Juri," p. 3910, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 163; Thomas Allsen, *The Mongol Imperialism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.72.

²⁴ *Yuan Shih*, "Bibliography of Xin Juri," p. 3910, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 163.

‘Ajall, so too did many Bai troops join Uriyangqadai and then followed him north to Hunan where they settled and are still found in large numbers today.

In 1256 the general and his son launched a further campaign in the south which quickly overran the kingdoms of the White Barbarians (Baiman Guo) and Boli which is near the tea producing region of Pu'er and provided prestigious captive generals to be sent back to the imperial court for manacled presentation. Uriyangqadai even encountered the Song while campaigning. Heading north from Zhaotong to meet up with the main army in Sichuan the general encountered 30,000 Song troops and a division of their inland navy. The encounter resulted in the destruction or capture of 200 Song vessels along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River. When he finally arrived at court for his audience with Möngke, he was able to boast that he had successfully brought the whole of Qarajang (Yunnan) under imperial command and qualified his claim with an impressive display of captured prisoners-of-war. The general could claim to have 7,200,000 households on the books and paying taxes. The Dali Stele itemises his triumph implicitly expressing the approval of the court for his conquests.

General Uriyangqadai moved on to attack other place of eastern Yunnan, conquered thirty-seven tribes of Wuman, attacked Jiaozhi country (northern Vietnam), captured its capital, conquered thirty-six tribes of Temoxidongman, Jinchi (Baoshan), Bai Yi, Luo Gui, Mianzhong (upper Burma), and finally conquer Yunnan entirely, and established local governments throughout Yunnan. There are thirty-seven general local governments, eight special local governments, sixty districts, fifty counties, sixty-one Dianbu villages, amount to 1,287,753 families, which belong to each of the districts. The provincial government was established in Zhongqing (Shanchan, now Kunming) in order to rule Yunnan province.

He was able to request successfully that he be permitted to divide the province into administrative districts and was further granted permission to commence his next campaign into Jiaozhi, northern Vietnam.

The various tribes and ethnic groups who lived in the region were the subject of a detailed study by an official, Li Jing from Hebei, appointed in 1301 as Deputy Pacification Commissioner with the rank of ‘Bearer of the Tiger Tablet’ to the Wusa Wumeng administrative unit based in Guizhou which borders modern day Yunnan. One of his tasks was to scour the whole region to procure supplies and funding for the Burma campaign in which the Mongols were then involved. His *Yunnan Zhilüe*²⁵ was first written in 1303 in the form of a report but in 1331 it was edited and revised. When added to the description of the province which Marco Polo compiled a detailed picture of Yuan Yunnan emerges. Though other sources do not touch the detail of Li Jing, such writers as Marco Polo and Rashīd al-Dīn often confirm the reports compiled by Yuan official.

The Bai people were found throughout the province and neighbouring areas and were prized for their silk weaving. They had a very distinctive culture expressed in their clothing, cuisine with a predilection for raw meat, and most notably in their sexual mores which appeared very lax and generally questionable to outsiders. They practiced cremation and revered their ancestors and some among them including the Duan clan were practicing Buddhists. Among the non-Buddhist clans killing and violence was said to be common. Calligraphy was practiced by the educated elite. Cowry shells were used as a common currency.²⁶

²⁵ Translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” pp. 131-49

²⁶ Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” pp. 131-35.

The Wuman or Black Barbarians, also known as the Luoluo were distinguishable by the total absence of facial and head hair on the men. Li Jing claims that the men enjoy knives, fighting and killing, and even within families attacks using military weapons were common. Their cropped-tailed horses were famed and they traded them as far away as India. He also notes their reputation as able soldiers. Their *juke* (soldiers) were generously supported and furnished with valuable, expertly crafted armour and swords. Their arrows and javelins were tipped in a deadly and instantly effective poison and their attitude to their own death is possibly revealed in the euphemism ‘going home’ which they employed.²⁷ Marco Polo reported that ‘they ride long like Frenchmen, and wear armour of boiled leather, and carry spears and shields and arblasts, and all their quarrels are poisoned.’²⁸

Li Jing again comments on their relaxed attitude to sex. In fact before marriage the bridegroom was expected not only to have sexual relations with the tribe’s shaman but was also expected to ‘dance’ with all the groom’s brothers to ensure that she was not a virgin on her wedding day. Though widespread throughout the region, these customs were regarded with horror by the region’s Han Chinese neighbours.

The Gold-teeth Bai from Tibet are mentioned by Marco Polo, Rashīd al-Dīn, Banākatī, as well as Li Jing. Rashīd al-Dīn describes Qarajang as being peacefully bordered to the northwest by Tibet and the ‘Gold-Tooth people.’ Marco Polo describes the province of *Zardandān* as five days west of Qarajang and was so-called because the

²⁷ All references to Li Jing are from Armijo-Hussein’s translation. See, Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” pp.131-49.

²⁸ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Eds. Trans. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), Vol. 2, p. 78; also quoted in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 139.

people covered their teeth in a gold casing. These gold sheaths would be removed when it came time to eat.²⁹ Banākatī claims that these people ate not only raw meat but were cannibals and consumed dead and carrion flesh.

They eat carrion and also human flesh and they are obedient to the Qa'an. From here to the borders of Tibet they eat raw meat and consult idols and are shameless as regards their own women. The air is so putrid that (the people) are fearful of eating food after midday and they use women's menstrual blood as an anecdote for food poisoning (*'ufūnat*) and its pains. They boil sugar apples and eat winnowed barley.³⁰

This was not confirmed by the other more reliable sources that detailed their elaborate costumes and described how they also decorated their bodies in tattoos, a custom which clearly fascinated Marco Polo apparently witnessing it for the first time,³¹ and shaved their heads and facial hair.

The women pluck their eyebrows and eyelashes, do not wear make-up, put their hair up in two coils, wear embroidered clothes, and adorn them by sewing on small shells. They work very hard at farming, never even stopping to take a break. Right up until delivering a baby, they hardly ever rest. When they give birth, they immediately take it up in their arms, wash it, in the river and then hand it over to the care of the father and return right to work themselves.³²

²⁹ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-Tavārīkh*, p. 442.

³⁰ Banākatī, *Tārīkh-i Banākatī*. Ed. Ja'far Shi'rār (Tehran: Silsila-yi Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī, 1348 H.sh./1969), p. 323.

³¹ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Vol. 2, pp. 84-85

³² Li Jing, *Yunnan Zhilüe*, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 141.

This is basically confirmed by Marco Polo who adds that the father takes the mother's place in the bed nursing the child himself for a further forty days.³³ Li Jing describes the humid climate and the bamboo housing built on stilt and the fact that the people wash many times a day, bathing together without embarrassment. He describes a lack of an absolute authority or any system of rules and regulations which causes fatal disputes and arguments. Shamans exercise a great deal of power among the communities of the *Zardandan*. Marco Polo and Li Jing remark on the relaxed marriage customs, absence of spousal possessiveness and the absence of restrictions on union between close relatives. There are various sub-groups named after their personal customs of bodily decoration.

The Mosu and Naxi lived north of Dali along the Jinsha River near the Tibetan border. The higher altitudes allows for a cooler climate and there are many sheep and horses. 'Their villages are scattered like stars in the sky and are independent of one another.' The men have a reputation as fighters and they all carry daggers. When altercations occur a gong is sounded and the women from the two factions are expected to intervene to prevent bloodshed. As with the other tribes they 'have no prohibitions regarding licentious behavior.' Their food is coarse and simple consisting for the main part of turnip with salt being their only seasoning. They do not follow either Confucius or the Buddha though they do practice annual religious rites and cremate their dead.³⁴

The Tulao Barbarians, the Tulao Man, reside south of Xuzhou (Yibin, Sichuan Province) and north of Wumeng (Zhaotong). Marco Polo came across these people whom

³³ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Vol. 2, p. 85.

³⁴ Li Jing, *Yunnan Zhilüe*, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 145.

he described as ‘tall and good-looking; their complexions inclining to brown rather than fair.’ He named the province as Tholoman where the towns and castles were perched on ‘lofty mountains’ in the hidden caves of which the bodies of their cremated relatives are secreted. Gold was found in abundance here though for daily transactions Indian porcelain shells was the standard currency³⁵ Lichees supplemented the income derived mainly from tea.³⁶

Other tribes recorded in the province include the Ye Man savages who lived scattered in the valleys west of Xunchuan and wear bark instead of clothes and whose appearance Li Jing found repulsive. Families contained up to ten wives and the tribes were hunter/gatherers rather than farmers and did not even use tools. They wrapped their food in banana leaves. The Woni or Hani lived very frugally 500 li southwest of Lin’an residing in the mountains and forests. Li Jing reports an anecdote to demonstrate their stupidity. They would hoard cowry shells and when they felt death approaching would confide the whereabouts of their secret hoards to their children but always with the following proviso. ‘I have buried a certain amount, you can take some of it, but do not touch the rest, for I will use it when I am re-born.’³⁷ Lastly there are the Pu Barbarians, Pu Man or Puzi Man who came from west of the Lancang River and were known to be brave, strong, expert thieves, masters of the spear and crossbow and bare-back horse riders. Marco Polo knew them for their notoriety as brigands and idolaters.

³⁵ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Vol. 2, pp. 122-23.

³⁶ Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 148.

³⁷ Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 148.

The people are idolaters and an evil generation, holding it no sin to rob and maltreat: in fact, they are the greatest brigands on earth. They live by the chase, as well as on their cattle and the fruits of the earth. I should tell you also that in this country there are many of the animals that produce musk, which are called in the Tartar language Gudderi. Those rascals have great numbers of large and fine dogs, which are of great service in catching the musk-beasts, and so they procure great abundance of musk. They have none of the Great Kaan's paper money, but use salt instead of money. They are very poorly clad, for their clothes are only of the skins of beasts, and of canvas, and of buckram.³⁸

Even though others had a crucial role in the conquest of the region, the Dali Stele is at pains to stress the debt the province owes their recently deceased emperor Qubilai:

The benefaction of Shizhu emperor is infinite, like heaven and earth, contain everything of our world. People live in the world, enjoy the benefaction of heaven and earth, just like the plants enjoy the warm breeze, sunshine and the rainwater, all happy and comply with the order of nature, no matter we realize the order the nature or not. The great deeds and exploit of Shizhu emperor, like the hosts of heaven, are immortal.

It must be assumed that this gratitude is an indirect way of praising the minister most associated with Yunnan and its stability and accompanying prosperity who assumed control after the actual conquest. Sayyid 'Ajall is not only associated with Mongol rule in Yunnan but is remembered in his own right as almost the father of the province and his memory remains strong today with the Muslim population of the province hailing him as their illustrious ancestor. Before Sayyid 'Ajall's arrival the province had been ruled by a triumvirate comprising Mongol royalty, the Mongol military, and local leaders. These three groups would not have been as distinct as their names suggest and the elite which ruled the vast and growing empire was in no way ethnically pure and admission into the ruling ranks was an aspiration of members of many local elites. The formation of an

³⁸ Marco Polo, Vol. 2, *The Travels*, p. 45. See also Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 149.

ethnically diverse elite, open to the aspirations of all and exclusive of few, was a development witnessed throughout the Toluid empire. Sayyid 'Ajall himself was a third generation military administrator and he would have fully identified with the empire's ruling circles.

The grooming of the Duan clan at the expense of their rivals, the Gao who had served as the Duan kings' ministers for the past century, was an act of astute political judgment on the part of the Mongols. This would prove to be highly beneficial to the invaders who were able to reap the gratitude of the Duans expressed through their loyalty and dependable service.

Uriyangqadai found support from the Duan king crucial for his campaigns in the South. Though these campaigns resulted in a serious defeat and destroyed the Mongol reputation for invincibility as convincingly as the defeat at 'Ayn Jālūd in 1260, Uriyangqadai down played the 1258 failure against the Vietnamese emperor, Trần Thái Tông. Uriyangqadai's assault was part of a major, co-ordinated advance against the remnants of the Song. Möngke's three-pronged strategy was launched in 1257 with an army under Qubilai Khan moving south from Kaiping, Möngke himself leading the main thrust from Ning Xia, and Uriyangqadai moving in from Dali towards Guilin with the plan being to meet up with Qubilai's troops in a manoeuvre aimed at squeezing and herding the dispirited Song army in a classic pincer movement.

However in order to link up with Qubilai's army in southern China, Uriyangqadai would have to move through Dai Viet territory. Following classic Mongol strategy, Uriyangqadai requested passage for his army through Dai Viet land with his long-term objectives remaining hidden and together with Duan Xingzhi whose knowledge of the

local geography and topology was useful, led a combined force of 10,000 men to a camp on the Yunnan-Dai Viet border. Both sides were well prepared for war. Having seen the fall of Dali, Trần Thái Tông's Royal Commander Tran Quoc Tuan had mobilised the whole population and had started intense training of his army. However, war with the Mongols whose ferocious reputation had preceded them was hardly relished. It is therefore surprising that more care was not taken of the envoys dispatched by Uriyangqadai. The Mongol general dispatched three envoys in all each requesting leave for his armies to proceed through Trần Thái Tông's territory in order to reach southern China. Uriyangqadai's envoys, the last sent in the last month of 1257, were all imprisoned by Trần Thái Tông.³⁹

Decisively the Vietnamese were able to keep their nerve long enough to survive the initial assault and subsequent occupation of their capital, and especially the wrath of the Mongols when they discovered one of their envoys dead.

They entered an empty city and found their three envoys, who were all trussed up in jail. One of them died from his ordeal and, on seeing this, the Mongols went berserk, killing all the people and destroying much of the capital.⁴⁰

The Mongols had advanced into the Viet lands steadily and though initially daunted by the heavy use of elephants by their enemy, they had devised a strategy to deal with these mediaeval 'tanks.' Le Tac, a defector to the Mongols, reports that

³⁹ *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, p. 27, cited in Vu Hong Lien Warder, *Mongol Invasions of South-East Asia and their Impact on Relations between Đại Việt and Champa (1226-1326 CE)*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2007), pp. 83-84.

⁴⁰ *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, p. 260, note 52; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*. (Hanoi: Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2002), p.132; Đào Duy Anh, *Lịch Sử Việt Nam*. (Hanoi: Văn Hoá Thông Tin, 2002), pp. 236. This quote was provided by Vu Hong Lien. **P.93.**

‘Uriyangqadai’s son Ashu ordered the bowmen to shoot at the feet of the Tran’s elephants and the beasts ran amok, Tran’s troops were routed.’⁴¹

They held out long enough to launch a counter-attack which saw the de-moralised Mongols who had been decimated by pestilence which was rampant in the deserted capital of Thăng Long (Ha Noi), ignominiously expelled after only one month into their campaign. On the twenty-ninth of January 1258 C.E., Emperor Trần Thái Tông, accompanied by his Crown Prince Hoảng, travelled by boat up the Red river from Thiên Mạc to arrive at the eastern gate of Thăng Long, scene of their hasty evacuation only days before. They ‘fought the enemy and took the city without much opposition’⁴²

The retreating Mongols earned the nickname ‘the Buddhist enemy’ because re-tracing their steps back along the banks of the Red River they were too weak and de-moralised to indulge in any looting or plundering along the way.⁴³ An explanation for this unexpected defeat at the hands of their Vietnamese hosts lies primarily with the outbreak of ‘pestilence’ caused by rotting foodstuff, unburied corpses and the hot and humid climate in which vermin, fleas, and disease bearing rodents thrived.

The account of this episode is only briefly sketched in the *Yuan Shi* and even the near contemporary Vietnamese annals, the official *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, and *An Nam Chí Lược* written by Lê Tac, a defector to the Mongols, do not dwell on the Mongol defeat and yet it remains the first of a series of defeats in south-east Asia and serves as

⁴¹ *An Nam Chí Lược*, by Lê Tac, trans. by The Committee for Translation of Vietnamese Historical Records, Hue University (Hue: Hue University Press, 1962), p. 85, cited in Vu Hong Lien.p.90

⁴² *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, Vol. 2, p 28, cited in Vu Hong Lien. P.102.

⁴³ Cited in Vu Hong Lien Warder, *Mongol Invasions of South-East Asia and their Impact on Relations between Đại Việt and Champa (1226-1326 CE)*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2007),p.102

much as ‘Ayn Jālūd and the ill-fated assaults on Japan as marking the end of the Mongols reputation for invincibility. Rashīd al-Dīn while not going into military details refers to the ‘unhealthy climate’ which had caused so many deaths, ‘more than five thousand.’⁴⁴ The reason for this lack of impact was simply that the defeat was dwarfed by the death of the Great Khan Mōngke himself which meant a cessation of all military campaigns and offensives immediately and the formation of a *quriltai* to negotiate and elect a new Great Khan.

While Duan Xingzhi, the Maharaja, and his army chief and uncle, Xin Jufu, provided practical support for general Uriyangqadai in his campaigns within Yunnan and south outside the province, Xin Juri also known as Duan Shi found it increasingly difficult to control the rivalries between the Mongol factions at home. The intrigues among the political elite of Dali climaxed in the assassination of Qubilai’s fifth son, Hūgechi, the ‘Prince of Yunnan’ in which the pacification Officer and Military Commander of the Dali region, Bahā’ al-Dīn, and the official biographer, Huohuodai, were both implicated. Since few of the high officials in Yunnan at that time were Han Chinese the sources are quiet on events at the court in the years before the arrival of Sayyid ‘Ajall. However, the *Yuan Shi* contains the biography of Zhang Lidao who was employed as ‘personal secretary’ to Prince Hūgechi and who was present at the time of the prince’s poisoning.⁴⁵ It is from this account of Zhang Lidao’s rise and fall that some impressions of the intrigues at the Dali court emerge.

⁴⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi‘ al-Tavārīkh*, p. 871.

⁴⁵ “Biography of Zhang Lidao,” *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 167, pp. 3915-3919, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” pp. 165-67.

The poisoning of a prince would have been an audacious act at any time but the murder of a son of Qubilai Khan, glorious occupant of the Golden throne, suggests a conspiracy or suicidal rashness. Bahā' al-Dīn would have been shocked and dismayed at the sudden enfeoffment and appointment in 1267 of Prince Hügechi and his team to the province. In all probability this local official felt far enough away from the centre of power to consider himself almost untouchable and very secure in his own 'fiefdom' and the imminent arrival of this royal party would have been very unwelcome. In addition it should be realised that the "branch secretariats were not organs of local government like the circuit (*lu*) bureaus of Song times"⁴⁶ as David Farquhar has argued, but "separate vassal states surrounding a nuclear state" and that certainly Marco Polo and Rashīd al-Dīn considered Yunnan to be almost a separate country with a great deal of autonomy.

Zhang Lidao's father, a scholar under the Jurchen dynasty, had served under Tolui and Zhang Lidao who had come to the notice of the court, was appointed Hügechi personal secretary after his 'exemplary service' in Tangut territory. His first act upon arriving in Qarajang (Yunnan) with the new title of "Bearer of the silver tablet." was to make agriculture a top priority with the establishment of agricultural colonies, state run farms. Zhang Lidao assisted by Ming Duanfu, the Vice-President of one of the six boards was also charged with formalising a peace treaty and tribute agreement with Annan (Vietnam). According to official documents, Bahā' al-Dīn prepared an official banquet to welcome the arrival of the royal party but he had secretly poisoned the food to be presented to Hügechi. Zhang Lidao had heard rumours of this plot and attempted to force his way into the banqueting hall in order to warn the prince. When he was forcibly

⁴⁶ David M. Farquhar, "Structure and Function in the Yuan Imperial Government," in *China Under Mongol Rule*, ed. John Langlois. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 52.

restrained the ensuing commotion came to the notice of the royal party who immediately commanded that Zhang Lidao be admitted. However, it was too late and in the words of the *Yuan Shi*'s biography of the personal secretary,

The prince (Hügechi) took Lidao's hand for him to look down into his throat, but his flesh had already begun to rot, the poison had already taken effect. That night the prince died. Bahā' al-Dīn proceeded to occupy the prince's throne and sent men to harass the prince's widow into handing over his official seal.⁴⁷

There is no suggestion that the Dali royal family, the Duan clan, were implicated in any way in the plot to assassinate the prince. Zhang Lidao organized a group of thirteen loyalists to resist the attempted coup d'état and inform the Great Qa'an but when they were discovered, Bahā' al-Dīn had Zhang Lidao arrested. Before he was able to execute the faithful courtier, one of the group of thirteen loyalists, the Superintendent of Craftsmen, Zhang Zhong, sprung Lidao from jail and they fled from Dali to the Tibetan border. On the way they met an envoy already on its way to the province from Qubilai Khan. The group contained the official, Boroqan whom Qubilai had dispatched in response to the message that he had already received from Dali, and Qubilai's personal tutor, Bie Tie. With these officials and the heavily armed delegation to support him, Zhang Lidao was able to return to Dali and have Bahā' al-Dīn arrested and executed. Zhang Lidao was then summoned to Khan Baliq (Beijing), the capital, where he delivered a formal report on the circumstances surrounding the prince's death to a tearful

⁴⁷ "Biography of Zhang Lidao," *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 167, pp. 3915-3919, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 166.

Qubilai Khan. For his loyalty, Zhang Lidao was awarded fifty *jiang* of gold while the other loyal officials were given official positions.⁴⁸

Little documentary evidence is available to account for the few years between the events which followed Zhang Lidao's return from Khan Baliq and the arrival of Sayyid 'Ajall in 1274. In Sayyid 'Ajall's official biography the event is recorded thus:

In the eleventh year (of the Zhiyuan reign period, 1274), the emperor summoned Sayyid 'Ajall and said to him: "Yunnan is a place I have personally been to, but because the officials that have *been appointed* there *have not* been appropriate, it has caused those distant peoples to be unrestful. I now wish to select someone who is both cautious and generous, to establish order there, and there is no one better than you."⁴⁹

Sayyid 'Ajall is indelibly associated with Yunnan, as much today as he was in the thirteenth century. He moved not only his immediate office and family but his Muslim troops from Turkestan and all were expected to settle and take local wives, just as back in the 1250s the troops accompanying Hülegü had similarly taken permanent leave of their wives and children in the East with the expectation of establishing new families in Iran.⁵⁰ His appointment was in keeping with Mongol imperial policy which had already been successfully implemented in northern China and in Central Asia. The Sino-Khitans' administration of Bukhara in the 1220s and 1230s, and the largely Khwarazmian-Bukharan administration in Chung-tu (Beijing) for north China both stood as models for

⁴⁸ "Biography of Zhang Lidao," *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 167, pp. 3915-3919, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," pp. 165-67.

⁴⁹ "Biography of Sayyid 'Ajall," *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 125, pp. 3063-3070, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, "Sayyid 'Ajall," p. 21.

⁵⁰ John Masson Smith Jr., "Hülegü Moves West: High Living and Heartbreak on the Road to Baghdad," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 111-34.

further imperial expansion. In anticipation of the scale of the appointment he had been awarded, he sent his son, Naḳīr al-Dīn, ahead of him to make an appraisal of the county and open negotiations with the officials already there.

The Mongol official in charge, Toqur (Tuohulu), an imperial prince, had been told by his staff that Sayyid ‘Ajall had been sent to depose him and restore direct rule from the capital. However, Naḳīr al-Dīn’s oratory gifts were the equal of his father and he was able to calm the fears and misgivings of Toqur and assure him that his father was looking forward to working with him, not against him. He even appointed Toqur’s own advisors as officials in his new administration. Sayyid ‘Ajall’s prompt moves to appease the Mongol elite of the province paid off and there were no reported assassination attempts and the transition from military rule to civilian government proceeded smoothly.

Qubilai Khan had given the separation of military rule from the civilian administration priority and had tried to institute his policies wherever and whenever it was possible. Yunnan under Sayyid ‘Ajall was one of the few provinces where this separation was actually realised. In early 1275, the following petition was submitted to Khan Baliq (Beijing);

In the twelfth year (of the Zhiyuan reign period, 1275), he presented the following memorial: “In Yunnan the barbarians who have yet to be incorporated are many, I request that the Pacification Bureau jointly with the Military Command deal with this, under the jurisdiction of the regional secretarial council.” Another memorial stated: “The territory of Qarajang (Halazhang) is almost the same as Yunnan, and the prefectures and counties are administered by *myriarchs* (commander of 10,000) and *chiliarchs* (commander of 1000) and this should be changed to civilian officials.” And the emperor agreed. By the thirteenth year (of the Zhiyuan reign period, 1276), all the prefectures and counties had been changed and it was reported.⁵¹

⁵¹ “Biography of Sayyid ‘Ajall,” in the *Yuan Shi juan* 167, pp. 3915-3919, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 23.

With the arrival of Sayyid ‘Ajall, Yunnan experienced a period of prosperity and stability which also marked the absorption of the province into China proper, a reality manifest in Yunnan’s status today. To consolidate his hold on the province, Sayyid ‘Ajall moved the capital from Dali to Kunming where it remains to this day. He was determined from the off-set to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people and with this aim in mind, he concentrated on four areas of the economy namely the development of agriculture with the introduction of new crops and more advanced agricultural methods, the stimulation of regional markets and local trade, taxation flexibility to promote trade along with exemptions from new currency regulations, and the exploitation of Yunnan’s mineral potential. Interestingly, rather than introducing Muslim, western Asian or even Mongol customs to underpin his reforms, Sayyid ‘Ajall implemented Chinese practices, promoting the use of Chinese marital and funeral ceremonies, building Confucian schools, and distributing copies of Confucian classics.⁵²

To strengthen the foundations of his agricultural policies, Sayyid ‘Ajall published and circulated handbooks on farming techniques and livestock maintenance to accompany the distribution of seeds, tools, and livestock. These packages were given to both indigenous farmers and immigrants who had arrived with Sayyid ‘Ajall. Agronomy was a subject which flourished under Mongol patronage and scholarly and scientific connections across the Empire were facilitated by the strong ties established between the

⁵² Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 202.

Han-lin Academy and what was to become the *Rab-i Rashīdī*.⁵³ Rice production, regulated forestry, mulberry trees and hemp under-pinned by an irrigation system employing dams, reservoirs, and controlled flooding were all introduced at this time and have continued in the Kunming area to this day. Arriving with his entourage were many Muslim merchants and traders whose expertise, commercial connections and entrepreneurial spirit opened up what was once a barbarian backwater of the Sung Empire to a wide and receptive world outside. The traditional use of cowry shells for commerce was allowed and the tax system and the corvée burden were lightened to encourage the involvement of the local people.⁵⁴

Stories of Sayyid ‘Ajall’s enlightened dealings with the locals are common. One Ming source reports a conversation in which the governor indulges in some heavy bargaining with some locals over how much tax they should contribute to the government. However, the traditional roles appear reversed and it is Sayyid ‘Ajall who is arguing for the reduction in tax and trying hard to dissuade the farmers from committing themselves to too high a rate, and convincing them to choose a more appropriate form of payment, be it silver, horses, shells or oxen. He threatens to decide himself on the amount and method of taxation if they should continue to offer unreasonably high rates of

⁵³ Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 115-26; Ann Lambton, ‘The Āthār wa Aḳyā’ of Rashīd al-Dīn Faḳl Allāh Hamadānī and his Contribution as an Agronomist, Arboriculturist and Horticulturist,’ in *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy*, eds. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David Morgan (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 126-54; Abolala Soudavar, ‘The Han-Lin Academy and the Persian Royal Library-Atelier,’ in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East*, eds. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), pp. 467-84.

⁵⁴ Cf. de Rachewiltz et al., *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 475-77; Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, pp. 201-03; Armijo-Hussein, ‘Sayyid ‘Ajall,’ Ch. 4, p. 176.

taxation.⁵⁵ The continued use of cowry shells by the indigenous people which was permitted by Sayyid ‘Ajall went in direct contradiction to the directive from Qubilai Khan who had ordained that the use of paper currency was to be mandatory through out his lands. Sayyid ‘Ajall was convinced that a disruption of the centuries old monetary system who disrupt trade and irrecoverably damage the local economy. His defiant plea for an exemption was highly controversial but it is a measure of the regard and trust in which he was held that the exemption was granted.

However, even though the province of Dali which came under Sayyid ‘Ajall’s direct control enjoyed the benefits of full participation in a global economy with the security and global access that membership of the empire entailed, there is considerable evidence that there was discontent in the neighbouring states. A complicated system of control and delegation of authority had emerged as a result of the negotiated peace and settlement which had replaced the traditional methods of Mongol occupation. The inducements to cooperate and accept Mongol sovereignty were considerable and the fact that the implicit threat of violence was not the main factor says much for the transformation of the culture which pervaded all levels of this global Toluid Empire.

Military out-posts and small garrisons were established throughout the region. Seventy-eight postal relay stations (*yam/yizhan*) between Dali eastward to Shicheng and the main east-west highway connecting Dali and the new capital Shanchan (Kunming) was repaired. Each postal station included a small military unit conscripted locally, a stable of fifty horses, provisions for overnight guests, and a general store. A prestigious title was awarded the local notable who would assume responsibility for the up-keep and

⁵⁵ Zhang Hong, *Nanyi Shi*, cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 175.

functioning of the station and hostel and the original five-year renewable posting was soon made into a sought after hereditary position which provided an element of stability and status.⁵⁶

Stability, status and most importantly a sense of inclusion and imperial connection were concerns which Sayyid ‘Ajall addressed by substituting the military institutions established by Uriyangqadai with often locally appointed political units of over-lapping, multilayered civilian jurisdictions. This multiplicity of political units allowed the ruling elite deeper penetration and more comprehensive control of the population while at the same time these units offered the indigenous population involvement in the complex political system and responsibility for their own future and well-being as well as instituting a recognisable path to political, financial, and social advancement. To reduce the demands on outside officials the post of *Tuguan* was created and this influential office was offered to local headmen and leaders in return for sworn loyalty to the Great Khan in order to ‘make officials out of native chieftains.’⁵⁷ The post was made hereditary and conferred considerable status and local power and though a *darughachi* was always appointed at the same time, complete parity was maintained as regards salary, office land and rank. This system worked well within the province of Dali though incidents of resentment, misunderstandings, intrigue, and even rebellion are recorded when the system was applied to the lands lying to the east.

Education was central to Sayyid ‘Ajall’s plans for political reform and economic development and to this end he oversaw the construction of schools to which the local

⁵⁶ De Rachewiltz, *In the Service of the Khan*, p. 476; Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ Herman, “Mongol Conquest,” p. 310.

notables were encouraged to send their children. His intention was that the reliance on Han Chinese administration officials could be broken. These educational facilities were financed by *xuetian* which in the Islamic world were referred to as *waqfs*. In all fifty-five schools were endowed in this manner and his colleagues were encouraged to follow his example so that the cost of education did not become a burden on the local population. Dali benefited initially but after the administration moved to Kunming schools were opened there also and by the end of the Yuan period schools were found in a number of urban centres in the province. In fact Sayyid ‘Ajall was simply implementing Mongol policy on education with a little more enthusiasm than found elsewhere. The *Yuan Shi* contains a section devoted to schools (*juan* 8, p. 2032) where Mongol policy and practice is elaborated. Qubilai Khan decreed that schools be established in all districts and that children should be allowed access and that scholars be enabled to continue their studies for the further benefit of the administration.⁵⁸

Though he ruled for only six years he achieved a great deal and the outpouring of genuine grief at his death, attests to the impression that he made on the people, both indigenous and immigrants.

Sayyid ‘Ajall lived in Yunnan for six years, and when he died in the 16th year of the Zhiyuan reign period (1279), at the age of 69 *sui*, the people cried in the streets, and he was buried outside the north gate of Shanshan. The king of Jiaozhi sent a delegation of 12 people wearing mourning attire. They prepared an elegy for the memorial rites, and it included the following words, “He gave birth to us and educated us, and we mourn him as our father and our mother” and this caused them to wail and cry uncontrollably.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” pp. 207-12.

⁵⁹ “Biography of Sayyid ‘Ajall”, *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 125, pp. 3036-66, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 27.

The establishment of Mongol rule in Yunnan was noteworthy in that the traditional brutal methods of subjugation were abandoned even in the face of extreme provocation, a policy which is commemorated on the re-discovered Dali Stele. This policy of avoiding bloodshed was continued and found expression in the rule of Sayyid ‘Ajall, Even when provoked in the extreme Sayyid ‘Ajall made the avoidance of bloodshed a priority. The rebellion of Luopan Dian (Yuanjiang, 100 miles southwest of Kunming) ended in peaceful surrender after the rebel leaders heard of Sayyid ‘Ajall’s anger and threats of execution for treason towards his own men who had disobeyed his orders of restraint towards the rebels. Sayyid ‘Ajall’s main concern throughout the incident was to the possibility of death and harm to innocents and his own soldiers.

I am not concerned about the attack, I am worried about you who will be rushing towards the points of swords, and if you are not fortunate the innocents will be killed; and I am also worried that you will plunder and enslave peaceful people, who will then no longer have any means to support themselves, and they will have to rebel again.⁶⁰

The criticism levelled against these policies and the blame directed at them⁶¹ for the continued, low level unrest in the provinces to the east of Dali amounts to a small price to have paid for what was essentially a period of comparative peace. The local sources paint a confused and hardly sympathetic picture but too much can be read into such detailed observations. The larger view and the legacy which Sayyid ‘Ajall left

⁶⁰ ‘Biography of Sayyid ‘Ajall *Yuan Shi*, *juan* 125, translated and cited in Armijo-Hussein, “Sayyid ‘Ajall,” p. 25.

⁶¹ Herman, “Mongol Conquest,” p. 327.

behind suggest a far less hostile reality, and certainly for those on the ground in Dali province Sayyid ‘Ajall and his progeny were respected and popular figures. In fact claims to blood links to Sayyid ‘Ajall are not uncommon both in China and Iran. The Safavid historian, Khwandamīr (d. 1539-40), claims descent from Sayyid ‘Ajall through his grandfather, Mīrkhwand (d. 1498), on his mother’s side. A tomb of a local notable in Quanzhou claims family ties reaching back to Bokhara with another claiming to be his son. In fact so many tombs in Quanzhou dating from the Yuan era claim connections with Sayyid ‘Ajall that Bai Shoufī finds them questionable.⁶² The leading Nestorian cleric, Mar Sargis, would have spread the good name of his governor after serving in Yunnan with Sayyid ‘Ajall in 1272. He later returned to eastern China where he was responsible for the construction of a number of churches including the elusive Nestorian church of Hangzhou.⁶³ There is a stele in the mosque of Hangzhou which reports that “During the years Hongwu (1368-98), there was a descendent in the seventh generation of Saiyyid Ajall, prince of Xianyang, named Ha Zhe (Hajji), who went to the imperial audience to hear the emperor's orders proclaimed. He was given permission to build mosques in all provinces and, during the following eras, decrees conferring favours were given to them as if this had been a permanent law.”⁶⁴

The significance of the Dali Stele is that it showed a new direction and attitude in the policies of the Mongols towards the indigenous people and a deeper awareness of

⁶² Chen Dasheng, *Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou (Zaitun)*. (Yinchuan shi: Ningxia People’s Publishing House, 1984), p. x.

⁶³ See A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), p. 148.

⁶⁴ From a stele dated 1670 in the mosque of Hangzhou constructed in 1281 by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn. See George Lane and Alexander Morton, *The Phoenix Mosque of Hangzhou* (forthcoming); see also A. Vissière, “L’Islamisme à Hang-tcheou,” *Revue de Monde Musulman* 22 (1913), pp. 1-84.

alternative methods of pacification and the fostering of loyalty. Through much of the thirteenth century the Mongols had nurtured a reputation for ferocity and ruthless militarism. The Dali Stele presented a total contrast. The picture presented permeating the words, was a vision of a new era and a new philosophy. The message engraved on the Dali Stele was in sharp contrast to the image of Mongol tradition and it clearly exemplified the emerging era of the Toluids, now undisputed rulers of the Mongol Empire, and founders of thrones in Persia and a united China. The Toluids not only represented a period of prosperity and relative stability but they oversaw and guided the emergence of a new multi-ethnic elite with a global outlook which was reflected in their eclectic culture fusing elements from east and west and expressed in everything from their cuisine, to the histories produced in the Han-lin Academy and the miniatures of its sister institution, the *Rabī-i-Rashīdī* of Tabriz. The Toluids were eager to fuse their leadership, their ideals and their future into the developing dominant culture. In both Iran and China and in these new regions which they were moulding into their empire, they wanted legitimacy, acceptance and mutual fusion. In Iran they had respected clerics such as Baiḳāwī⁶⁵ re-working history to incorporate their dynasty into the great tide of inevitable time and in Khanbaliq Chinese scholars were already working on the histories of three dynasties which had now given way to Qubilai's Yuan Empire. In Iran Naḳīr al-Dīn Ḳūsī prepared lectures and wrote notes for visiting scholars from China while churches opened their doors to bishops from Qubilai's capital. In China a Persian entrepreneur, 'Alā' al-Dīn re-built the Walin Mosque in Hangzhou, still standing and functioning to this day, while the Muslim governor of Quanzhou presided over a

⁶⁵ Charles Melville "From Adam to Abaqa: Qāḳī Bayḳāwī's Rearrangement of History," *Studia Iranica* 30 (2001): 67-86; 36 (2007): 7-64; Baiḳāwī, *Nizām al-tawārikh*. Ed. Mīr Hāshim Muḳaddith, Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktūr Maḳmūd Afshār 1381 H.sh./2002.

booming economy fuelled by a prosperous and expanding Muslim population. There were many urban centres prospering and growing from the new markets opened by the Iran/China union and in the late thirteenth century, early fourteenth century trade and exchange were at a peak. The Dali Stele celebrates Qubilai and his inclusion of Dali and the surrounding lands into his global Yuan-Ilkhanid empire. Sayyid 'Ajall stands as an embodiment of the Toluid vision and the Dali Stele a celebration of that vision.

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