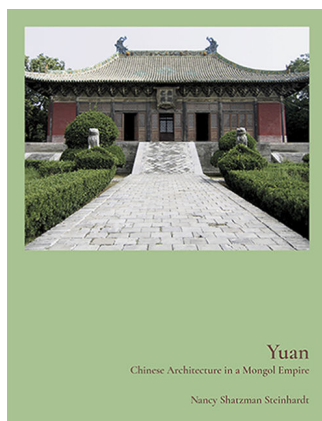


NANCY SHATZMAN STEINHARDT, *YUAN. CHINESE ARCHITECTURE IN A MONGOL EMPIRE*

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Reviewed by
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Yuan. Chinese Architecture in a Mongol Empire by Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt is an important and useful addition to the sparse Western-language literature on Chinese architecture, which includes an introductory survey of this topic by the same author. Founded by Chinggis Khan (1162–1227), who amalgamated smaller confederations, and initially based in Mongolia, the Mongol Empire of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries remains the largest contiguous empire in world history, extending, at its height, throughout southern Russia, Central and West Asia, and China, as well as, briefly, parts of eastern Europe. Its astonishing geographic range contributed to a vibrant exchange of technologies, ideas, luxuries, and commodities throughout this vast transcontinental empire, as well as the movement of peoples, including papal envoys, Iranian historians, and the famed Venetian explorer Marco Polo.

This volume focuses on the period from the rule of Ögedei (1186–1241), the second son of Chinggis Khan, to that of Khubilai Khan (1216–1294), the fifth khaghan, and the founder of the

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Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) in China. Khubilai was one of the grandsons of Chinggis Khan whose rivalries over issues of succession contributed to the dissolution of the Mongol empire. Arguments regarding whether the Mongols should continue their primarily nomadic way of life or adopt a sedentary lifestyle were another factor that led to the division of the empire into four factions ruled by competing members of the ruling family. The volume, which discusses a remarkable range of wood and stone buildings, including palaces, observatories, monasteries, mosques, mausolea, tombs, and stages constructed throughout China, Inner Mongolia, and elsewhere incorporates historical studies and older and more recent excavations. When pertinent, Steinhardt also illustrates and discusses decorative elements and the free-standing stone sculptures that are integral to the sites addressed in the volume.

Steinhardt begins with an exploration of the walled enclosures built by the Mongols, including the capital cities of the Yuan dynasty – Kharakorum, Shangdu, Zhongdu, and Dadu – as well as the sites that developed through the appanage system in which members of the ruling family were awarded lands whose income contributed to their maintenance. Kharakorum, currently known as Kharkhorin, is in present-day Mongolia; Shangdu, the fabled Xanadu of Samuel Coleridge, which was called Ciandu by Polo, is in Inner Mongolia; Zhongdu is in Hebei Province in China and Beijing is an independent municipality within its borders. In the book's first chapter, Steinhardt describes each of these cities, their spatial organizations, and their primary structures such as palaces as well as administrative and religious buildings, while also providing useful information regarding prior studies and excavations of these important centers. She incorporates current archaeological findings into her reconstructions of the sites, focuses on Chinese building techniques that were in use during the Mongol Yuan dynasty and bases her discussion on extensive, careful personal observations at the sites discussed.

Time and again Steinhardt refers to the *Yingzao fashi* (Treatise on Architectural Methods), written by the official Li Jie (1065–1110), which is an influential work incorporating earlier texts as well as oral accounts. This work carefully describes the construction of wooden buildings and explains and illustrates components such as foundation platforms, pillars, and beams supporting brackets and roofs that were usually embellished with ceramic tiles. Steinhardt also explains that in addition to the size and scale of buildings, subtle variations in these features have helped in distinguishing the types and functions of public and private buildings. Repeated reference to the *Yingzao fashi* clearly places the planning and construction of the Yuan imperial cities firmly within the history of Chinese architecture. How the Mongols, or any of the other non-Han Chinese rulers that preceded them in the north, contributed to the physical construction of these cities, the buildings that they housed, or any of the other works produced in China during their respective periods of rule remains an interesting area of inquiry.

The rulers of the Yuan dynasty organized the many peoples in their realm into hierarchical categories. Mongols were placed at the top, followed by the Semu, a term used to define non-Han Chinese specialists such as Iranians, Uyghurs, and others working at the court. The third rank comprised people from northern China, including those from conquered dynasties such as the Qidan Liao (916–1125) and the Jurchen Jin (1115–1234), while the fourth group consisted largely, but not exclusively, of Han Chinese of southern China. It seems likely that whatever combination of Mongol, Semu, and Han Chinese individuals such as former Jin bureaucrat Liu Bingzhong (1216–1294) – a court advisor and architect commissioned by Khubilai Khan to oversee the planning and construction of Shangdu and Dadu, both of which follow earlier models for the structure and organization of imperial or capital cities – were involved in the supervision, development, and construction of the cities and buildings of Yuan-era China, it was local, possibly at times conscripted, individuals, largely of Han Chinese ethnicity and trained in the construction techniques, who built these structures.

Interesting similarities are evident in the making of other types of art or luxury goods during the Yuan dynasty. For example, the flourishing of blue-and-white (porcelain painted with cobalt blue under a clear glaze) in the great kiln complex at Jingdezhen during the Yuan dynasty, while spurred in part by easier access to imported cobalt ore from the greater Iranian world, relied on the longstanding Chinese mastery of clay and glazes. Once again, production at the site was presumably in the hands of local craftsman and workers, trained in the pertinent skills for generations. A similar continuity of artistic practices and imagery can be found in earlier dynasties such as the Liao and Jin as well as during the later Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911). This reality reinforces the understanding that the knowledge and skills of trained artists, or artisans, in addition to China's agricultural productivity and other riches, contributed to the country's appeal, during different historical periods, to groups living beyond its borders. (The Mongols and the Manchus were the only two non-Han Chinese dynasties to control both north and south China.)

As Steinhardt points out in her introduction, the choice to live in sedentary communities, the related development of an administrative system, and the trained and knowledgeable individuals needed to staff such a bureaucracy, were critical to the creation of the Mongol empire. In both the first and second chapters of *Yuan*, she explores Mongol interactions with just such settlements, including the razing of cities, and encounters with earlier enclosed spaces such as Avraga (or Avarga), Olon Süme, and other sites in Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and southern Russia. She also discusses Mongol awareness of mounded tombs in Inner Mongolia, and the precedent of military enclosures such as that built near Harbin in Heilongjiang Province in the northeast by the Jin dynasty. The second chapter features the five capitals established by the previous Jurchen Jin dynasty, another nomadic or nomadic pastoralist group that had

earlier established control of northern China. The book presents the organization of these capitals, which also follow established Han Chinese traditions, and the major monuments within these cities and nearby. While Steinhardt presents the Jin as an exemplar for the Mongols and their capitals, the prototypes for Yuan architecture can be traced to architectural techniques and types that have a much longer history in Chinese architecture and significantly predate the arrival of the Jurchen or the Mongols.

The third chapter discusses famous Yuan-dynasty buildings, such as the Dening or Virtuous Tranquility Hall, built for imperial sacrifices in Quyang, Hebei Province, the stone platform for observing celestial bodies in Dengfeng, Henan Province, and the Juyong or Cloud passage to the Great Wall to the northwest of Yuan Daidu. Steinhardt stresses the long history and study of these imperially sponsored monuments and their ties to early architectural traditions. This approach continues in the fourth chapter, which highlights complexes and buildings, such as the Daoist Yonglegong, and the Buddhist Guangsheng Monastery, in Shanxi Province, built during the Yuan dynasty, though possibly not under imperial patronage. In addition to her thorough discussions of these sites, their histories, and earlier studies, Steinhardt also explores the rendering of buildings in the murals painted at these sites, linking them to contemporaneous building styles, and to other artistic practices such as the *jiehua* or ruled-line painting, used for the depiction of buildings, and popular during the Yuan dynasty.

Tombs, theaters, and other private – as opposed to court-sponsored – buildings, constructed during the Yuan dynasty are the focus of the fifth chapter. Steinhardt's discussion of tombs in China and Inner Mongolia, which continues the analysis of Jin-period tombs found in the same regions in the second chapter, provides another linchpin in the discussion of the Mongol adaptation of existing Han Chinese traditions including long-established funerary practices. It is worth noting that the bodies of the rulers of the Yuan dynasty, and those of high-ranking officials, were returned to their homeland rather than interred in China. While this remains controversial, both Chinggis and Khubilai are thought to have been interred in or near Burkhan Khaldun near Ulanbaatar in Mongolia. Recently excavated tombs have provided evidence that such structures were built for non-literati officials, who were often buried with their wives. They are not large or complex, but consist of a corridor and a single chamber with a rounded roof. They are decorated with murals, as were earlier Chinese tombs. Most contain portraits of the deceased: some wear Mongol-style clothing and others Han Chinese dress.

Jin- and Yuan-period tombs have also been found to incorporate theaters or stages into their structures. Such venues, particularly for the *zaju* style of drama, were initially associated with monasteries, although performances were open to the public. During the Yuan dynasty, they were constructed both as free-standing buildings, and as structures incorporated into tombs. They were

also represented on murals in these tombs. Their prevalence at burials sites and above ground reflects the importance of the performing arts in the culture of the Jin and Yuan dynasties. It should be noted, however, that acrobats, musicians, and dancers are also represented in the murals and clay figures (*mingqi*) found in tombs dating from the Han (206 BCE – 220 CE) to the Tang (618–906) dynasties, suggesting that such entertainments were long valued in daily life as well as the afterlife. Stages, on the other hand, became important during the Jin and Yuan dynasties. It remains unclear whether, beyond enjoying such performances, any of the staging, costuming, or thematic elements of Yuan theaters and performances can be traced to specifically Mongol practices.

The book's sixth chapter encapsulates the diversity of the Mongol realm. It presents Muslim mausolea, particularly the dome-and-square type that is found from northwest Iran to China and Inner Mongolia. This chapter also explores the Tibetan Buddhist presence in Mongol China, illustrated in the *chorten* (Tibetan-style pagodas) constructed throughout the realm. Steinhardt also analyzes newly identified Manichean paintings as sources for now-lost Manichean complexes in China. She also identifies crosses as indicators of certain types of Christianity in Mongol-period China. Her discussion of rock-cut architecture in the seventh chapter, particularly the site of Feilaifeng near Hangzhou in the south, noted for its use of Indo-Tibetan imagery, provides yet another example of the Mongol adaptation of pre-existing architectural traditions. Man-made rock-cut cave temples, usually Buddhist centers, can be traced from South and Central Asia into north China as early as the fourth century. Although such sites continued in north China, as well as slightly later in Sichuan Province, none have been found south of the Yangzi River from prior to the Mongol period. The construction of Feilaifeng, and other sites such as Arzhai in Inner Mongolia, provides another example of the Mongol continuation of earlier architectural types. It is unclear, however, why Steinhardt chose not to include the rock-cut caves constructed during the Mongol period in the spectacular cave-temple complex at Mogao near Dunhuang in Gansu Province, or the nearby Yulin cave temples.

The innovative, if speculative, eighth chapter looks east. While the Mongols failed in their attempts to reach Japan and were only marginally successful in Burma and other parts of Southeast Asia, the Korean peninsula was under Mongol influence from 1270 to 1356. Steinhardt suggests that the Tibetan-style pagoda or chorten built there at the time reflects an awareness of practices in China and not those in Tibet. However, Korean monks traveled in the Himalayan region as early as the eighth century, and there is no reason to assume that Koreans were unaware of the chorten-style pagoda. Moreover, the wood and stone edifices built in Korea and Japan at the time belong to the continental architectural tradition, introduced to both nations centuries before the Mongols conquered China. The construction and appearance of the Korean and Japanese

buildings discussed in this chapter do not seem to have any direct connection to the Mongols.

Yuan. Chinese Architecture in a Mongol Empire is enhanced by a deep bibliography and by an appendix giving the Chinese characters for the multilingual names of the places and peoples discussed in the book. While Steinhardt carefully explains the Chinese-language architectural terms when they are initially presented in the volume, this book would have benefited from an easily accessible and independent glossary providing a quick reference for those who do not specialize in architecture. Despite this and other minor quibbles, Steinhardt deserves congratulations for skillfully incorporating the breathtakingly complex geography of the Mongol period, and its equally demanding history, into a narrative that highlights long-known monuments from the period, newly discovered sites, and a host of archaeological findings, to mount an engaging presentation of buildings, their patrons, their meanings, and their uses during an important period in both Chinese and world history.