

# **Biographies of Influential People from China**

by

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For

Cal Poly Pomona

**Program on India and China 1995-98**

Funded by the *National Endowment for the Humanities*

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# Biographies of Influential People From China

## Rationale:

The California Framework encourages a study of civilizations such as China and India. Social, cultural, and technological changes occurred during the periods C.E. 500-1789. The Chinese and Indian cultures and societies showed remarkable development. The Mongol Ascendancy (1264-1368) developed trade and cultural exchange.

History can truly be brought to life when individuals are presented as having many of the same needs, wants, challenges, and imperfections. Their legacies have left an impact on world events today.

Students will learn about the rich contributions of diverse historical figures in history:

a. Genghis Khan was known for more than just military prowess. His organizational skills and his ability to rule an empire for the time he did was spectacular.

b. Empress Wu maintained considerable power and control, especially for a woman, though her methods were sometimes questionable.

c. Confucius never meant for his philosophy to become a religion, but it not only spread outside of China's boundaries, but still is associated with other different cultures today.

d. The Emperor K'ang-Hsi was one of the greatest Chinese rulers. He was known as the "Sun of Heaven" and through his own "writings" such as edicts, we are able to gain insight into this emperor, who believed that he was responsible for the welfare of his entire economic and educational structure as the evaluation and molding of their characters.

## Objectives:

1. Students will read given primary and secondary documents and resources on Genghis Khan, Confucius, Empress Wu, and Kang-Hsi.
2. Students will write "original" newspaper articles relating to these historical figures and participate in "You were There" simulations.
3. Students will roleplay these historical figures in "You were there" roles. They will be interviewed by other students acting as contemporary reporters.

## Approximate Time:

Each individual lesson consists of one class period of 50-60 minutes.

## Materials and Handouts:

1. Student hand-outs (provided)
2. Student sheet from *The Mongols* by Professor Christopher Cullen

3. Writing paper
4. Art paper
5. Transparencies illustrating people (optional).

**Introduction:**

We learn about many different people in history. Social and cultural and technological changes occurred during the period C.E. 500-1789. The Chinese cultures and societies showed remarkable development. The Mongol Ascendancy (1264-1300) developed trade and cultural exchange.

**Procedure:**

**Step 1:** Show the picture or transparency of Genghis Khan. Encourage discussion about Genghis.

**Step 2:** Pass out student sheets of primary source documents and information. Have students read and discuss the private and public leadership of Genghis Khan in cooperative learning groups of three.

**Culminating or closing activity:** Each group of three students will do a biography profile of Genghis Khan.

## **BIO PROFILE** - Student Sheet

ON: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Address

Height

Eyes

Family members

Leadership qualities

Favorite colors

Favorite hobby or activity

Greatest hope

Worst fear

My critics would describe me as

Geography helped or hindered me by

Sometimes I wish

The advice that I would give leaders today would be

## **STUDENT SHEET - GENGHIS KHAN**

Source: Adapted from the book *Genghis Khan: Mongol World Conqueror*

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Not surprisingly, the life and character of a man who made such an impact on history was later overlaid with legend. He was the most famous conqueror in history, even surpassing Attila the Hun. Genghis came from the Eurasian steppes. Genghis and his Mongols posed a mortal threat to settled civilization. . . The world was changing and Genghis Khan represented the steppes' final and greatest challenge to the urban cultures of China and the Middle East. Though one document illustrates his good and heroic qualities as well as his less flattering ones, most critics portray him as a sub-human monster. As a child Genghis murdered his own half-brother Bekter. The Muslim historian Rashid al-din quotes Genghis as saying that the greatest pleasure in life was "to cut my enemies to pieces, drive them before me, seize their possessions, witness the tears of those who are dear to them and to embrace their wives and daughters."

A Chinese philosopher who visited the Mongol court recorded the Khan's view of himself:

"Heaven is weary of the luxury of China. I shall remain in the wilderness of the north. I shall return to the simplicity and moderation once again. As for the clothes I wear and the food I eat, I shall have the same as cowherds and grooms and I shall treat my soldiers as brothers. In a hundred battles I have been at the forefront and within seven years I have performed a great work, for in the six directions of space all things are subject to one ruler."

**DIRECTIONS:** 1. Please complete a biography profile sheet on Genghis Khan. You may use this primary source or get information on your own. You need to show that Genghis was also human. After completion, illustrate by using a computer or colored pencils or markers.

2. You have met other leaders from diverse civilizations such as Suleiman the Magnificent. What qualities did all these leaders possess? Write a conversation involving Genghis and at least two other leaders. Have them discuss how they would handle violent waves of crimes that might take place in their societies or our world today.

## **STUDENT SHEET**

### **EMPRESS WU**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Empress Wu was originally a consort of Kaotsung, a ruler of medieval China. She was finally elevated to the role of empress. The emperor found it increasingly difficult to go against her wishes, especially since, after her coronation, she methodically removed all of his most trusted advisors and substituted men loyal only to her. The deposed ministers were exiled to distant provinces; they all died on the way or were forced to commit suicide after they got there. To prevent further problems, their families were sold as slaves. Women whom Kaotsung looked at twice had a tendency to die suddenly; usually right after a dinner with the imperial couple. Two women whom Wu removed in that manner were the duchess of Han in 655 and her daughter Sansan in 666. The duchess was Wu's own sister.

Princess Wu was a very strong ruler. Words which might be used to describe her were proud and forceful. Though we have no recording of her voice and, therefore, must guess its sound, it could be described as rough, high-pitched, clear, or soft.

Being that she came from a rich, financial background, she was able to wear jewelry and different hair ornaments.

A lady of the court could participate in many activities: listening to court music, listening to poets, and hunting on horseback.

#### **DIRECTIONS:**

You are Empress Wu. Write a paragraph explaining why you believe you should have power as the empress, and how you can still be a woman during this time period.

## STUDENT SHEET

### EMPEROR K'ANG-HSI

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Emperor K'ang-Hsi reigned from 1661 to 1722. He was one of the greatest rulers in all of China's three-thousand-year history. He was as powerful and remarkable as his two contemporaries, Peter the Great and Louis XIV. Yet, the man was not as well known in the West as these rulers during this time period. He remained hidden behind protocol. However, through his own words, this emperor becomes a living person to us: describing bear hunting on the steppes, leading armies, doling out punishments and rewards. He had an amazingly inquisitive mind which he used to try to understand everything from western clocks to literature. He managed to have 56 children by 30 consorts.

Some of the primary sources containing his own words are letters, edicts, commands, pardons, and poetry.

The following are excerpts on his statements related to ruling:

"Giving life to people and killing people . . . those are the powers that the emperor has. He knows that administrative errors in government bureaus can be rectified, but that a criminal who has been executed cannot be brought back to life anymore than a chopped string can be joined together again. He knows too, that sometimes people have to be persuaded into morality by the example of an execution . . . I've read in the *Book of Changes*, "Fire on the Mountain." 'The calm of the mountain signifies the care that must be used in imposing penalties; the fire moves rapidly on, burning up the grass, like lawsuits that should be settled speedily.' My reading of this was that the ruler needs both clarity and care in punishing; his intent must be to punish in order to avoid the need for further punishing.."1