



THEMES IN WORLD HISTORY

THE TURKIC PEOPLES IN WORLD HISTORY

Joo-Yup Lee



“Lee’s book is an outstanding contribution, an important introduction to the Turkic-speaking world and its role in world history. It is a very convenient, readable introduction to a highly complicated area of study (the Central Asian and Middle Eastern Turkic world). Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), one of the founders of modern geographical studies, termed Central Asia ‘the pivot’ of Eurasia, a role it is again playing in modern affairs. For those seeking background knowledge of the Central Asian/Central Eurasia states, Lee’s book offers a very solid introduction. This is an excellent introduction to the history of the Turkic peoples.”

Dr. Peter B. Golden, *Professor Emeritus of History, Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies, Rutgers University (and Honorary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences)*

“Lee’s book is an excellent piece of scholarship which gives a well-proportioned introduction to the theme. The author yields an in-depth narrative which is readable nonetheless. The book is useful for both undergraduate and graduate students.”

István Vásáry *m.p. Emeritus Professor, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest*

“The movement of Turkic peoples into western Eurasia represents one of the major world historical events during more than half a millennium that stretched between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. It culminated with the establishment of the Ottoman Empire by Oghuz Turks. Joo-Yup Lee’s book *The Turkic Peoples in World History* offers readers a lucid guide to the complex process of Turkic migration, settlement and empire-building. Dr. Lee is the author of the widely praised work, *Qazaqliq or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs: State and Identity in Post-Mongol Central Eurasia*, as well important scholarly articles on the history and identity of Turks and Mongols. His work is informed by an ability to utilize sources in half a dozen languages of the Eurasian region as well as by a specialized knowledge of the genetic relationships of Central Asian peoples. His new book is, quite simply, the best new introduction to the broad geographical and historical expanse of Turkic history.”

Stephen Frederic Dale, *author of The Garden of the Eight Paradises, Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530) and The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals*

“This survey is an excellent addition to the study of world history. Joo-Yup Lee provides a concise study with depth and substance that demonstrates the importance of the Turkic peoples in world history, while lucidly connecting the past with the present that both student and specialist will appreciate.”

Timothy May, *Professor of Central Eurasian History, University of North Georgia*



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THE TURKIC PEOPLES IN WORLD HISTORY

The Turkic Peoples in World History is a thorough and rare introduction to the Turkic world and its role in world history, providing a concise history of the Turkic peoples as well as a critical discussion of their identities and origins.

The “Turks” stepped on to the stage of history by establishing the Türk Qaghanate, the first trans-Eurasian empire in history, in 552 CE. In the following millennium, they went on to create empires that had a profound impact on world history such as the Uyghur, Khazar, and Ottoman empires. They also participated in building the Mongol empire, and these Turko-Mongol empires are credited with shaping the destinies of pre-modern China, the Middle East, and Europe. By treating the history of the Turkic peoples as a process of amalgamation and integration, rather than simply categorizing the Turkic peoples chronologically or geographically, this book offers new insights into Turkic history.

This volume is a comprehensive guide for students and scholars in the fields of world history, Central Asian history, and Middle Eastern studies who are seeking to understand the historical roles of Turkic peoples and their origins.

Joo-Yup Lee is an intermittent lecturer at the University of Toronto, where he received his Ph.D. in Central Eurasian Studies (2012). He has published several books and articles, including *Qazaqliq, or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs* (2016), which won the 2017 CESS Book Award. He also wrote entries on Turkic peoples for the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asia* and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *THREE*.

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THE TURKIC PEOPLES IN WORLD HISTORY

A Concise History

Joo-Yup Lee

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Dedicated to my wife and best friend, Lia Hee-Jeung Lim



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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND STYLE

This book uses several different systems of transliteration. For Persian and Modern and Ottoman Turkish words, this book mainly follows the English transliteration system of the *International Journal of the Middle East Studies*. For transliterating Russian words, it follows the United States Board on Geographic Names, avoiding diacritics and ligatures. For romanizing Chinese, the pinyin system has been employed. In the bibliography, the notes, and in general matters of style, this book conforms to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise in footnotes. The information contained in square brackets in the translations is mine and not in the original.

<i>Arabic Alphabet</i>	<i>Persian</i>	<i>Chaghatay Turkic</i>	<i>Ottoman Turkish</i>
<i>Consonants</i>			
ء / ا	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ
ب	B	b, p	b
پ	P	p	p
ت	T	t	t
ث	s	s	s
ج	j	j, ğ	c
چ	ch	ç	ç
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ
خ	kh	ḫ	ḫ
د	d	d	d
ذ	z	z	z
ر	r	r	r
ز	z	z	z

xviii Notes on Transliteration and Style

<i>Arabic Alphabet</i>	<i>Persian</i>	<i>Chaghatay Turkic</i>	<i>Ottoman Turkish</i>
ژ	zh	ž	j
س	s	s	s
ش	sh	š	ş
ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş
ظ	ẓ	ẓ	z
ط	ṭ	ṭ	t
ظ	ẓ	ẓ	z
ع	‘	‘	‘
غ	gh	ğ	ğ
ف	f	f	f
ق	q	q	k
ك	k, g	k, g	k, ñ, y
گ	g	g	g
ل	l	l	l
م	m	m	m
ن	n	n	n
ه	h	h	h
و	v, u	v, w	v
ی	y	y	y
<i>Vowels</i>			
Long			
ا or آ	ā	ā	ā
ؤ	ū	ū, ō	ū
ی	ī	ē, ī	ī
Diphthongs			
أ	au	av, äv, ev	ev
إ	ai	ay, äy, ey	ey
Short			
ا	a	a, ä	a, e
و	u	o, ö, u, ü	o, ö, u, ü
ي	i	e, î, î	ı, i

INTRODUCTION

Why Study the Turkic Peoples? Why Do They Matter?

The “Turks” stepped onto the stage of world history when the Türks led by Bumin (d. 552 or 553) and his brother Ishtemi founded the first Turkic empire, known as the Türk Qaghanate (552–745), on the Mongolian Plateau in the mid-sixth century CE.¹ The Türk Qaghanate was the first trans-Eurasian empire in history, which dominated much of Inner Asia from the mid-sixth to mid-eighth century CE. Although the Türk Qaghanate collapsed in the mid-eighth century CE, various Turkic peoples went on to create empires and states that had a profound impact on world history. To name a few, they included such mighty empires as the Uyghur Qaghanate (744–840), the Khazar Qaghanate (mid-seventh c.–c. 969), the Seljuk Sultanate (c. 1037–1194), and the Ottoman empire (1299–1922), and such regional powers as the Delhi Sultanate of India (1206–1526) and the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria (1250–1517). As a matter of fact, the Mongol empire (1206–mid-fourteenth c.) can also be included among the Turkic empires because various Turkic groups participated in building and administering it and, in time, linguistically Turkicized the Mongol elements in central and western Eurasia.²

The Turkic peoples also played important roles in the Islamic world as slave soldiers, known as *mamlūks* or *ghulāms*. Turkic slave soldiers became a major component of Muslim armies from the ninth century CE during the ‘Abbasid period (750–1258) and gradually seized political control of many Muslim polities. As a result, many commanders of *mamlūk* origin succeeded in establishing provincial dynasties, including the *mamlūk* states of Egypt and northern India.

The Turkic peoples also contributed to cultural history. Numerous Turkic rulers fostered periods of cultural flowering in different places and times

2 Introduction

through their lavish patronage of art and architecture. For instance, around the tenth to the thirteenth centuries CE, the Uyghurs created beautiful murals and frescoes in the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, a complex of Buddhist grottos located in the Turfan oasis in modern-day Xinjiang. The Seljuk period saw the development of the classic form of a four-iwan mosque that consists of a central square surrounded by four buildings, each with a large *iwan* (a vaulted space). The Timurid patronage of architecture, arts, and sciences between the late fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries brought about cultural and artistic developments and a renewal of Persian culture known as “Timurid Renaissance.” The Mughal emperors brought India to a golden age of art and architecture, whose greatest example is the Taj Mahal, a mausoleum complex in Agra, commissioned by Shah Jahān (r. 1628–1658) for his wife Mumtāz Maḥal (1592–1631). These are just some of the many cultural achievements that were fostered by the Turkic peoples.

In short, it is hard to think of any other ethnolinguistic entity in history that conquered so vast a territory and founded so many empires and states, also contributing to world civilizations. The history of the Turkic peoples was an important factor in world history for more than a millennium until the emergence of Europe as the world’s dominant power. What happened in the Turkic world often affected the history of China, Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. One may also argue that world history began with the “Turko-Mongol” empire created by Chinggis Khan.³ In the contemporary world, Turkic-speaking nations form six states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey/Türkiye) and several “autonomous” units in Russia (the republics of Chuvash, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Altai, Khakassia, Tuva, and Sakha) and China (the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region).⁴ Turkic peoples also reside as minority groups in several other countries, including Mongolia and Iran, among others. It would therefore be difficult to acquire a comprehensive understanding of world history as well as our present world without studying the history of the Turkic peoples.

BOX 1: WHY WERE THE TURKIC NOMADS FORMIDABLE WARRIORS?

The reason that the Türks and other Turkic nomads were formidable warriors was that they were horse-archers. A horse-archer specifically denotes a mounted warrior armed with a bow who can shoot from horseback while riding. The Turkic nomadic warriors as well as the Mongols used the composite bow, which was made of horn, wood, and sinew. The composite bow was more accurate and had a better range and rate of fire than muskets and

early firearms. The tactical principles of the Turkic horse-archers were based on the combination of fire power and mobility. The nomadic horse-archers shot in volleys, weakening the enemy before they charged. Ideally, they practiced “fire power in movement” like modern armies. Other things being equal, the horse-archers were often almost unbeatable on the open battlefields. Against them, sedentary soldiers were often helpless until the development of efficient battlefield handguns, including the repeating firearms (the firearms that could be fired repeatedly before being manually reloaded) in the seventeenth century.

Who Were the Turks? How Should We Define a Turk?

The modern Turkic-speaking peoples are a very diverse entity, who are widely spread out across the Eurasian continent between Yakutia (the Republic of Sakha) in the east and Anatolia (the Republic of Turkey or Türkiye) in the west. Scholars tend to classify all Turkic-speaking peoples broadly as “Turks,” virtually using the name *Türk* as a synonym for a Turkic speaker. Modern historians also tend to view the Turks as a single, unbroken ethnolinguistic entity that originated from the Türks of the Türk Qaghanate and spread to the wider Eurasian world during the medieval era, before diverging into the various modern Turkic peoples.

However, the Turkic-speaking peoples of the premodern period, who are referred to as “Turks” in modern scholarly literature, did not use the term *Türk* as an all-embracing term for the Turkic-speaking peoples. Contrary to popular belief, the concept and name of *Türk* were largely unknown to or unused by the Turkic-speaking peoples residing in the Qipchaq Steppe and Siberia or outside the Islamic world during the premodern period. For instance, the Turkic-speaking peoples of Siberia and the Middle Volga region, including the Sakha (formerly known as Yakuts) and the Volga Tatars, did not use the name *Türk* as a self-name before being conquered by the Russian empire.⁵ Historically, only a small portion of the Turkic nomads, that is, the core members of the Türk Qaghanate and their direct descendants such as the Qarakhanid Türks used the name *Türk* as an “endonym,” that is, as a self-name that they themselves used.⁶ Therefore, the Uyghurs and the Qirghiz, who succeeded the Türks as the dominant power in the Mongolian steppe, did not identify themselves as *Türks*, whom they regarded as their enemies.⁷ As a matter of fact, an all-embracing Türk or any common Turkic identity was lacking in the Turkic-speaking world during the pre-modern era. The various Turkic-speaking peoples of the Türk and post-Türk periods, such as the Uyghurs, the Qirghiz, the Qarakhanids, the Oghuz, and the Qipchaqs, among others, possessed their separate ethnic identities. They also created their respective dynastic traditions or foundation myths, which were unrelated to each other.⁸

4 Introduction

The lack of a common identity or a collective sense of Turkic consciousness in the pre-modern Turkic world may perhaps be explained from the fact that the Turkic-speaking peoples do not all descend from the Türks of the Türk Qaghanate or any other single ethnic group. Extensive DNA testing of the modern Turkic populations informs us that they are a heterogeneous entity in terms of patrilineal descent. In other words, they do not descend from a common ancestral group.⁹ It should also be noted that even the early Turkic peoples, including the Tiele and the Türks, were made up of heterogeneous elements.¹⁰ Importantly, DNA studies demonstrate that the expansion process of the Turkic peoples involved the Turkicization of various non-Turkic-speaking groups. The “Turks” intermixed with and Turkicized various indigenous groups across Eurasia: Uralic hunter-gatherers in northern Eurasia; Mongolic nomads in Mongolia; Indo-European-speaking nomads and sedentary populations in Xinjiang, Transoxiana, Iran, Kazakhstan, and South Siberia; and Indo-European elements (the Byzantine subjects, among others) in Anatolia and the Balkans.¹¹ This process was a multi-layered one in that the Turkic peoples or tribal unions containing Turkicized elements of non-Turkic origins also went on to Turkicize other non-Turkic indigenous groups as they made their way into new territories. For instance, the Oghuz, a Turkic tribal confederation that inhabited the Aral and Caspian steppes in the ninth and tenth centuries CE and, in time, became intermixed with Iranian-speaking elements in Central Asia, went on, as Ottomans, to Turkicize various indigenous groups, including Armenians, Greeks, and Slavs, in Anatolia and the Balkans.

In short, the various Turkic-speaking groups of the post-Türk era did not constitute a homogeneous entity descending from a common ancestral group. Accordingly, this book treats the history of the Turkic peoples not as an unbroken history of a patrilineally connected descent entity, but as a long process of amalgamation and integration. Rather than simply categorizing the Turkic peoples chronologically or geographically, this book classifies them according to their distinct origins and separate identities. It therefore attempts to provide a critical discussion of Turkic identity as well as a concise history of the Turkic peoples.¹²

BOX 2: THE GENETIC MAKEUP OF THE TURKIC PEOPLES

A Y-DNA haplogroup denotes the male group or patrilineal lineage that shares a certain mutation. In other words, a haplogroup is a population descended from a common ancestor who had and passed on a specific mutation. Population geneticists have categorized human Y-DNA into over 20 major groups, with many sub-groups, to which all males belong. The Y Chromosome Consortium (YCC), a scholarship group formed to