

Introduction by Morris Rossabi *(City University of New York)*

Genghis Khan: World Conqueror?

Paul Ratchnevsky's book on Genghis Khan¹ (Chinggis Khan) remains the standard biography two decades after its initial publication. A number of other biographies and studies have appeared since then, but none has superseded it.² Its superiority is based not only on its command of the principal primary sources but also on Ratchnevsky's critical evaluations of these accounts. He conducted research in Chinese and Mongolian, as well as in the major European languages, and consulted Persian texts through Russian translations. He might have gleaned more information from a study of the *Koryo-sa*, the Korean dynastic history, but that source is much more valuable for the later Mongolian empire than for Genghis Khan's era. He could also have profited from consideration of the voluminous Japanese secondary sources on Genghis and the Mongolian empire. However, he chose instead to focus on *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Rashid ad-Din's history of the world, and the *Shenwu qinzheng lu*, the most important primary sources, and to reconcile these texts and, on occasion, to rule out one or another of the differing versions of events. One of his major accomplishments thus was the establishment of a reliable and factual account of Genghis' life and career. He sifted through the texts and reconstructed Genghis' movements, battles, and alliances. As important, he gave the reader in each case his reasons for choosing, if he was faced with discrepancies, one account over another.

What emerges first from Ratchnevsky's book was the fragility of Genghis' rise to power. Unlike the stereotypes of Genghis' virtual invincibility, Ratchnevsky shows that his success was not preordained. He demonstrates that the unifier of the Mongolians was frequently in dire straits before the Mongolian elite accepted him as their leader. As late as 1203, Genghis was defeated by a

coalition of his enemies, and he sought to retain his allies' loyalty by taking an oath promising them an equal share in whatever spoils they would acquire. Surviving this ignominious defeat, he rallied his troops and allies and finally emerged victorious three years later. Luck played a role in his success, and there was no guarantee that he would overwhelm his opponents and become the unifier of the Mongolians.

His ruthlessness, his knack for forging alliances, and his equitable division of spoils contributed to his success. Most of these skills were political and required shrewdness and organizational abilities. The conventional view that Genghis succeeded principally because of his military prowess needs to be modified. As Ratchnevsky repeatedly observed, Genghis recovered from defeat or overcame setbacks often by calling on allies for assistance or by forging new coalitions against his enemies. He showed how Genghis' brilliance as an administrator and political deal maker averted disaster.

Ratchnevsky did not ignore Genghis' military innovations and accomplishments, yet he placed them in the context of other, less acknowledged aspects of the Great Khan's career. He provided a comprehensive description of the organizational structure Genghis devised, a structure based on a unit of 1,000 that proved to be optimal for the Mongolians henceforth. He also described the tight discipline Genghis imposed on his forces, a harsh set of rules that mandated severe punishments for those who disobeyed orders. Cowardice resulted in immediate execution, and Genghis and the other early Mongolian leaders ordered similarly draconian punishments for other breaches of discipline. The feigned retreat by a small detachment which led the pursuing enemy into a deadly trap where they faced a much larger force was a favorite Mongolian tactic. To be sure, some of these tactics had preceded the rise of Genghis. The steppe peoples had developed numerous innovations in warfare from their earliest appearance on the historical stage, starting with domestication of the horse and the use of steeds to provide mobility and continuing with a powerful bow and arrow with a greater range than the equivalent weapons of their enemies. Genghis' uniqueness lay in capitalizing on these advantages. Marshalling the full array of tactics, strategies, techniques, and technologies that had evolved over centuries of conflicts among the steppe peoples or between them and agricultural civilizations, he led his troops to initiate campaigns that eventually created the largest contiguous land empire in world history.

Ratchnevsky's work also appeared to challenge the view that Genghis had a plan for conquest of the known world. Ratchnevsky asserted that the Great Khan's objective was either booty in the forms of animals, precious metals and other commodities or trade concessions. He observed that in Genghis' campaigns against the Jurchid, 'the acquisition of slaves, animals, and riches rather than territory was their aim, since fiefs were calculated in households

rather than land'. This conception seems to refute the interpretation that the Sky God had entrusted Genghis with the mission of bringing the world under Mongolian hegemony. Ratchnevsky argued, on the contrary, that foreign, mostly Chinese or Khitan, advisers inspired Genghis to seize and possibly govern foreign territories. At the outset, he had no such intentions. Control over land was initially secondary to the desire for objects and animals. The description of Genghis as a 'world conqueror' is thus overstated.

Indeed it was Genghis' sons and grandsons who could more accurately be described as 'world conquerors'. His campaigns had barely reached into parts of North and Northwest China. Only in Central Asia did he acquire and occupy substantial new territories. His sons actually expanded the empire into Russia, Georgia, Armenia and North China, and his grandsons annexed South China, Persia and much of West Asia, and Korea. However, his grandson Khubilai Kha'an failed in his efforts to extend Mongol control over Japan and Java and only temporarily seized areas in mainland Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, despite these failures, the third generation of Genghis' descendants controlled territories stretching from modern Beijing to Baghdad in the south and the region of Moscow in the north. Genghis could not have foreseen the creation of this vast Eurasian empire. Yet he himself had considerable influence on the Mongolian leaders, for only his direct descendants could legitimately assume the title 'Khan'. Even Temür (or Tamerlane), the great fourteenth-century conqueror, abided by this tradition and never claimed to be a 'Khan'. In fact, he retained one of Genghis' descendants at his court as a puppet who served to link him with Genghis and to offer him legitimacy.³

Genghis' stature was thus not based exclusively on his military successes. To be sure, his military and political unification of the diverse groups in the modern region of Mongolia, Inner Mongolia and South Siberia was a considerable achievement, and much of his fame was interlocked with the stories and legends about these campaigns. The Persian historians Juvaini and Juzjani contributed to his reputation by writing extensively about him in their works. They both emphasized the destruction Genghis and his forces wrought, but they also added to his notoriety, particularly in describing his military exploits and the brutality of his campaigns. Such descriptions as 'They came, they sapped, they burnt, they slew, they plundered and they departed' and 'Quarter by quarter, house by house, the Mongolians took the town, destroying the buildings and slaughtering the inhabitants, until finally the whole town was in their hands'⁴ terrorized readers and stressed the violence he brought and condoned, especially in Central Asia.

Yet the latest research also emphasizes Genghis' non-military and perhaps longer lasting legacies. The mythic representation of both the brutality and brilliance of Genghis' military exploits overshadowed most of his other

accomplishments. Even Ratchnevsky devoted most of his book to Genghis' 'Rise to Supremacy on the Steppe' and his military campaigns beyond Mongolia, and only in the last section of Chapter Five did he focus on Genghis' other contributions.

Genghis' Legacies

One of the most important legacies he bequeathed to his descendants was ardent support for trade, a value which would have important implications for Eurasian relations. His nomadic pastoral background impressed upon him the significance of commerce because herders needed a steady supply of goods from the sedentary civilizations for their very survival. This favourable attitude towards trade translated into advocacy for merchants and efforts to foster commerce. He and his successors would order the construction of bridges, roads and canals, all of which facilitated trade. They waived, or at least reduced, the stiff taxes imposed on merchants and sought to remove obstructions, including excessive government regulations, to commerce. Indeed they actively attempted to promote trade by supporting institutions such as the *ortogh*, merchant associations which funded long-distance trade caravans and spread the risks of these hazardous ventures. Thus no single merchant would incur ruinous debts if a caravan fell prey to bandits, hostile rulers or natural disasters. The later Mongolian rulers offered additional inducements to the development of *ortogh* by providing them with low-interest loans. In China, they promoted increased use and circulation of paper money and sought unsuccessfully to foster its adoption in Persia.

Genghis ought to be accorded some credit for the remarkable growth in trade and the ensuing initiation of contacts among Eastern and Western civilizations. His and his successors' favourable view of commerce translated eventually into the greatest flow of goods and people in history until that time. It is no accident that Arab-Berbers such as the jurist Ibn Battuta, Venetians such as the merchant-adventurer Marco Polo, Nestorian Christians such as the religious pilgrim Rabban Sauma, and the official Zhou Daguan travelled, with few impediments, through the Mongol domains and wrote well-informed accounts of regions ranging from West Asia to Cambodia to China.⁵ In fact, these voyages dovetailed with Genghis' and his successors' promotion of commerce and were not due merely to the Mongolians' imposition of their own rule over much of Asia. Genghis set the stage for such contacts.

The movement of people resulted, in turn, in the circulation of ideas. Genghis himself encouraged these exchanges. For example, contrary to the

stereotypes conveyed in historical accounts, Genghis was not totally bereft of interest in religion. He invited the Taoist monk Changchun to accompany him on his campaigns and travels in Central Asia. While he was eager principally to elicit secrets for longevity or perhaps immortality from the Chinese Taoist, he also initiated conversations on Taoism in general. Even when Changchun explained that he had no such magic formulas, Genghis insisted that the Chinese dignitary remain at his camp to continue their dialogue.⁶ In addition, Genghis was so impressed by a Buddhist monk named Haiyun that he offered him exemption from taxation and a title usually reserved for military achievements. To be sure, Genghis may have feigned interest in these religions to ingratiate himself and to win over foreign clerics who would facilitate rule over the territories he had subjugated. However, this motive is not plausible in his dealings with Changchun and Haiyun because both were Chinese, and he had few Chinese subjects at that stage.

Genghis and his immediate successors also had a genuine interest in new technologies and contributed to their diffusion throughout the Mongolian domains. Genghis ordered the construction of catapults and other engines, which proved to be invaluable in the siege of Central Asian cities during his campaigns against the Khwarazm-shah Muhammad II. Even earlier, when he attacked the Chin dynasty and confronted walled cities and elaborate fortifications, he recruited Chinese defectors to build not only catapults but also battering rams and scaling ladders. He willingly sought the assistance of foreigners in these efforts. As Ratchnevsky wrote, 'Chinese siege technicians, joined by Muslim engineers, were of incalculable service to the Mongols.' His descendants would follow his lead and recruit talented foreigners with expertise in military technology. His grandson Khubilai Kha'an used Muslim engineers to build siege engines for his campaigns against the often well-fortified cities of Southern China, and Hulegu Khan, another grandson, employed Chinese and Turkic specialists in his conquests of Persia and West Asia.⁷ Their Chinese assistants also provided them with incendiary weapons, including gunpowder, which they eventually used to great effect. Such receptivity to foreign experts and technology enabled Genghis and his successors to win several important battles.

Moreover, Genghis and his descendants would not limit themselves to interest in foreign military technology. They willingly explored and sought to use advanced techniques in practical fields that offered them specific advantages. Genghis himself instructed his forces not to harm captured craftsmen, particularly when he had occupied Samarkand. No doubt many of these so-called craftsmen practiced such technical occupations as medicine, not simply artisanship. As John Masson Smith has written, 'dietary

decadence' and the resulting ailments afflicted the Mongols, compelling great interest in medicine.⁸ Genghis had sought elixirs for prolonging life, and his successors followed his lead in recruiting physicians, as well as quacks, to care for them. The Mongolian Khans accorded doctors a higher status than they had in earlier times. In China, members of the elite, for the first time, began to consider careers in medicine, and in Persia, Rashid ad-Din, arguably the most distinguished figure in Persia during Mongolian rule, had trained as a physician.

Astronomy was still another practical field that Genghis and his successors prized and for which they offered patronage. Study of this science was occasionally interwoven with astrology, which attracted the Mongolian rulers. In addition, astronomy had useful applications because of its links with climate. Genghis and his descendants believed that knowledge of astronomy would enable them to gather information about future weather conditions that might imperil their society. Deriving from a pastoral economy, they were well aware of their dependence on the weather and would cherish knowledge of its operations, which might ameliorate its occasionally devastating impact. It is thus not surprising that Genghis' grandson Hulegu supported astronomers and the construction of an observatory in Mongolian-dominated Persia and that Khubilai, one of his other grandsons, recruited Persian astronomers to build observatories in China and to assist in devising a more accurate calendar.

Less practical but no less important was Genghis' patronage of artisans. Genghis valued the goods they produced both for their utility and beauty. Although he 'frowned upon luxury' and 'material possessions held little appeal for him', he appears to have appreciated his people's desire for beautiful objects. The Mongolian elites were, in particular, fond of gold and textiles, and articles made of these materials suited their nomadic lifestyles because they were compact and easily transportable. With Genghis' support, goldsmiths and weavers produced gold plaques, jewellery, and bowls, and silk clothing, banners, and religious articles. Later, Genghis' descendants were even greater patrons of artisans throughout their domains. They compelled communities of Central Asian weavers to move to North China to introduce new designs into Chinese textiles; they encouraged Persian potters to emulate Chinese decorations, shapes and types of Chinese porcelain; and they commissioned painters and associated artisans to produce miniature paintings and manuscripts in which Chinese motifs were often predominant. The resulting cultural and artistic diffusion led to the creation of Chinese textiles with Persian and Central Asian influences, Persian celadons in imitation of Sung and Yuan dynasty porcelains, and Persian manuscripts replete with Chinese touches from landscape to dress. In short, Genghis' initial

support of crafts resulted in Mongolian patronage and the fashioning of beautiful objects which reflected diverse cultural and artistic traditions. Many of the Mongolian domains experienced an artistic renaissance.

In trying to reconstruct precisely the events in Genghis' life, Ratchnevsky did not devote much space to Genghis' policies towards trade, religion and craftsmanship, all of which influenced his successors and eventually fostered considerable interaction among the various Eurasian civilizations. His close and critical reading of the primary sources and his careful delineation of the attested events in Genghis' career were invaluable contributions and marked a major step forward in the study of the Mongolian Khan, but Ratchnevsky had not benefited from recent research concerning the perhaps more far-reaching consequences of Genghis' reign. Such scholarship since Ratchnevsky's book was published has revealed sides of Genghis that moved beyond a record of Genghis' military campaigns and political exploits. It has offered a greater appreciation of Genghis' influence in Eurasian history and culture.

Modern Negative Assessments of Genghis

This assessment of Genghis yields a sharp contrast to two paradigms that portray the Mongolian Khan either in a devastatingly negative or in an almost adoringly positive light. These differing interpretations often reflect political circumstances and objectives. Because Genghis became a national symbol and was portrayed as the 'Father of Mongolia', his reputation became embroiled in contemporaneous political clashes. His legacy has been almost endlessly debated, and his achievements and excesses have become enshrouded in myths and political controversies.⁹ Governments in Russia, China and Mongolia have commissioned and sometimes commanded historians to write studies of Genghis and his era that confirmed and bolstered a particular political agenda.¹⁰ In such a short essay, it is impossible to describe all or even a large selection of the various conceptions of Genghis and his positive and negative roles in Mongolian and world history.¹¹ Two rather different twentieth-century perceptions are the most pertinent.

The USSR, in large part, shaped the first image, which depicted Genghis as a representative of the Mongolian feudal aristocracy who ravaged vast domains in Eurasia. Soviet historians, tailoring their interpretations to the prevailing ideology, ignored Genghis' civilian policies, including his fostering of commerce and craftsmanship, his tolerance of foreign religions, and his sponsorship of the development of a Mongolian written language, and emphasized the destructiveness of his military campaigns. They portrayed Genghis as reflecting the interests of the horse-riding aristocracy who terrorized the sheep

herders and galvanized his forces to attack and devastate the people and lands which stood in the way of their relentless drives westward and southward. Such a portrait is understandable in light of the perception of the damage the Mongolians wrought on medieval Russia. According to the Russian and Soviet historians, the Golden Horde oppressed the Russian population, ravaged the city of Kiev, and razed many towns en route to Kiev. Even after the collapse of Mongolian rule, Russians continued to fear invasions from the East by groups they considered to be illiterate and brutal barbarians. Moreover, one motive for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tsarist expansion into Siberia was the creation of a buffer zone against any such attacks. This visceral fear about a Mongolian threat dissipated only with Qing China's pacification of Mongolia in 1691 and its final victory over the Zunghar Mongolians in 1756. Mongolia posed no further threat to Russia.

Indeed, in 1921, the USSR dominated the relationship, which certainly undermined any paranoid Russian fear of a revival of the Mongolian empire. For about a decade or until the late 1920s, Mongolian historians and politicians could portray Genghis Khan in a balanced way, without either reviling or deifying the most renowned Mongolian in history. In 1923, the newly formed Mongolian (later to become the M[ongolian] P[eople's] R[epublic]) Scientific Committee 'actually published material in praise of Chinggis Khan'.¹² This apolitical and mostly historical approach to Genghis began to end in 1928 with the onset of the collectivization movement, a more radical step towards Communism in Mongolia, and halted entirely with Japan's encroachments in Northeast Asia in the early 1930s. Japanese agents stimulated Mongolian nationalism in Inner Mongolia, which spilled over into the creation of Pan-Mongolianism. They allied with the Mongolian Prince Demchudongrob, most often known to the Chinese as Prince Te, to instigate the establishment of an independent country of Inner Mongolia free of Chinese control,¹³ perhaps imitating the transformation of Manchuria into Manchukuo, a Japanese puppet state.

Joseph Stalin, fearful of the Japanese and intent on preventing the rise of nationalism and the spread of Pan-Mongolianism in Mongolia, ordered Mongolian Communist leaders to root out attempts at fostering such manifestations. His instructions translated into denigration of the Mongolian heritage and, in particular, to severe criticism of Genghis. Mongolian history texts could not portray Genghis as the father of the Mongolians and could not include anything positive about his life and career. At one point, Stalin reputedly commanded Mongolian officials to prohibit any reference to Genghis.¹⁴ This bizarre directive did not prevent Mongolian academics and some nationalists from continuing their interest in their ancestor and in publishing works about him.¹⁵

Their published accounts about Genghis kept well within the bounds imposed by political circumstances. They portrayed him as tyrannical and his campaigns as destructive but also credited him with unifying the Mongolians and setting up an administration to govern the previously fractious peoples of the steppelands.¹⁶ Mongolian historians praised him because they declared that unity resulted directly in economic development and fostered cultural innovations. Nonetheless, they and the government and Communist Party officials who shared their views were wary of the potential use of Genghis' image to stimulate nationalism. Thus the Soviets, in particular, denigrated him 'in order to suppress the national consciousness of the Mongols in Russia' and feared that lavish praise would restore 'the unity of the many Mongols in the world'.¹⁷ Yet, according to the testimony of Mongolian historians and other intellectuals, an underground view that resisted both the Mongolian and USSR's state perceptions of Genghis persisted. Based in part on a different interpretation of the officially sanctioned writings, these versions presented a much more positive image of Genghis. Some Western anthropologists have declared that Mongolian nationalists and historians possessed 'hidden transcripts', which veered considerably from the official Soviet and Mongolian Communist versions and emphasized Genghis' role in fostering unity and Mongolian identity.

The eighth centenary of Genghis birthday in 1962 revealed the tensions between these differing conceptions.¹⁸ The post-Stalinist thaw, which in Mongolia was a post-Choibalsan thaw (as Choibalsan was often referred to as Mongolia's Stalin), seemed to presage a liberalization in the Communist world. Capitalizing on this relatively more relaxed atmosphere, Mongolian political leaders and academics planned a celebration in honour of the most renowned Mongolian in history. Genghis, who had been deliberately ignored in public events, suddenly became the subject of a scholarly conference, and his reputed image would adorn stamps produced in his honour. The academic and political organizers also planned the erection of a monument in his birthplace and sought to stimulate the production of a documentary about his life and career. On 31 May 1962, the prominent historian Sh. Natsagdorj presented a lecture on 'Chinggis as the Founder of the Mongol State', which offered a balanced evaluation of Genghis. He proclaimed that Genghis was a fine leader and a unifier of the Mongolians but was also capable of vicious and barbarous acts.

The Chinese View of Genghis

These relatively mild observations and low-key events might have attracted little attention had they not become ensnarled in the Sino-Soviet split. This dispute, which had emerged into the open in 1958 and entailed ideological

debates and territorial and economic controversies, had spilled over into evaluations of history. The Mongolian invasions had affected both Russia and China. The Russians had always perceived of the Golden Horde era as a period during which they were oppressed under the Mongolian yoke. They could not concede that the Mongolians had made significant contributions to Russian history. The Chinese had a more nuanced interpretation of the Mongolian impact on Chinese history. They were naturally critical of the devastation wrought by Genghis and his successors in China. Genghis himself came in for harsh denunciations because of Mongolian brutality during his siege of the area around modern Beijing in 1215. Chinese historians blamed the terrible loss of life and the razing of many sections of the city on the instructions and orders Genghis gave to his troops. Yet Genghis was the grandfather of Khubilai Kha'an, the founder of the Yuan dynasty which had brought China under one rule after four centuries of disunity.¹⁹ Thus Genghis deserved praise for initiating policies that culminated in the restoration of a greater China.

Inner Mongolia contributed to the ambiguity of the Chinese viewpoint. On the one hand, the Chinese feared that lavish praise of Genghis' contributions might stimulate nationalist and Pan-Mongolianist sentiments. On the other hand, they sought to win over the Mongolians in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. As early as the 1930s, Mao had invoked Genghis when he implored the Mongolians to 'cooperate with the Chinese Soviet regime and the Red Army' so that 'who [would] then dare [to] entertain the thought that the sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan be humiliated'.²⁰ After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese built a Genghis Khan Mausoleum in the steppelands at which elaborate ceremonies were conducted seven times a year to commemorate his birthday, his accession to the Khanate, and other significant events in his life and career. During the ceremonies, prayers were recited, sacrificial offerings of sheep, koumiss, butter and cheese were presented, and ritual textiles on which were written 'Long live all the nationalities in China' and 'Mongolians and Han [ethnic Chinese] are one family' were displayed.²¹ The Chinese, in this way, tried to co-opt Genghis as a means of bolstering the unity of the Mongolians and the Han in Inner Mongolia. Similarly, they could use the Mongolian ruler and his grandson Khubilai Kha'an to foster greater links between China and Mongolia.

Proclaiming that Genghis deserved praise for initiating the processes that led to the unification of China, the subversion of parochial State and ethnic boundaries, and the establishment of an international empire, the Chinese authorities permitted the celebration of Genghis' birth in Inner Mongolia and called for similar commemorations in Mongolia.²² The Soviet and Mongolian

governments had no choice but to proceed with their own celebrations. It would have been inconceivable that Mongolia would not follow suit after China granted permission in Inner Mongolia. Both the Soviet and Mongolian leaders approved of the celebration. Academicians convened their conference, and ceremonies were held at the newly-constructed Genghis Khan monument in Khentii province on 3 July 1962.

The Purge of Nationalists

The nationalism evident in these demonstrations concerned the Soviets and the Mongolian Communists and provoked reprisals. It is unclear whether the Soviet or the Mongolian authorities ordered the cessation of the celebration and the punishment of the planners responsible for this commemoration. The Mongolian Academy of Sciences demoted, dismissed or silenced several historians, and the government recalled the offending stamps and dismissed and exiled one of the most important officials, blaming him for facilitating what they referred to as subversive activities. Most important for perceptions of the Mongolian empire, the Soviets and the Mongolian Communists reverted to the negative image of Genghis. They condemned him for attacking other countries and massacring and enslaving foreigners and plundering their resources. One article added still another indictment, charging that his and his successors' policies had bankrupted and led to decline in Mongolia.²³ This evaluation became, in fact, the standard interpretation through the last stages of Communist rule. It was, in large part, prompted by contemporary events and by the anti-nationalist Mongolian sentiments of the USSR. The so-called hidden transcripts, which portrayed Genghis as much more of a heroic figure and as the progenitor or, perhaps better, the symbol of Mongolian ethnic identity, persisted, but the official view prevailed in public.²⁴ The media and the educational system conveyed the official interpretation which accorded Genghis a lesser status in Mongolian history.²⁵

Post-Communist Interpretations of Genghis

The peaceful changes in 1990 that led to a multi-party system in Mongolia and the subversion of Mongolian Communism, as well as the subsequent collapse of the USSR, generated a second paradigm and re-evaluation of Genghis' historical role. Genghis became the symbol of the nationalism that pervaded Mongolia with the decline of Soviet and Communist influence. The initial euphoria that accompanied the withdrawal of Soviet troops and

influence resulted in an outpouring of nationalism. Mongolians seemed to be in charge of their own fate after several hundred years of Chinese or Soviet control or influence. This optimism proved to be illusory because Mongolia was compelled to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank among other organizations, many of which gained considerable leverage over the country's economy and political life as a result. Nonetheless, Mongolian intellectuals were excited about apparent control over their own destiny, despite the disruptions caused by the ending of their previously close economic relationship with the USSR and Eastern Europe. Unemployment, poverty and crime increased throughout the 1990s and early twenty-first century despite (and sometimes because of) the assistance provided by the international financial organizations.²⁶

Yet seeming liberation from the suffocating control of the USSR and Mongolian Communists prompted a reassertion and reaffirmation of the Mongolian culture in order to bolster their identity. They feared that they might wind up like the Mongolians in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region whose identity was gradually eroding as more and more Chinese migrated to the region. One way to survive and flourish was a ringing revival of nationalism. Features of the Mongolian heritage that had been denigrated during the Communist era now emerged amidst efforts to emphasize the elements of Mongolian culture that had not been influenced by China or Russia. For example, some nationalists lobbied for a return to the traditional Uighur script for the Mongolian written language instead of the Cyrillic alphabet that they had been compelled to adopt in the 1940s; others fostered revivals of Buddhism and shamanism, religious expressions that had been frowned upon and persecuted during the Communist era; and still others sought a restoration of festivals, including Tsagaan Sar or New Year, that had not been elaborately celebrated in Soviet-influenced times. Several of these efforts foundered. A re-adoption of the Uighur script would bring the Mongolians closer to their cousins in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, where the old written language continued to be used, but would further isolate them from the rest of the world. Even the Uighurs, most of whom resided in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China, no longer used their eponymous script and had adopted the Arabic script. Moreover, the costs of conversion to a new written language were staggering for a country that already faced serious economic problems. Buddhism and shamanism have revived, but neither has attracted the wide following it had in traditional times.²⁷ In addition, critics have accused, rightly or wrongly, some monasteries and monks of nepotism and corruption and have been disturbed by expenditures on expensive statues, foreign tours by monks and elaborate ceremonies when almost forty per cent of Mongolia's population

lives below the government-defined poverty line. Tsagaan Sar and other festivals such as Naadam, with its contests in archery, wrestling, and horse racing, have flourished, but these activities have not required the vast investments or the dramatic changes in lifestyle envisioned in the other manifestations of nationalism.

The cult of Genghis revived, still another manifestation of such nationalism. The educational curriculum and the mass media glorified Genghis and accorded him a respected status among such great thinkers as Buddha and such great political figures as Charlemagne and Babur of the Moghul dynasty of India.²⁸ Popular songs, television shows, an opera, art works and a ballet brought Genghis out of the shadows of the Communist era and extolled him for fostering Mongolian unity and for initiating the creation of one of the great empires in world history.²⁹ Several feature films and documentaries appeared in rapid succession, and as of early 2005, at least four movies, a BBC documentary, a Russian film, a Mongolian–Japanese co-production and a Mongolian film, are either in production or contemplated.³⁰ Historians wrote books and articles that revised the image of Genghis conveyed in the Communist era. Business enterprises attested to his growing popularity by naming cigarettes, brands of beer and vodka, a hotel, and restaurants and bars in his honour. Government officials joined in by printing his image on paper money, commissioning paintings of him to be hung in Mongolian embassies, and perhaps even more telling, placing his bust and other symbols of his rule in Government House where the Khural, or Parliament, meets. In 2004, the government ordered the removal of the mausoleums for Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan, two heroes of the Communist era, from Sükhbaatar Square (the Mongolian equivalent of Red Square in Moscow and Tiananmen in Beijing) and their replacement with a ceremonial hall and a monument to Genghis. He will be depicted on a throne, with forty-five steps leading to his statue, and will be surrounded by sculptures of his mother and nine of his commanders.³¹ The government also celebrated the 840th anniversary of Genghis' birthday in 2002 and plans elaborate activities to commemorate the 800th anniversary of his accession to the throne. Though the government persists in its idolization of Genghis, public euphoria has waned somewhat, particularly as unemployment and poverty have taken precedence over concern for nationalism and for a cultural hero. Recent surveys indicate that many Mongolians have a positive image of Genghis, but he does not play a prominent role in their lives, except for those who are involved with a specific spiritual cult associated with him.

Nonetheless, historians, nationalists and political figures have continued to reassess his stature since the collapse of Communism. Such reinterpretations generally pay minimal attention to his military campaigns and instead

emphasize his civilian achievements. These accounts lavish praise on his unification of the Mongolians, an achievement that they consider to be more important than his military forays outside the country. This assessment may not be wide of the mark because, as mentioned earlier, unity had previously proved to be elusive; moreover, Genghis' descendants were the true builders of the empire. Nonetheless, the violence that accompanied Genghis' unification of the Mongolians tended to be minimized.³² Instead the post-Communist writers depicted him as 'a moral exemplar' and as 'a wise and just ruler'³³ and as a patriot for his unification of the Mongolians and lauded him for reputedly commissioning the *Yasa*, a legal code or perhaps a group of maxims that defined proper norms and behavior and provided punishments for deviations and transgressions.³⁴ Nationalists also construed the *Yasa* as a moral code and an affirmation of Mongolian values, but they ignored its severity. A few even portrayed Genghis as a democrat, partly because he reputedly believed in the rule of law as evidenced by his commissioning of the *Yasa* (which actually seems not to have been a clearly articulated law code). They conceived of his granting of some authority to the *Khuriltai*, an assemblage of the Mongolian nobility, as confirmation of his democratic attitudes. Although their view of the *Khuriltai* as a useful institution has some merit – it convened to ratify and initiate military campaigns and eventually was given the power to elect Great Khans from the Genghisid line – it surely did not represent the will of the majority of the Mongolian population. It was, after all, composed of a tiny minority of the elite. Moreover, the *Khuriltai* often served simply to rubber stamp the Great Khan's decisions.

Nonetheless, this conception of Genghis as a democrat spilled over into several Western accounts in the post-Communist era. These popularizations were usually written by non-specialists who either collaborated with Mongolian colleagues or read secondary sources about Genghis and early Mongolian history.³⁵ They cited features of Genghis' rule that they proclaimed resembled democracy. First was the *Khuriltai*, which they labelled as significant participation in government. However, as mentioned earlier, it was certainly not popular participation in government. Second was the *Yasa*, which they claimed represented the rule of law. Setting aside the question of whether the *Yasa* was a law code, we know little about its implementation. Under these circumstances, it would be incredibly rash to credit Genghis with instituting a rule of law. Third was equality for women. A few elite women, including Genghis' mother and wife, exerted considerable influence on policy, but evidence about the rights of women from non-elite backgrounds is unavailable.³⁶ Fourth was freedoms of speech and religion. There is no evidence that ordinary Mongolian herdsmen could speak freely or challenge

their tribal chieftains, much less Genghis Khan. The first Great Khan and the later Khans tried to ingratiate themselves and to simplify their rule over subjugated peoples by winning over foreign clerics, assuming that success with the religious leaders would translate into success in governing a potentially restive population. This policy may more appropriately be considered as pragmatic and political, if not cynical, use of religion rather than freedom of religion.

These Western accounts may reflect a reaction to the Communist era and an attempt to reverse its social and economic system, its values and its interpretation of the Mongolian heritage. Several Western countries and international financial organizations to which Mongolians had turned for assistance in the post-Communist era sought to promote a Western-style democracy and a market economy, frequently conflating the two. They denigrated Mongolian Communism and, as an antidote, glorified previous Mongolian history. Thus Genghis' policies, in their view, were, in some ways, steps towards democracy. They depicted Mongolian herders, whom they portrayed in a positive manner, as having considerable personal freedom because pastoral nomadism precluded despotic control. According to their accounts, the herders' constant migrations or freedom of movement provided fertile grounds for a quasi-democracy. However, this interpretation romanticized the conditions of pastoral nomads, most of whom were controlled by the nobility or the Buddhist monasteries, in pre-Communist times. In addition, pastoral nomads required, for their very survival, goods from the sedentary world, particularly China, which often led them to become indebted to and under the control of Chinese merchants and officials during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).³⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Communism, both Genghis and the pastoral nomadic lifestyle were romanticized and presented unhistorically as apostles of democracy.

The Search for Genghis' Tomb

Great attention was also accorded to the search for Genghis' tomb. Myths enshrouded the exact site and the objects buried within such a possible tomb. Was a tomb built in the Burkhan-kaldun mountain in the modern province of Khentii? What, if any, treasures – armour, jewels, porcelains or gold – or any human or animal sacrifices were buried for Genghis' needs in the spirit world? Neither *The Secret History of the Mongols* nor the *Yuanshi* offer details about the disposal of Genghis' remains. The Persian historian Juvaini, who wrote several decades after Genghis' death, noted that his son and successor Ögödei commanded that his forces 'select forty maidens of the race of the emirs and

noyans . . . be decked out with jewels, ornaments and fine robes, clad in precious garments and dispatched together with choice horses to join his spirit'.³⁸ However, he did not mention a specific tomb or a specific site as its location. Two Sung dynasty emissaries who accompanied two separate embassies to the Mongolians in 1234 and 1235 claimed to have seen Genghis' grave, though doubts persist about such a sighting.³⁹ Genghis had died while on a military campaign in what is now Northwestern China, and later accounts reported that his body was transported to the Burkhan-kaldun mountain in Northeastern Mongolia for burial.⁴⁰ This narrative, sometimes embroidered with stories about the slaughter of anyone encountered en route, the sacrifice of young virgins and horses at the burial site, the stamping of the earth around the tomb by one thousand horses, and the killing of the soldiers who accompanied the funeral cortege, remains the conventional wisdom for many foreigners and Mongolians. These precautions would ensure that no one would ever discover the site, and so far, if the narrative is accurate, they have achieved their goal.

The ambiguities surrounding these sources did not deter foreigners from beginning to search for Genghis' tomb as soon as Communism fell in Mongolia. Amateur archeologists who either sought to make a name for themselves or claimed, probably sincerely, always to have had an interest in Genghis sought financial, logistical and Mongolian government support to discover what was purported to be a treasure-laden site. They were also aware of Western fascination with Genghis and tried to achieve notoriety through association with the Great Khan.⁴¹

The Three Rivers Expedition, undertaken by a combined Japanese–Mongolian team, was the first post-Communist effort to locate the site.⁴² With lavish funding from the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbum*, the team, reputedly composed of forty Mongolians and thirty Japanese, not including cooks, drivers and other logistical support, devoted four summers, from 1990 to 1993, to an exploration of the region.⁴³ They used satellite photographs, aerial surveys, remote-sensing devices, high-powered cameras and reputedly 'every available gadget of state-of-the-art technology' to canvass the area and discovered numerous pre-Genghisid Turkic graves and a pre-Mongolian Khitans site (a proto-Mongolian group that established the Liao, a Chinese-style dynasty, from 907 to 1115, which bordered on the northern frontiers of the Northern Sung dynasty). Critics later asserted that the expedition scanned the wrong sites and was not sufficiently thorough in its examination of the Burkhan-kaldun mountain.

An American businessman named Maury Kravitz and a University of Chicago professor named John Woods initiated a second search and signed an agreement with the Institute of Geography of the Mongolian Academy of

Sciences in August of 2001. Kravitz, who had in childhood become a Genghis *aficionado* after reading a popularized version of the life and career of the Great Khan, almost immediately after negotiating this pact, announced that 'My considered opinion is that we are very close to the tomb of Genghis Khan.'⁴⁴ Professor Woods, a specialist on West Asia, was more cautious and did not make predictions about the discovery of Genghis' grave, particularly since the agreement did not permit excavations on the Burkhan-kaldun mountain. Kravitz, 'who uses Genghis as an icon to raise interest and money',⁴⁵ Woods, and their Mongolian associates continued to dig near the mountain and came across what appeared to be Liao dynasty tombs. They found nothing related to Genghis, but their repeated assertions about their eagerness to discover the Great Khan's tomb prompted criticism from many Mongolians. Dashiin Byambasüren, the first freely elected Prime Minister who served from 1990 to 1992, denounced the expedition for desecrating ancestral graves and for using vehicles to disturb sacred soil.⁴⁶ The expeditions ended that summer, whether voluntarily or not.

Ratchnevsky would have contested the views of the Mongolian–Japanese team and of the Kravitz–Woods expedition. He wrote that the Mongolians had not developed the practice of embalming and that the summer heat and the subsequent putrefaction of Genghis' body would have prompted the funeral cortege to bury him in the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia. He was 'inclined to accept the views . . . that the World Conqueror's body was not brought back to his homeland and that only relics are entombed in Mongolia'. Though Mongolian officials continued to insist that Genghis' body was interred in the Burkhan-kaldun mountain, 'from the sixteenth century the cult of Genghis Khan was transferred to the Ordos . . . '.

Authorities in the People's Republic of China concur with Ratchnevsky's view, but, unlike the German biographer of Genghis, they have political motives in mind. They have used and continue to employ Genghis' immense popularity among the Mongols of Inner Mongolia to bolster their own control over this so-called Autonomous Region. Depicting Mongolians as part of China and thus Genghis as a Chinese hero, they have attempted to assume the Mongolian cultural heritage as their own.⁴⁷ As a recent study explains, 'Ironically, the Chinese have co-opted Chinggis Khan as a pan-Chinese hero and ancestor whose military feats purportedly brought glory to the Chinese nation. Numerous novels about Chinggis Khan have been published in recent years, often portraying him as the only Chinese to defeat the Europeans.'⁴⁸ Chinese archeologists even reported, in 2000, that they had discovered Genghis' tomb in Xinjiang, challenging the Mongolian claim that his grave was located in the Burkhan-kaldun mountain.

Even more alarming to the Mongolians has been the Chinese attempt to gain control over the Genghis Khan Mausoleum in the Ordos where Mongolian rituals related to his cult have been practiced.⁴⁹ For several centuries, China had designated the Darhad Mongolians as the caretakers of the Mausoleum. The loyal Darhad managers, who considered Genghis 'to be the greatest man of the second millennium', had maintained the buildings in the complex even during the Cultural Revolution when the site was damaged somewhat.⁵⁰ However, in 1991, the Chinese authorities had labelled the site as one of the forty best tourist attractions and since then have gradually encroached upon the Darhads' jurisdiction. In 2004, the Chinese announced plans to privatize the Mausoleum to the Dong Lian company, a Chinese-owned entity. The Darhad reacted swiftly to what they perceived to be a commercialization of their heritage by issuing an open letter to the world and appealing directly to the Chinese State Bureau of Cultural Relics and indirectly to the United Nations.⁵¹ They demanded a reversal of the decision to privatize the Mausoleum and sought curbs on the Dong Lian company, which had offended them by printing Genghis' name on slippers available for sale to tourists. In a perhaps hyperbolic statement, the Darhad wrote 'This is an ill-motivated action and through which they intend to let the thousands and tens of thousands of tourists to tread on the name of Chinggis Khan and we Mongols.'⁵² Fearing a resurgence of Mongolian nationalism and thus even more vigorous protests, the Chinese authorities revoked entry permits to Hurd, a rock band from Mongolia which seemed sympathetic to the Darhads, to perform in Inner Mongolia.⁵³ This controversy promises to rage on for some time.

Genghis thus remains relevant to the present as a symbol to many different groups. The Mongolians of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, the Russians, the Manchus, the Chinese and even Westerners have attempted to use him for their own political ends. Almost eight centuries after his death, Genghis retains his hold on the public imagination. For most Westerners, he embodies the image of a warrior and barbarian from the East who plundered and massacred on the Mongolians' path to establishing a powerful empire. To many Mongolians, he has more potent reverberations and represents a great era in their past and offers solace in the turbulent present. As Dr. Sanjaasür-engiin Oyun, a Cambridge-trained geologist who entered politics in 1998 after the brutal murder of her brother Zorig, the Minister of Infrastructure, says about Genghis as an important symbol in a trying period,

These are turbulent times, and people need something to hang on to. Before, people had little, but enough. And now? Look around: what do ordinary Mongolians see? The social fabric torn apart, street children, corruption. People

do not see the real fruits of democratic change yet. Democracy is supposed to empower people, but we have seen an increase in poverty and unemployment . . . a lot of people . . . [are] more threatened economically, than they were under communism.⁵⁴

Deputy Speaker of Parliament as of 2004, Oyun could easily gain employment outside Mongolia but has instead chosen to remain in her native land in difficult times and, in that sense, is a descendant of the Khans and a defender of the Mongolian cultural heritage.