

## Chinggis Khan

From Imperial Ancestor to Ethnic Hero

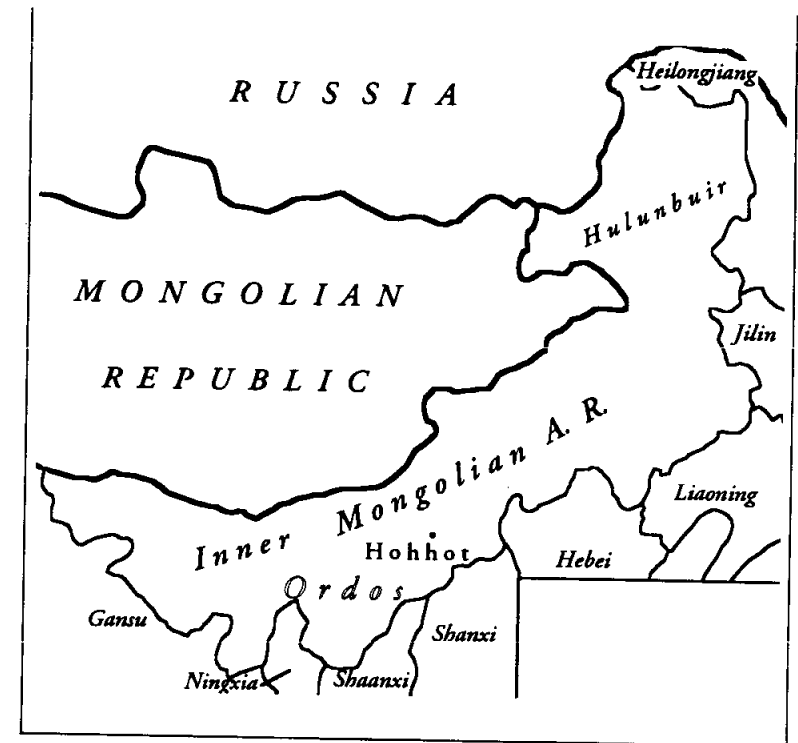
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Although problems of ethnicity are becoming increasingly important among Mongols, especially in China and the former USSR, where they find themselves a disadvantaged minority, the topic has been little explored in Mongolian studies. This chapter examines the emergence and evolution of Mongol ethnicity by looking at how it is related to a particular Mongolian cultural symbol: Chinggis Khan, the highly mythologized Mongol conqueror of the thirteenth century. By exploring the evolutionary history of this symbol and its signification, I hope to unveil the processes through which the cult and symbolism of Chinggis Khan evolved from a privileged ruling ideology manipulated predominantly by the imperial house, or Golden Descendant, during the premodern period of Mongolia,<sup>1</sup> into a popular universal discourse containing an increasingly wider and deeper sociopolitical significance in modern and contemporary times. While serving today as one of the basic identity symbols for both the Inner and Outer Mongols (and other Mongol groups as well),<sup>2</sup> this unique cultural form carries different meanings for the two groups.

For the Inner Mongols, Chinggis Khan has come to serve specifically as a symbol of ethnic/cultural survival of their group in relation to the overwhelmingly dominant Chinese state and society, which they more or less have to deal with on an everyday basis. The symbolism of Chinggis Khan functions as an increasingly salient identity boundary marker that sets them off from the dominant Han group in today's Inner Mongolia, where due to the overwhelming Han presence in social,

1. The term Mongolia, if not otherwise specified, refers here to Mongolia as a historical, cultural area that includes both present-day Inner Mongolia (in the People's Republic of China) and Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic).

2. Included here are Mongols in Xinjiang, Qinghai, and other parts of China; the Buryat Mongols of the Lake Baikal region; the Kalmyk Mongols of the lower Volga region; and, as an intriguing extension, some non-Mongol Central Asian groups today, such as the Kazaks and the Kirghiz of Soviet Central Asia.



MAP 5. Inner Mongolia and neighboring regions

political, and economic structures, formal/physical boundaries between the two groups are becoming more and more arbitrary (while, as a result, symbolic boundary markers are increasingly important).

For the Outer Mongols, on the other hand, the Chinggis symbolism has been closely linked to the nature of their relationship with the Soviet Union, a relationship in which the issues of Mongol national/cultural survival have seemed to be rather insignificant if not irrelevant—even though they have sacrificed dearly in terms of their dependency on the USSR for economic aid and protection in the international arena.<sup>3</sup> This differential signification of the symbolism

3. Founded in 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic was, until the breakup of the Soviet Union and its empire in 1991, the oldest Eastern Bloc country as well as the second oldest socialist country in the world—after the USSR. Despite its political and economic dependence upon the USSR, however, the national culture of the country enjoyed autonomy and protection as well as growth.

of Chinggis Khan appears to be a direct consequence of different sociopolitical contexts, particularly since the founding of today's Mongolian People's Republic.

We must first examine the symbolism of Chinggis Khan in premodern Mongolia (from the Yuan dynasty to the mid-nineteenth century), and then in the modern and contemporary periods (from the mid-nineteenth century to the present), with Inner and Outer Mongolia as two separate political entities. This is in consideration of the fact that the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic in the early 1920s created two fundamentally different sociopolitical contexts—two social and ethnic entities that share the same cultural traditions and primordial ties.

What makes the cult of Chinggis Khan so different in the premodern and modern periods is the emergence of ethnicity as a feature both uniting Mongols and distinguishing them from others. The concept of ethnicity, as defined in anthropology, may refer to ethnic identity or the phenomenon of "political assertion of cultural differences" (Anthony P. Cohen 1985:104). The problem of identity implies not only self-perception, but also an interactional relationship with another group or groups whose perception or identification of the group in question exerts significant impact on the latter's self and total identity (Harrell 1990). "Ethnicity" refers here to the political assertion of cultural differences (see Crossley 1990c). Ethnicity is intrinsically relational; primordiality (either as a genuinely biological or fictive, "imagined" construction) provides one of the crucial bases of ethnicity, but by itself does not automatically give rise to ethnicity. In a larger sense, ethnicity can be the product only of circumstances, particularly adverse ones (Nash 1989). Further, there is a direct correlation between the nature of the relationship a group has with another group (or groups) and the degree of saliency and intensity of the group's self-consciousness and political assertion of its cultural differences. Within such a context, contrary to the melting-pot or assimilationist point of view, the more intensive and extensive the relationship, the stronger the ethnicity of the group in question becomes. This process is further intensified when the group in question suffers overwhelming sociopolitical-economic encroachment from the other group and therefore faces the issues of cultural survival. Here the experiences of the Mongols in China are a most telling testimony.

THE EARLY PERIOD: GOLDEN DESCENDANTS  
AND THE LACK OF ETHNICITY

Following the above theoretical framework, let us examine the history of the cult and symbolism of Chinggis Khan. We begin with the period after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, when the symbol of Chinggis, though often invoked by members of the Chinggisid line in tribal power struggles, could not serve as a rallying point in preventing killings among brothers or creating a united front against external threats. The most important reasons for this were: the tendency to constant shifting of alliances and loyalties that seems to be an intrinsically easily available tactic in the politics of nomadism (Bawden 1968:40, 44);<sup>4</sup> the absence of a strong bond to specific locality or territory—something characteristic of powerful centers of sociopolitical-economic civilization with high degrees of adhesiveness, integration, and homogeneity; and, most importantly, the relatively high degree of independence and autonomy in economy and politics during the period from the Yuan dynasty to the mid-nineteenth century, which was characterized by, among other things, the absence of significant external threat to the survival of the Mongols as a group, thereby lending a free reign to a phenomenon of chronic intertribal fighting.<sup>5</sup> In fact, to talk about Mongol group survival in this period makes little sense, since there was in reality no such a category as the Mongol community or nation, but rather various local groups, whom the Chinese conveniently referred to as Mongols, probably because of their common linguistic and other cultural traits. Therefore, the concept of group survival at this time applies to historical reality only in reference to a certain tribe, whether it be the Khalkha, Khorchin, or Oirat.

4. Here the split of Temujin's (Chinggis Khan's personal name) tribe upon the death of Yesugui (his father) seems to be uncannily allegorical and prophetic of patterns of events to come. See Cleaves's translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

5. The relatively comfortable position the Mongols perceived or found themselves in is reflected in Mongolian folklore, which has it that the founding emperor of the triumphant Ming was in fact the son of a Mongol princess (Chan 1989); in the minds of the folklorist and the Mongol popular imagination, the Ming to some extent had become a continuation of Mongol reign. On the practical level during the period in question, the Mongols remained politically and militarily remarkably powerful. During the Qing period, many "Mongolic" tribes did not perceive the Manchus as enemies.

According to *The Secret History*,<sup>6</sup> the early Mongols had traditionally practiced a form of ancestor worship. After the establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China under Qubilai Khan, grandson of Chinggis, the traditional practice of ancestor worship was officially institutionalized and transformed—largely within the confines of the Imperial House—into a state-sponsored imperial ancestor worship in relation to Chinggis Khan. In 1266 an imperial ancestral temple was constructed and regulations were implemented regarding genealogies, offerings, and temples of the “four great emperors” (Chinggis, Ogedei, Guyug, and Mongke). Moreover, the well-known Eight White Halls (Naiman Cagaan Ger), a worship institution specifically devoted to Chinggis, was later officially established; after the fall of the Yuan it evolved into what is now known as the Cult of Chinggis Khan, with its traditional site in Ordos, in the western part of today’s Inner Mongolia (see Jagchid 1988:300–315).

From this rather sketchy review of the origin of the cult, it seems safe to conclude that the symbolism of Chinggis Khan came into being as a result of the direct participation and manipulation of the Imperial House, namely, the extremely prestigious Chinggisid khans, otherwise known as Altan Uragh—Golden Descendants. In other words, the cult was more a state-implemented sociopolitical form than one that grew out of the spontaneous reaction of the masses. This top-down nature and origin of the cult to a large extent determined its particular efficacy as a symbol of prestige, privilege, and political legitimacy—issues and parameters that were removed from and irrelevant to the commoners of the time. From their retreat back to the steppes after the fall of the Yuan up until the mid-eighteenth century, a period during which the survival of the various “Mongolic” groups as social and political units encountered little if any external threat, Chinggis Khan was invoked as a symbol again and again in intertribal wars among the princely power contenders who strove to gain control of land, animals, and subjects. Thus, during the beginning years of the seventeenth century, when the Chinggisid Ligden Khan of the Chahar tribe (who at the time stood as the third power between the rising Manchus and the declining Ming dynasty) declared himself emperor

6. *The Secret History* (Nuuchi tobchi), is the earliest known native-written history of the Mongols. Compiled in the mid-thirteenth century, it tells in a combination of mythology and historical facts of the origin and rise of the Mongol tribe and of Chinggis Khan’s life and conquest. See Saunders (1971:Appendix 1).

of the Mongols, he made the announcement of his accession “according to old custom, before the relics of Chinggis Khan . . . in the Ordos Region” (Bawden 1968:45). On top of that, he subsequently took the relics with him so as to “use the possession of them to substantiate the legitimacy of his reign, and as a device to rally support in the Kukunor area [today’s Qinghai] for which he was making” (ibid.:45–46). Another instance of such symbolic manipulation occurred when, in a letter he sent to Nurgaci, the Manchu khan, Ligden “boasted of his title of Genghis Khan, the Lord of forty tumen [myriads] of Mongols” (ibid.: 43). In 1635, after the death of Ligden and his son’s surrender to the Manchus, Ligden’s imperial seal went into the possession of Hong Taiji, Nurgaci’s son and the second ruler of the Manchu alliance. The transfer of the Chinggisid seal might have been a Manchu practice legitimizing Hong Taiji’s succession to the inheritance of Chinggis Khan (ibid.:47; Crossley 1990a:16). This symbolic assertion of political legitimacy by evoking the symbolism of Chinggis Khan must have considerably smoothed the process of change of power.<sup>7</sup>

The symbolism of Chinggis Khan was also manipulated during the introduction and spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia and in the relationship between the Mongolian secular and religious aristocracies. As early as the Yuan period, when Buddhism was first brought to the attention of the Mongol ruling class, Tibetan Buddhologists and historians had drawn upon the theories of reincarnation to link the Mongol imperial lineage directly to Buddhism. They claimed that Khorichar-Mergen, Chinggis Khan’s ancestor of twenty-one generations before, was the reincarnation of Padmasambhava, a great master of Tantrayana and founder of the Buddhist faith in Tibet. Later, as the influence of Buddhism expanded, Mongolian Buddhist historians linked the Khan’s genealogy to Tibetan and Indian legendary kings and to the Buddha himself. Still later, during the Manchu reign, it was claimed that the Manchu emperor was the bodhisattva

7. After the collapse of the Mongol reign in China “Khan,” the highest political title, continued to be restricted to the descendants of Chinggis Khan—in Mongolia as well as in other parts of the Mongol-controlled world. After the fall of the Yuan domination on the steppes there emerged non-Chinggisid tribal leaders, such as Mahmud of the western Mongols and Arughtai of the eastern Mongols. These leaders, though they exercised effectual rule themselves, nevertheless found it necessary to maintain a facade of political legitimacy by naming a Chinggisid descendant as the formal, symbolic khan, while leaving to themselves the title of *tayishi*, a position formally inferior to the khan.

Manjushri, while Chinggis Khan was the reincarnation of the bodhisattva Vajrabani (Jagchid 1988:306–307). It is highly alluring to hypothesize here that this incorporation of Chinggis Khan into Buddhist historiography might have been a successful maneuver on the part of the Tibetan missionaries to make the alien belief more acceptable to the Mongols, while the coupling together of the Manchu emperor and Chinggis Khan as reincarnations of bodhisattvas might have helped significantly, as did the transference of Ligden's Chinggis seal, to maintain the Manchu-Mongol alliance and legitimize and facilitate Manchu domination of Mongolia. However, whatever the real intentions and consequences might have been, given the fact that by the nineteenth century the Mongols had been turned into a thoroughly Buddhist nation, it may not be far-fetched to assume that the incorporation of Chinggis Khan into Buddhism helped to a large extent the popularization of the Chinggis symbol in the lives of the common people.

Toward the latter part of the seventeenth century, when Tibetan Buddhism became popularized, the first Zebtsendamba Khutuktu (the highest ranking Buddhist leader in Mongolia) was chosen from the Golden Descent line, and after his death in 1723, his successor was manipulated so that he was reborn once again in the imperial line of Chinggis Khan (Bawden 1968:58).<sup>8</sup> This joining of the secular with religious prestige and legitimacy brought about a potentially highly powerful political force among the Mongols, as seen in two newly emerged powerful sociopolitical classes, the noble lamas, religious practitioners who were born into the Chinggisid line, and lama nobles, great lamas who enjoyed the confidence of the khans (Jagchid 1988:146, 157). As soon as the Manchu court realized the danger generated by such a union, it decreed that the reincarnation of Khutuktu no longer be sought in Mongolia, but rather in Tibet (Moses 1977).

In short, during this period, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan was principally manipulated by different members and factions among the Golden Descendants as a symbolic measure to gain prestige and legitimation of power over the various tribes (or in relation to such groups as the Manchus and the Chinese). Put differently, there seemed at this time to be little sense of common national/ethnic

8. Jagchid (1988:300–315) discusses the deification and mythification of Chinggis Khan and the processes of his incorporation into Buddhist folklore.

identity among the different groupings identified as Mongol in historical records. The symbol of Chinggis Khan as a rallying point seems to have been restricted mainly to the privileged members of the Golden Descent, and certainly was ineffective in preventing genocidal cross-tribal wars. A most telling and ironic case in point involved the late-seventeenth-century Khaikha tribes (the majority group in today's Mongolian People's Republic), which handed themselves over to Manchu domination in order to escape annihilation by the Oirat tribes.<sup>9</sup> In his letter to the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722) requesting that his followers be received as subjects of the Manchus, the Khutuktu of Khaikha graphically described the sense of crisis: "Suddenly the Oirats have come and burned my temples and destroyed my scriptures. . . . My serfs are many. If I could live in the protection of the Holy Emperor, my desires would be satisfied. I beg the Holy Emperor to show mercy on me" (Bawden 1968:77). Many more such cases can be found in the period after the fall of the Yuan dynasty (see Barfield 1989:187–297; Li Jingping 1982:131). In fact, the whole period seems to have been filled with frequent fighting and changes of alignment among these various tribes known to us through historical records as Mongol, and their varied relationships to the Manchus and the Chinese only further complicate the picture. Indeed, it ironically proves rather difficult to establish the interaction among these various parties as one of a triadic structure. The reason for this lies in the troubling fact that the so-called Mongol tribes in effect had not acted as a unified single nation/ethnic entity in relation to the other two groups.

#### THE QING PERIOD: THE EMERGENCE OF MONGOL ETHNICITY

Owen Lattimore divided his discussion of the history of the Manchu's Mongol policy and Han colonization of Mongolia into several periods. The first starts before the Manchu conquest of 1644 and ends in 1748 (Lattimore 1934:73), and is characterized by the Manchu government's preoccupation with consolidating its power

9. The Oirat, also known as the Zungar or the western Mongols, traditionally resided in the Altai Mountain area of Central Asia. Unlike the majority of the tribes in eastern Mongolia, they were not related to the line of Chinggis Khan. See Halkovic (1985:1–20) and Du and Bai (1986).

structure over Khalkha and China; its lengthy and costly military endeavor to quell the danger of the establishment of a new Mongol empire by the Zungars; and implementation of its frontier policy of preventing the spread of Han infiltration into Mongolia so that the Mongols would not become "softened" and would remain a reservoir of military forces to be used in times of need. Han colonization during this phase, according to Lattimore, was "a luxury which the Mongols themselves introduced" (*ibid.*:71). In general, in Sino-Mongol interaction of this period, the Mongols were the "privileged people" (*ibid.*:63). On various levels the lack among the various Mongol tribes of a what we today call ethnic/national consciousness and solidarity can be seen, but this was also a time when seeds were sown for the emergence of such consciousness in the future, through such major developments as the loss of political independence of the Inner Mongolian princes (1636) and later of Outer Mongolia (1691) to Manchu dominance (see Bawden 1968:47, 80).

It was in Lattimore's second period, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and extending toward the end of the nineteenth century, that Mongol ethnicity really began to emerge. This period was crucial in that it was the time during which the Mongol social, political, and economic life finally saw its inevitable drastic decline and decay. To start, the year 1748 saw a major hardening of Manchu policy toward the Mongols (Lattimore 1934:75). The traditional Mongol land tenure, which asserts that all land belongs to all the tribes, was formally replaced by the Manchu banner administrative system, which created territorial identity among the Mongols by assigning definite, rigid boundaries to each tribe. The prince was accordingly made responsible for the handling of Han colonization.<sup>10</sup> The direct consequence of this divide-and-rule policy was the disappearance of the fluid quality of traditional nomad politics that had time and again given rise to formidable steppe empires (Togan 1990; Barfield 1989: 275-76). Even though the Mongols still went on to be the politically "privileged" people (as defined by Lattimore), hard times had unmistakably set in. The widespread practice of Tibetan Buddhism under the active sponsorship of the Manchus, who themselves shunned it, is

10. Many of these princes later became rather corrupt, selling large amounts of Mongol pastureland to the encroaching Han colonists for personal gains, thus speeding up the decay of Mongolian society.

seen by many historians as having greatly damaged the productivity and vitality of Mongol society, since monks could not marry or engage in economic activities (Jagchid 1988:234-37; Moses 1977:7-8). It is reported that by the early decades of the twentieth century every family with three sons offered one of them to "serve and glorify the Buddha" (Almaz Khan 1988; Moses 1977:8). In the economic sphere, the Manchu government opened the steppe for the first time to severe exploitation by profiteering Han merchants through such devastating means as credit and compound interest.<sup>11</sup> An important event indicative of trouble was the mid-eighteenth-century rebellion of some of the Khalkha princes against Manchu rule only about fifty years after Khalkha's voluntary subjugation to Manchu overlordship in 1691 as a result of invasion from the Zungar (or Oirat) Mongols (Barfield 1989: 282-83). According to C. R. Bawden, the main causes of the rebellion were the irritation of the Khalkha nobility at their high-handed treatment by the Manchu emperor, the war-weariness of the people (from military campaigns against the Zungar Mongols), and their exasperation at high taxation and commercial exploitation by the Han merchant community (Bawden 1968:112-14, 117; Barfield 1989: 301-302). The course of events leading to and surrounding the rebellion (which, for example, included Kalkha traffic with the Zungar Mongols, whom the Khalkha princes were supposed to fight against [Bawden 1968: 110-34]), reveals quite a few interesting points concerning the symbolism of Chinggis Khan and the rise of Mongol ethnicity. Galdan Tsering, the new khan of the Zungars who succeeded to the position in 1727 (and who was also the grandson of the brother of Galdan Khan, whose invasion of Khalkha forced the latter to become incorporated into the Manchu state [Barfield 1989: 282-84]), decided to expel the Manchus from Khalkha and to organize a united Khalkha-Zungar state. What is of interest to our discussion is that both Galdan Tsering and the Manchu emperor tried to win over the Khalkha as their allies by evoking the symbolism of Chinggis Khan. The emperor, addressing the Inner Mongolian nobility, stressed the fact that they (like the Khalkhas) were descendants of Chinggis Khan, while the Zungars, not descended from Chinggis, had always been traitors to the Mongol imperial house (Bawden 1968:113). Galdan, too, sought help through

11. For studies of Han merchant exploitation of Mongolia, see Barfield (1989:301-302); Lu Minghui (1988:87-94; 1982:94-95). NMQW (1984) provides a detailed case study.

this kind of symbolic discourse. In his letter to a Khalkha prince from whom he hoped to win collaboration, he wrote:

We are of one religion, and dwell in one place, and have lived very well alongside each other. . . . Considering that you are the heirs of Chinggis Khan, and not wanting you to be the subjects of anyone else, I have spoken with the emperor of China about restoring Khalkha and Kukunor as they were before. But now the emperor of China wants to organize us, too, like Khalkha and Kukunor, into banners and sumuns [traditional communes], and grants us titles, wherefore I am going to oppose him by force by arms. If all goes well, I shall restore Khalkha and Kukunor. May it soon succeed! Move over to the Altai, and dwell together with us in friendship as before. If war comes, we can face it together, and not be defeated by any men. (Bawden

1968:114)

Several important observations can be made of this document. First, it indicates that the symbolism of Chinggis Khan had undergone subtle but important changes: that Galdan does not bother to attribute to himself political legitimacy by claiming connection to the line of the Chinggisid in order to become the "natural" emperor of the Mongols suggests that the privileged exclusiveness of the symbol of the Golden Descent had become somewhat diluted.

Second, even though evoked here as one way to rationalize a concerted effort in the possible establishment of a united states of Khalkha and Zungaria, Chinggis Khan was still more a symbol of exclusive prestige and imperial political legitimacy than of unity among various tribes, as Bawden would have it (Bawden 1968:115). To say Chinggis Khan was a symbol of Mongol unity at this point in history would imply a general sense of national/ethnic identity cutting across and overriding regional, descent, and class boundaries among the Mongols of the time and in relation to non-Mongol groups perceived as a common source of threat. We really do not, however, find such a sociopolitical context in existence during the period in question. The symbolism of Chinggis Khan, when invoked, was for the power struggle among the Golden Descendants and other imperial pretenders (including, in a sense, the Manchus) rather than as a rallying point for a self-conscious effort to restore the Mongol empire or unite the Mongols as a nation of solidarity. In

fact, upon a closer look at the semantics of the above-cited document, we cannot but notice Galdan's alienating tone and phraseology. Instead of employing the idea that "we are of one stock—Mongolian," Galdan claimed only that the Zungars and Khalkhas were "of one religion," and "have lived very well alongside each other [in one place]." Indeed, disregarding the conventional wisdom that the groups involved here were Mongols, we could hardly see them as such—not simply on the basis of common religion and proximity of territory, or mutually intelligible languages (which seem to have been ignored by Galdan in his discourse). The apparently inevitable, unorthodox conclusion would be that these two groups did not perceive themselves as belonging to what we today call a common ethnic group or nation. The appellation Mongol might have been externally imposed on various "Mongolic" groups by such neighboring peoples as the Chinese, who perceived them to be nondistinguishable in terms of objective, visible culture: Mongols were people who lived in yurts, "followed water and grass" (*zhu shui cao er xing*), and spoke languages that were more or less mutually intelligible. With this in mind we can see why Bawden missed the point when he regretfully pointed out that, in spite of Galdan Tsering's appeal to the symbol of Chinggis and his interest in a "united Khalkha-Zungar state," he and his followers

in particular seem to have been obsessively determined to allow their own internal jealousies and ambitions [to have] priority over their resistance to the common enemy, the Manchus, and right up [until] the very end they persistently and perversely turned aside from the struggle for their national survival to indulge in palace revolutions and civil war. (Bawden 1968:115)

Leaving alone the problematic concept of "nation" here, the reasons for this lack of solidarity and a common course are not difficult to detect: apart from the factors mentioned earlier, the absence of common experiences (particularly adverse ones) and of action against a common enemy are important factors.

Mongol ethnic identity and solidarity and their political assertion in social and political movements came about only with the advent of the modern historical period. This development was closely connected to changes in the Manchus' Mongol policy and the related drastic escalation of Han colonization of Mongolian land in the latter

half of the nineteenth century. The shift in policy from protection and isolation to allowing vast colonization of the Mongol frontier was caused by several factors, including the gradual sinification of the Manchu ruling class, which resulted in their conception of the empire as basically Chinese; the unprecedented threat and damage by the "barbarians from the sea," which had begun in the mid-nineteenth century and caused a shift of the frontier from North to the sea coast, thus reducing the former's political importance in national politics; and the intrusion by Russians from the North, which necessitated not the re-enforcement of the Mongols as a people, but the dispatching of large numbers of Han Chinese to colonize Mongolia.

As a result of these changes, there was a sudden, radical increase in the degree and amount of interaction between the Mongols and China, not only on the official level, but—in many ways more importantly—on the individual level as well. Compared with the period from 1644 to the first half of the nineteenth century, during which the Mongols had more or less patronized Chinese farming activities, they now not only found themselves fast declining in socio-political status and importance, but feared for their livelihood as well. They were pushed farther and farther back into remote, inhospitable areas, at times under military coercion.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Mongols found their cultural traditions threatened and their identity stigmatized by Han ethnocentrism and ethnic chauvinism.

It was under such circumstances that a sense of Mongol national/ethnic identity and solidarity began to emerge and develop. This was expressed, starting in the late nineteenth century, in numerous popular uprisings launched against corrupted Mongol aristocrats who sold Mongol pastureland for personal gain and against Han colonists who cultivated Mongol land.<sup>13</sup> Other turn-of-the-century manifestations of Mongol nationalism include the introduction of modern

12. There are few detailed studies of Han colonization of Mongolia. For Han migration during the Qing, see Tsai (1983); for the period after 1949, see Ji (1986). For a personal account of the processes through which the Mongols were increasingly pushed into inhospitable hinterland by the onslaught of Han migration and colonization, as experienced by one Mongol family during the first three decades of the twentieth century, see Khan (1988).

13. For more detailed information on popular uprisings, see Onon (1976), Jagchid (1988:186–93), Underdown (1980), and, for a Chinese official representation, MJS Writing Group (1985:292–308, 323–36, 347–66).

education,<sup>14</sup> the invention of modern printing in Mongolian and the resultant surge in Mongolian publications,<sup>15</sup> the birth of Mongol civil and cultural organizations, and, needless to say, the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic in 1924, the series of attempts at independence and autonomy in Inner Mongolia, and the plans and actual endeavor for a great pan-Mongolian nation-state for Mongols of all lands, including (in addition to Inner and Outer Mongolia) the Buryats of Siberia, the Zungars of the Central Asian Altai regions, and the Kalmyks of the Lower Volga region (Jagchid 1988:244).<sup>16</sup>

#### CHINGGIS KHAN IN MODERN POLITICS: A DOUBLE-EDGED TOOL

##### *Nationalism and Soviet Repression: The Mongolian People's Republic*

With the decline of the feudal order in Mongolia and the awakening of Mongol ethnicity in the face of an ethnic survival crisis, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan went through important changes in its signification and application. In Outer Mongolia the Cult of Chinggis Khan was abolished in the 1930s and Chinggis Khan as a symbol became problematic. In 1962, encouraged by the relaxed atmosphere of the post-Stalinist era, the Mongolian ruling party and government held grand celebrations on the occasion of the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khan. As expressions of the commemoration, a stone monument was erected at the Khan's putative birthplace and the government issued commemorative stamps decorated with his portrait, the *sulde* (his mili-

14. For a study of Gungsannorbu (1871–1931), the pioneer of modern Mongol education, see Jagchid (1988:207–33). For more general information on education during this period, see MJS Writing Group (1985:459–60).

15. The first lead-type printing press for Mongolian was invented in 1922 by Temgetu (1887–1939), a nationalist who received his education in Japan. In 1923 he founded one of the first Mongolian printing houses, the Mongol Bichigiin Khoroo, and proceeded to publish numerous books, newspapers, and journals in Mongolian. For a biographical account of Temgetu, see Lu Minghui et al. (1981:310–18); for a study of the publications of the Mongol Bichigiin Khoroo, see Krueger (1966). For more information on early twentieth-century Mongolian printing and publishing, see MJS Writing Group (1985:461–64).

16. The drastic deterioration of Mongol society and of the Mongol-Han relationship were also evidenced by anti-Mongol movements among the Chinese settler/colonist populace.

tary standard, which embodied magic and legendary power), and other historical artifacts linked with him.

In addition to the above activities, the Academy of Sciences held a special conference devoted to Chinggis Khan, during which Natsagdorji, head of the Historical Committee, gave a speech entitled "Chinggis Khan, Founder of the Mongol State," in which he confirmed the positive contributions of Chinggis Khan. He asserted that only forces such as the Chinese Nationalists, who tried to deny Mongolia's statehood, would wish to misinterpret Chinggis Khan's historical role. The anniversary celebration immediately drew fire from Moscow, which attacked Chinggis as a "reactionary" (Sanders 1968: 40). Then, at the third plenum of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee, Tomor-ochir, a secretary responsible for organizing the commemorative event, was suddenly dismissed from office for, among other things, his "tendencies directed at idealizing the role of Chinggis Khan" (Rupen 1964, 1:320-21). Other officials were expelled two years later for similar or related charges (Sanders 1968:40-41; Rupen 1963: 77-78).

Scholars of Mongolian studies have explained the suppression of the symbol of Chinggis Khan in Outer Mongolia by pointing out that the symbol, easily invoked as a rallying point for Mongol nationalism, ran counter to the Communist ideology of international proletarianism (Bawden 1968: 417-19). But this does not seem to have been the main reason. The Chinese Communist Party certainly has never refrained from evoking its nationalistic symbols of *long de chuan ren* (descendants of the dragon) and Yan Huang *zi sun* (children and grandchildren of Yan Huang), or even the Great Wall. The Mongolian People's Republic's suppression of the symbol of Chinggis was probably mainly for the sake of international survival in its relationship with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, both of which were trying to win over the Mongols to their own side in their bilateral dispute. By totally depending on the USSR in opposition to China, the Mongolian People's Republic had to follow the Soviet Party line; in that era, the USSR allowed no dissent within its bloc. In addition, Chinggis Khan as a historical figure has never been popular among the Russians (Saunders 1970:391).

But history has shown once again the amazing endurance of the Chinggis symbol. The dramatic political changes in the Mongolian People's Republic that started toward the end of 1989 indicate that despite official suppression, the symbol of Chinggis Khan has re-

mained alive in the minds and hearts of the people. One central theme of the present democratic movement centers around the restoration of the symbol, Chinggis Khan, and for the first time in decades people can freely talk about Chinggis Khan in public (SR 1990). The title "Lord" has started to be used in front of his name in the officially run news media, a new hotel and vodka have been named after him (NYT 1990b), and mass-produced memorial buttons have appeared.

In conjunction with a nationwide celebration of the 750th anniversary of *The Secret History*, an international academic conference was held in August 1990. This was not only the first such anniversary celebration ever held, it was also the first time a pan-Mongol congregation was held with a keen sense of a common Mongol nationality unbounded by political/geographic boundaries: the conference was attended by representatives from both Inner and Outer Mongolia, and from the Buryat and Kalmyk Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics of the USSR.

Apart from official reassertions of the symbol of Chinggis Khan, there have also been various popular expressions. A famous Mongolian rock group, Hongk (Bell), composed a song about Chinggis Khan that well expresses the sentiments of the people. According to the *New York Times*, the song, entitled "Forgive Us," "brought the house down at a packed-to-the-wall concert" in March 1990. It is addressed to Chinggis and runs as follows:

Forgive us for not daring  
To breathe your name.  
Though there are thousands of statues,  
There is none of you.  
We admired you in our hearts  
But we dared not breathe your name.  
(NYT 1990a)

In short, for the Mongols in the Mongolian People's Republic, the meaning of the Chinggis symbol has been closely linked to their particular relationship to the Soviet Union, a relationship that provided them with international protection as well as political suppression and economic exploitation. Within such a context Chinggis Khan came to be a symbol of opposition and of yearning for a strong Mongol fatherland and independent nation-state. It is no wonder



that one of the first matters taken up by the Mongolian democratic movement as soon as *glasnost* allowed was reviving his status as a national hero.

*The Manipulation of the Chinggis Khan Symbol  
by Outside Political Forces: The Case of Inner Mongolia*

Throughout Mongolian history, we see many instances where non-Mongol groups have tried to evoke, eulogize, and/or even incorporate the Chinggis symbol in an effort to achieve political ends, and it can be argued that in modern times such non-Mongol efforts have corresponded with or even predated the increased popular identification among Mongols with Chinggis Khan as a common ethnic—or even biological—ancestor of Mongols of all lands, and have added to the Mongols' consciousness of a shared past. The multivocal nature of symbols has meant in the Chinggis case not only multi-interpretation but also multisignification. The process of foreign influence is best demonstrated in twentieth-century Inner Mongolia.

The earliest instance of foreign manipulation of the Chinggis symbol appears to be Hong Taiji's taking possession of Ligden's imperial seal so as to bring legitimacy to his rule. Throughout the Qing dynasty the Manchu rulers used the Chinggis symbol. The imperial court created a special *zasaq* administrative unit for the care of the shrine of Chinggis Khan in Ordos. In addition, it provided an annual budget of five hundred taels of silver for preservation of the Chinggis relics (MZWYH 1962:26).

During the Second World War, the Japanese invaders also showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the symbol of Chinggis; after occupying Manchuria and eastern Inner Mongolia, they constructed a temple in his honor in a city known today as Ulaanhot (formally Wanggin Sume, in today's Hinggan League, in northeastern Inner Mongolia) (Jagchid 1988:300).<sup>17</sup> In an act strongly reminiscent of Ligden Khan, they had plotted in 1939 to abduct the shrine and relics of Chinggis from Ordos—probably to the planned Ulaanhot temple (Bawden 1968:417). But, according to current Chinese official history, the abduction plot was somehow revealed to some Mongol

17. According to an official travel guide, this Chinggis temple, occupying an area of about sixty-two thousand square meters, was constructed in 1940. Interestingly, the book does not mention the Japanese sponsorship of its construction.

“patriotic [i.e., pro-Chinese] princes,” who at once appealed to the Chinese Nationalist government for protection of the shrine. The Nationalist regime lost no time in dispatching a “special commission on shrine evacuation” to Ordos (Xu Cheng 1985:80).

The Chinese Communist Party did not miss out in this curious competition for the symbol of Chinggis Khan. As early as 1935, in order to win over the Inner Mongols (who were by then becoming more and more involved in the power struggle between the Nationalists, Communists, and the Japanese invaders), Mao Zedong issued his “Declaration to the People of Inner Mongolia,” in which he warned against the Japanese intention to dominate Inner Mongolia by invoking “Mongol chauvinism,” thus paving the way for further Japanese attacks on the “Chinese Soviet Republic.” After going on at great length about the Mongols' allegedly pending “national annihilation” by the Japanese imperialists and the Nationalists, Mao declared that the “only way out” for the Mongols was to “cooperate with the Chinese Soviet regime and the Red Army.” This way, “who then dare entertain the thought that *the sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan* can be humiliated!” (Wang Tingdong 1985:395 [my emphasis]).<sup>18</sup>

With the above discourse in mind, it should be no surprise that upon the shrine's arrival in Yan'an en route to its evacuation destination in Gansu, the Chinese Communist Party “held a grand sacrificial ceremony which was attended by about ten thousand people from various walks of life in Yen-an.” In addition, high-ranking Party and military officials attended the ceremony, and sacrificial wreaths were offered in the name of the Party Central Committee, Headquarters of the Military Forces, and the local Chinese Soviet government. The following day, representatives from various institutions including the Party and the government paid their respects to the shrine and the relics, and then escorted the team on its journey to Gansu (Xu 1985:80). In the following year a Mongolian cultural exhibition and a Chinggis memorial were set up in Yan'an, with a plaster statue of the Khan expressly sculptured for the latter project. Chairman Mao Zedong personally wrote the tablet identifying the Chinggis Khan Memorial Hall (MJS Writing Group 1985:421).

18. It would be interesting to find out whether this phrase is a translation from Mongolian or a Chinese coinage, in which case it would be a Chinese representation and conceptualization of the Mongols that might have helped reinforce Mongol historical consciousness and national identity.

Chinese manipulation of the Chinggis symbol has continued after the Communist victory. Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 and the incorporation of Inner Mongolia as an autonomous region, according to a Chinese official account, "in order to forever commemorate this great historical figure of the Mongolian nationality, the Party Central Committee invested a huge fund to reconstruct Chinggis Khan's mausoleum in Ordos. Two years later a magnificent and sacred new mausoleum was set up standing solemnly on the Ordos steppes" (Xu 1985:80). In Taiwan, the Nationalist regime sponsors an annual celebration and veneration of Chinggis Khan "with traditional memorial services" (Jagchid 1961).

FROM GOLDEN DESCENDANTS TO "SONS AND GRANDSONS  
OF CHINGGIS KHAN": THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF AN ANCIENT SYMBOL

When Mao Zedong appealed to the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, using the term Menggu (Mongol) *minzu*, and referring to them as "sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan," he was apparently conscious of the emotional appeal of such a symbol to the struggling Mongols. More importantly, this novel appellation indicates both that there was a folkloric idea among the Chinese that the Mongols were actually the descendants of Chinggis Khan and that the original Chinggis symbolism, with its absolute blood/kinship connection, had receded from the sociopolitical arena. The old, exclusive, prestigious Golden Descendants had been replaced and transformed into "sons and grandsons of Chinggis Khan": an all-inclusive appellation transcending differences in descent, class, and tribal or regional affiliation. A kinship bond had thus evolved into an ethnic tie, and a new tradition had been invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983)—or an old one redefined—to accommodate a new community of imagination (Anderson 1983).

Throughout the history of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan has remained highly important, for the central government in Beijing as well as for the Mongols. This is demonstrated by the fact that the symbol has experienced (as has senior leader Deng Xiaoping) at least three ups and downs: up in the early 1950s (as symbolized by, among other things, construction of the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum in Ordos);

down during the Great Leap Forward (as a "historic casualty" in the Campaign against Local Nationalism [Connor 1984:414-15]); up in the early 1960s (as evidenced by the highly conspicuous eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Khan); down during the Cultural Revolution (when non-Han minority cultures, together with the "four olds" [old culture, thought, customs, and habits], suffered great devastation); and up again since the end of the Cultural Revolution (as signaled by an official statement in *People's Daily* early in the summer of 1980 that the Khan was a "leader of Chinese and foreign peoples," an outstanding military strategist and statesman" [ibid.:466-57]).<sup>20</sup>

The ratio of the Mongol population to that of the Han in Inner Mongolia, in contrast to the ups and downs of the Chinggis symbol, has seen a steady, drastic decline: despite a tripling of its absolute number, its percentage has ironically dropped from roughly 40 percent to today's 12 percent of the total population of over twenty million. This has been caused by huge waves of hunger-induced immigrations of Han peasants (tacitly approved by the central government); by rigorously implemented transference of large numbers of Han administrators, educators, and industrial workers under the policy of "constructing the frontier" (*jian she bian jiang*); and finally, by forced replacement of the border Mongol population with specially transposed Han peasants, a practice strongly reminiscent of Ming dynasty policy. Many pastures were lost due to cultivation by the Han immigrants, and huge areas of pastureland degenerated into deserts due to overuse. On top of that, the Cultural Revolution proved to be irrevocably devastating to the relationship between the Mongols and the Han. Numerous Mongol lives were lost in a frame-up purge that affected almost every Mongol family.<sup>21</sup>

19. It is interesting to note here that Chinggis Khan is not identified as Mongolian.

20. In another ostentatious expression of the current policy, in the mid-1980s the Chinese government allocated more than three million yuan (U.S. \$300,000) for extensive restoration of the mausoleum (LAT 1987), partly in order to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in 1987.

21. The purge was with regard to the long-dead Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (otherwise known as the Inner Mongolian Nationalist Party), which was alleged to be recruiting new members with an independent Inner Mongolia or United Mongolia as its goal. See Jagchid's articles "The Inner Mongolian Kuomintang of the 1920s" (1988:262-80) and "The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Movement of the 1930s" (ibid.:281-95). There has been only one study of the purge (Jankowiak 1988).

While these unfortunate events have greatly increased and strengthened Mongol ethnicity in relation to the dominant Han sociocultural structure, the structural boundaries between the two groups have been reduced: the old sociopolitical institutions of aristocracy and Tibetan Buddhism were abolished in the 1950s, many people have stopped wearing traditional costumes, and (in urban areas at least) many can speak only Chinese. In areas of mixed residence such as towns and cities, intermarriage has not been uncommon. In short, the culture of the Mongols is confronted with unprecedented pressure toward and a real prospect of integration into the dominant culture.

Out of these historical circumstances have emerged both a new generation of Mongols with a keen sense of Mongol ethnicity, and those overwhelmed by defeatism. Particularly since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the implementation of official reforms in the late 1970s, efforts to reassert and maintain Mongol culture and identity have seen a remarkable surge. And, in response to the blurring structural boundary between the Han and Mongols, symbolic devices are becoming increasingly crucial and common for the Mongols in drawing ethnic boundaries (Khan 1989). Thus the Mongolian language, a cultural form and communicative tool, has again been emphasized as a symbol—even in areas where its practicality is minimal at best.<sup>22</sup> Along with this tightening of the ethnic boundary through a symbolic means has been a palpable and paradoxical loosening of the qualifying criteria regarding Mongol ethnicity—knowledge of the language, for example, is no longer a must, just as “pure” blood is no longer an absolute prerequisite. In fact, urban Mongol youth (most of whom speak no Mongolian) and the children of mixed Mongol-Han marriages are often the most adamant advocates of Mongol ethnic asser-

22. For example, the Mongols of the Tumet Banner, crop-growers who stopped speaking Mongolian as early as three generations back, have now started Mongolian-language schools for their children, with teachers from pastoral areas specially hired at high pay. An even more remarkable case is a Mongol community in Yunnan, left behind when the Mongols retreated back to the steppes upon the collapse of the Yuan dynasty seven hundred years ago. For practical reasons they had concealed their identity and adopted local ways hundreds of years ago, and today speak a language that is neither Bai nor Yi (their ethnic neighbors), nor Chinese (see He Jiren 1989:36). In the early 1980s their identity was reconfirmed through the ancestral tombstones they have kept through the ages. Subsequently they recruited Mongol-language teachers from Inner Mongolia and started Mongol-language schools for their children.

tion. Here we see an uncanny parallel between the evolution of the semantics of the Chinggis symbol and symbols and traits qualifying membership to the Mongol ethnic group. While Chinggis Khan has evolved from an exclusive symbol of imperial political legitimacy grounded in kinship to a symbol of ancestry for all Mongols, the general criteria for being a Mongol have moved from the physical to the ideational and imaginative.

The achievement of the unprecedented popularity of the symbol of Chinggis, along with a much stronger enthusiasm and emotional intensity in promoting the symbol in Inner Mongolia, has been achieved through considerably improved modern forms of communication, which have been easily available to the masses (NMZG Writing Group 1983:173–85, 192–94). During the forty years in question publications about Mongolian culture and history, as well as about Chinggis Khan himself, have seen a tremendous increase. A feature film about the life of the Khan was released in 1988, and the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum in Ordos has become a site of pilgrimage for Mongols not only from all parts of Inner Mongolia, but also from various regions across China, reminding people of and reinforcing their connectedness through the invocation of a shared proud past mediated by the symbolism of Chinggis Khan.

#### *The Chinggis Tahilga*

According to tradition, the Chinggisiin Tahilga (Chinggis Khan Sacrificial Ceremony) is held at least seven times annually on occasions such as the Khan's (putative) birthday, enthronement, victory over enemies, and so forth (Jagchid 1988:303–305). In May 1988 I attended one of these commemorative occasions and was moved by the tremendous effort the Mongols have exerted in preserving their culture and identity, as expressed in the course of this traditional event. I was particularly struck by the general efficacy of the rituals—and, indeed, of simply being there—on festival-goers as well as on serious pilgrims.

The Tahilga, which lasted through most of the day, apparently consisted of four major proceedings: the *oboo* ceremony, which took place early in the morning; the official sacrificial offering later in the morning; and, for the rest of the day, individual offerings consisting of two separate, simultaneous, ritual events—the *kumiss sacuuli* in the open, and worship sessions executed in front of the shrine of the Khan inside the mausoleum.

The *oboo* ritual, originally a shamanistic offering to various local gods, to exorcise evil spirits or to invoke rain,<sup>23</sup> took place on top of a hill outside the compound housing the mausoleum. Seven or eight monks (some wearing secular clothing) sat chanting by the *oboo* (a pile of rocks roughly resembling a stupa), which was decorated with tree branches and silk ribbons and streamers bearing images of the Heavenly Horse (Hii Mori) and Buddhist prayers written in Tibetan. The *oboo* ritual is a striking example of interaction between indigenous shamanism and the victorious Buddhism (Moses 1977:118–19).

The official sacrificial offering took place in the square in front of the mausoleum, where tens of thousands of worshippers and visitors had assembled by late morning. A sheep was taken into the main hall of the mausoleum, killed, boiled, brought back out, and placed on a long rectangular table on the platform leading to the main entrance to the mausoleum.<sup>24</sup> Before long, a Darhad<sup>25</sup> ritual master standing on the platform started chanting sacrificial prayers. At the end of the chanting, troops of Party and government officials, social dignitaries, and celebrities marched in a long rectangular formation toward the platform with long silk *hadag* (sacrificial silk scarves) and streamers (some with words of praise written on them) held in their outstretched hands. One after another they placed their offerings on the table.

After the official offering began, the “informal” worship sessions were held inside the mausoleum, with mostly common people as participants. The mausoleum consists of three halls. In the central hall facing the main entrance was a five-meter white marble statue of the Khan, dressed in civilian costume and assuming a calm sitting pose, his face appearing serene and amiable.<sup>26</sup> In the other two halls glass cases contained saddles, a sword, and other items supposedly used by the Khan, as well as the *sulde* (Jagchid 1979:169–70; 1988:306, 311–15). On the walls

23. For discussions on shamanism among the Mongols, see Banzarov (1981 [1846]); Jagchid (1979:164–75; 1988:322–32); and Moses (1977:112–118).

24. The mutton, known as *heshig* (blessed food) is as a rule distributed among worshippers and consumed toward the end of the *tahilga*. This is one of the ways of establishing a sense of commonality among the pilgrims.

25. A special name for members of the five hundred hereditary families designated to guard the shrine of the Khan.

26. During a visit to the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum in 1986, I noted a differently styled statue of the Khan: he was wearing an armored combat costume with helmet, his pose showing vigilance and tension, his hand resting on the handle of a long sword, and his facial expression awe inspiring.

were huge murals depicting the Khan's life and political and military feats. Behind the main hall is the Chamber Hall, where the shrine of the Khan rests, together with those of his three wives and his brothers. The shrine of his youngest son, Toli, is in the east hall. It was in front of these shrines that the worshippers, kneeling, paid their respect to the Khan and received in return blessings from him. The shrine of the Khan himself attracted the most people. Here there were worshippers of all descriptions: gray-haired pastoralist men and women in the traditional robe with sash and boots, urbanites in their Western style clothes, college students, government officials, teenagers, children led by their parents, and Buddhists of advanced age. Many brought with them sacrificial items such as butter, cheese, distilled liquor (Chinese style *baijiu*), kumiss, bread, and *hadag*. Many also offered money.

The general atmosphere of the worship session was not rigid, excessively formal, or stiflingly solemn. Depending upon the number of people present at a particular moment, it could be a one-person affair or a collective one involving twenty or thirty people. The group could be composed entirely of friends and acquaintances or of strangers or a mixture of both. The Darhad ritual master, dressed in traditional costume, occasionally would organize the crowd.

The structure and content of the ritual are fairly simple: the worshipper approaches the shrine, which consists of a golden silk yurt in which is contained the *onggon* (“object of worship,” i.e., the casket) of the Khan<sup>27</sup> and a sacrificial table in front of the entrance to the yurt. The worshipper kneels on the floor facing the shrine, with arms stretched out holding *hadag* or other offerings, while the ritual master chants a psalm. Composed in a flowing, epic style, the prayer is basically an invocation to the Khan, with an account of his life, his superhuman ability, and his feats. The beginning stanza runs as follows:

Born with the mandate of Supreme Heaven,  
Bearing majestic fame and divine title,  
Governing all nations of the universe,  
Chinggis Khan, you were born of Heaven!

27. According to Jagchid (1988:305–306), the *onggon* is unlocked only when it is necessary to change the satin covering the relics. Before carrying out this task, the Darhad officials involved must make a solemn oath that they will never reveal to anybody what they see or experience.

Then, after a lengthy account of his life and conquests:

This day we offer effusive prayer to you,  
preparing various offerings we entreat you:  
Grant mercy and provide for the well-being of your  
descendants, offspring of your Majestic Borjigin line,  
Oh Chinggis Khan of divine birth!

And, toward the end of invocation of some one hundred lines:

We pray, your own—the Mongol masses.  
Extend their lives and longevity.  
Enlarge the size of their herds and animals.  
Cause to flourish your own descendants and offspring.  
(Quoted in Jagchid 1988:308–310)

Finally, the prayer ends with the name of the worshipper (to signify personal blessing from the Khan), as the ritual master sprinkles liquor from a bowl on the head of the worshipper and ties a *hadag* around his neck.<sup>28</sup> Following that, and after dipping his right middle finger into the bowl and flicking the liquor into the four directions and toward the sky, he offers the bowl of liquor to the worshipper, saying something to the effect that it is a blessed drink from the Khan. After repeating the same sprinkling ritual, the worshipper drinks from the bowl. When there is a group of worshippers, the bowl is passed around until every person has partaken of the same blessed drink.

While the worshipping went on inside the mausoleum, the *kumiss sacuuli*<sup>29</sup> ritual was carried out not far from the *oboo*. The kumiss offering, according to the regulations set by Qubilai Khan regarding the imperial ancestral temples, is one of the rituals practiced by the Golden Descendants in honor of the four great ancestral emperors

28. This scene was witnessed by Frank Bessac, an American anthropologist who attended a Chinggis Tahilga in the 1940s (Jagchid 1988:318:n. 64). Jagchid (1979:109; 1988:308) interprets the tying of the *hadag* as symbolizing that the worshiper has “pledged himself to the cause of Chinggis Khan”; receipt of the *hadag* means “the acceptance of vassalage of an individual to the Mongols, and with it . . . a certain degree of national identity.”

29. Or *cacuuli* (lit., “to sprinkle”). Here it refers to the activity of offering liquid such as milk or liquor.

(Jagchid 1988:303). Unlike the worship at the shrine of the Khan, the *sacuuli* must be performed collectively (although excluding women, probably because it was originally a rite of ancestral worship). The *sacuuli* is carried out by a group of nine, each of whom takes a ladleful of kumiss from a huge wooden bucket and runs along a route marked by sticks with cotton heads, while sprinkling the milk along the way. Upon returning to the starting point with the emptied ladle, each runner is replaced by a new person, thus ensuring that there are always nine people on the run. The structure of the ritual remains unchanged (i.e., the number of people and the manner of performance), while the body of actual performers changes constantly. Throughout the performance the kumiss sprinkling is accompanied by the chanting of two ritual masters.

This rather simplified description of the form and content of the rituals of the Cult of Chinggis Khan demonstrates how the Cult has evolved from an imperial ancestral institution exploited as a symbol of political legitimacy, to a popular ethnic tradition pregnant with contemporary signification. In terms of the structure of the Cult's rituals, little seems to have changed from its earliest version. The original procedures set forth by Qubilai Khan upon establishing the Eight White Halls still are observed: “the sacrifice of animals, the offerings of kumiss and the words of prayer,” as recorded in *Yuan shi* (History of the Yuan dynasty) (Jagchid 1988:303). In terms of signification, however, changes are remarkable and unmistakable: while the specific rituals are still those originally designed and practiced by the Golden Descendants for the purpose of worshipping the four ancestral emperors (as evidenced by the repeated invocation of the phrase “your own offspring,” “your own Borjigin line,” and so forth, in the prayer cited above), participants in today's Chinggis Tahilga have come to include all Mongols,<sup>30</sup> even regardless of sex if we look at the event as a whole. (This aspect can be viewed as a structural change in the Tahilga.) While the offering of *hadag*—a practice that probably came with Tibetan Buddhism—remains, the epithets written on them have come to include such lines as “Long live the unity of all the nationalities in China!” “Long live the unity between the Mongolian and Han peoples!” and “Mongolians and Han are one family”—

30. As well as many fun-seeking Han tourists who arrive with their picnics and boom boxes blasting Chinese disco music—something inconceivable only a few decades ago.

a reminder of the Chinese government's tremendous interest in the Cult and its symbolic efficacy, and efforts invested in its manipulation. While it is largely a matter of interpretation to try to determine the significance of such symbolic acts as the tying of the *hadag* around the neck of the worshipping or of the sprinkling of kumiss on the ground, there should be little doubt about the emotional, psychological effects the Cult and its rituals have on the participants, or about its impact as a powerful tool of socialization and acculturation. Indeed, at a time when the Mongols have come to find themselves a tiny minority in their own land, a social gathering such as the Chinggis Tahilga is one of the rare occasions on which Inner Mongolians can physically assemble in large numbers without causing political suspicion. Therefore, for a Mongolian person, suddenly finding him/herself amidst thousands of others sharing the same primordial sentiments is by itself a tremendously powerful emotional experience. Although few people can or even try to understand the intricate symbolic meanings of specific ritual acts (as would an anthropologist), the participants nevertheless return home with their historical consciousness enhanced through the proud symbol of Chinggis Khan, and with their sense of identity and community created, recreated, or reinforced. For no one in his right mind would leave the occasion without pondering at least a little the reality and future of the Mongols as a group, when the whole arrangement of the Cult forces them to confront history. As Durkheim sums up such phenomena eloquently in his discussion on totemism, sacred beings "attain their greatest intensity at the moment when the men are assembled together, when they all partake of the same idea and the same sentiment" (Durkheim 1915:230). The Chinggis Tahilga, as such, is more than a physical assembly: it is also a congregation of the minds and hearts of the participants.

That Chinggis Khan has in the latter part of the twentieth century become a symbol of ethnicity in the consciousness of the Mongol populace is evident in many examples. The logo of a Naadam Festival<sup>31</sup> held by the Mongols of Beijing a few years ago, for example, bore, among other traditional ethnic symbols, the image of the Chinggis Kahn Mausoleum. A member of the recently "rediscovered"

31. This festival, traditionally a trade and entertainment occasion, became an officially sponsored activity after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

ered" Yunnan Mongol community<sup>32</sup> composed a poem that testifies to the power of the primordial tie when (and only when) it is awakened and put to practice by the pressure of reality. The poem, published in a university paper in Inner Mongolia, is entitled "We Are the Sons and Daughters of the Steppes: Children and Grandchildren of Chinggis Khan":

We are the sons and daughters of the steppes,  
children and grandchildren of Chinggis Khan.  
Under the military standard of Zandan,<sup>33</sup>  
riding horses and holding bows, we fought  
across vast lands of the North and South.  
Passing the steppes on our magical horses  
and crossing the Jinsha River on [inflated] leather bags and  
bamboo rafts, we  
camped at the Ka Qu Tuo Frontier, under the military  
standard of  
Zandan.

We are the sons and daughters of the steppes,  
children and grandchildren of Chinggis Khan.  
We planted trees and set up schools and promoted  
culture and civilization, and our awesome  
cavalry maintained peace and harmony.  
Under the leadership of Zandan  
we guarded the Southern Frontier.

We are the sons and daughters of the steppes,  
We are the children and grandchildren of Chinggis Khan.

32. The Yunnan Mongols, whose term for themselves is Khatso, number about 6,400 (He 1989:25). Their identity as Mongol came to the full attention of Chinese officialdom and academia only in the late 1970s. Since then, they have maintained an active relationship with the Mongols of Inner Mongolia. Their renewed interest in genealogy is similar to that inspired by the novel *Roots* among African Americans in the United States. They have sent several delegations to Inner Mongolia and have invited teachers to come to Yunnan to teach their children Mongolian.

33. Zandan was the son of Altumur, commander of the Mongol Yuan troops headquartered at Qutuo Pass (also mentioned in the poem), Yunnan, during the Yuan dynasty. For a detailed study of the Yunnan Mongols, see Schwarz (1984).

Looking into the distant North we could see  
 in our mind's eye the fresh pasturelands,  
 the healthy sheep and cattle, and the galloping horses.  
 We miss the fine liquors and kinsmen.  
 Ah, we miss our ancestral land of the faraway North.  
 (NMDXR B 1982, my translation)

As mentioned above, the signification of the Chinggis symbol often differs according to the parties involved. If the fall of the Qing dynasty had meant the end of an era of some sort of official institutional sponsorship of the cult and symbolism of Chinggis Khan, then half a century later the construction of the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum by the Chinese government signified the resumption of state sponsorship, albeit one of much greater vigor and with new official meanings injected into the symbol and sponsorship. These novel elements include the official slogan that the Menggu *minzu* is a great nationality of China, and the similar discourse that Chinggis Khan is a hero of the Zhonghua *minzu* (Chinese nation) (Ma Yin 1984: 113);<sup>34</sup> and finally, the statement that sponsorship of the Cult of Chinggis Khan has been a proof of "concern and love" for the Mongols on the part of the government (NMZG 1983:244). As for the function of the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum and its annual commemorative rites, they (along with officially incorporated traditional practices such as the Naadam Festival) have "greatly benefitted the unity among the various *minzu*" (Xu Cheng 1985: 82)<sup>35</sup> and have proudly become "one of the greatest resorts for tourism" (CKMa), attracting visitors from both home and abroad due to their "peculiar historical value" (CKMb).

34. This can be traced back to both Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang, in particular, was remarkably candid about his view: "Our Republic of China is founded by the whole Chinese nation. The 'Chinese nation' is composed of five lineages or Zongzu—Han, Manchurians, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans. The reason I use the term 'lineage' instead of 'nation' is because all of us belong to the Chinese Nation. It is just like several brothers in a family" (quoted in Hsieh Shih-chung 1989:146).

35. A few years ago the Chinese State Council listed the Chinggis Mausoleum as "one of the key units of cultural relics of nationwide historical significance to be protected by the state" (CKMb). In another ironic turn, officials have discovered the economic value of the Chinggis symbol. Thus a rather posh tourist hotel designed in the style of yurts and named, not surprisingly, Chengjisi Han Jiujiu (Chinggis Khan Inn) has recently been completed on the eastern outskirts of Beijing.

## CONCLUSION

Since its emergence seven centuries ago, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan has gone through a complicated history of change in signification and application, just as Mongolian culture and society and their relevant international contexts have undergone tremendous changes. The symbol as such has shown not only an amazing level of tenacity but also a high degree of adaptability in taking on new meanings in relation to different historical contexts and different sociopolitical entities. For the Mongols, it has evolved from a symbol of imperial political legitimacy and privilege grounded in absolute kinship ideology and relevant exclusively to the Golden Descendants, to a potent symbol of ethnic/national identity shared by Mongols all over the world, just as the historical Mongols have gradually evolved from an empire of tribal confederation to a nation and ethnic entity of solidarity. Thus the claim "we are the children and grandchildren of Chinggis Khan," which used to be an exclusive self-reference of the Golden Descendants, can now be exercised by the Mongol populace in general; such a claim would have sounded absurd or even dangerous centuries ago. This fictive biological ancestry, and its symbolic value as an identity marker (which came into being as the conscious or unconscious creation and imagining by various non-Mongol groups as much as by the Mongols themselves), proves eloquently that ethnicity is fundamentally ideational, relational, and historical. Arguing along a similar line, Eric Hobsbawm points out that an invention of traditions occurs "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated; in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side" (1983: 4-5). The case of Chinggis Khan and the Mongols proves again this intricate interaction between social context and cultural tradition. Indeed, if ethnicity can be viewed as an "imagined" tradition as well as a body of specific social practices, then the evolution of the cult and symbolism of Chinggis Khan has mirrored the processes through which Mongol ethnicity has emerged in accordance with the changed and changing Mongol social milieux.