THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS, A PSEUDO-HISTORICAL NOVEL

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This paper[1] intends to warn historians not to take what the Secret History of the Mongols says too seriously. The work is neither a factual account of what happened in the life of Chinggis Khan nor a kind of heroic epic as sometimes contended to be. Rather, it is a novel by an anonymous author who did not mind to invent interesting episodes and to distort his materials for the sake of literary effect. This conclusion is reached by carefully comparing the narratives of the Secret History with the information contained in more reliable historical sources of the Mongol times.[2] With a little insight one can determine why a particular episode was placed where it is now found in the Secret History. In other words, we are facing a literary, if not historical, masterpiece which has succeeded fabricating such a convincing picture of Chinggis Khan's life that many a credulous historian has been deceived into accepting it as a chronicle it pretends to be.

Now let us get down to the specifics. The two last chapters of the Secret History will not be discussed here for they are clearly branded as a sequel. Only 246 paragraphs contained in the ten chapters which comprise the original body of the Secret History will be taken up in the following.

From the literary point of view, the work falls into the following five parts:

I. Chinggis Khan's ancestry (1–58)
II. His early life (59–127)
III. His rivalry with Jamukha (128–149)
IV. His relationship with Ong Khan (150–201)
V. Chinggis Khan as a supreme ruler (201–246)

Part I is mainly genealogical in nature. Let us skip it and start our analysis with Part II.

Part II is the most interesting of all. Not only that most of the interesting episodes are concentrated in this part, but also it has the tightest-knit overall

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2) The author of the present paper owes much to a brilliant report by Yoshida Jun'ichi delivered orally at the so-called Quriltai on Lake Nojiri, July, 1968. For details, see Okada H.: Dai 5 kai Nojiri Ko Kurirutai (Journal of Asian and African Studies, No. 2. Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku, Tokyo, March, 1969).

plot, one episode flowing naturally into the next. Let us break it down into episodes.

> Temüjin is born (59). His siblings are counted (60). Father Yesügei takes him to the Unggirad where he is betrothed to Börte (61–66). Yesügei is poisoned on his way home by the Tatar (67–68). Temüjin is fetched home (69). Subjects desert his mother Hö'elün (70–73). Hö'elün brings up her children all by herself (74–75). Temüjin and Khasar murder their half-brother Begter (76–78). Temüjin is taken prisoner by Targhutai Kiriltugh of the Tayichi'ud but escapes with a help from Sorkhan Shira of the Süldüs (79–88). Temüjin retrieves eight geldings stolen with a help from Bo'orchu of the Arulad (89–93). Börte joins Temüjin (94). Bo'orchu comes to Temüjin (95). Temüjin, Khasar and Belgütei go to see Ong Khan of the Kereyid with the gift of a black marten furcoat which is Börte's dowry (96). Jarchi'udai of the Uriyangkhan gives his son Jelme to Temüjin (97). Three Merkid chieftains, Toghto'a, Dayir Usun and Kha'atai Darmala, fall upon Temüjin and carry away Börte and Belgütei's mother (98–103). Temüjin asks Ong Khan for help, who in turn enlists assistance of Jamukha of the Jadaran (104–106). The Merkid are defeated (107–109). Börte is recovered (110). Chilger Bökö, who married Börte, runs away (111). Kha'atai Darmala is taken prisoner; Belgütei's mother vanishes; the Merkid are exterminated (112). Temüjin thanks to Ong Khan and Jamukha (115). Küchü of the Merkid is adopted by Hö'elün (114). The victors march home (115). Temüjin and Jamukha renew their oath of anda (116–117). They break up with each other (118–122). Kököchü of the Tayichi'ud is adopted by Hö'elün (119). Temüjin is enthroned with the title of Chinggis Khan (123). His officers are appointed and Bo'orchu and Jelme are put in command of the men (123–124). Ong Khan and Jamukha are informed of Temüjin's new title (126–127).

It should be pointed out that very few of these episodes, famous may they be, are found also in other reliable historical sources. We know that Temüjin was named so after a Tatar chieftain whom Yesügei had taken prisoner and brought home right at the time of our hero's birth; that his first wife Börte was an Unggirad or Khunggirad girl, that in his youth he was once in a Tayichi'ud captivity but made his escape with the help of Sorkhan Shira; and that he and Jamukha had been andas. Those are the few elements historically attestable. Other episodes are doubtful at best, and some of them are downright fictitious. For example, the three men named as the abductors of Börte are as a matter of fact the supreme leaders of the three Merkid tribes. That the tribal chieftains themselves should come, unaccompanied by their vassals, all way from the

Selengge River on which they live, just to make a looting raid on the impoverished camp of Temüjin, is utterly inconceivable and must therefore be unhistorical. Also our text describes how completely the Merkids were annihilated by the victorious Kereyid-Mongol forces, using such an expression as "the Merkid were destroyed right down to their offsprings' offsprings until their ashes were blown away by the wind." This is, to put it mildly, a gross overstatement, as we see in subsequent parts the Merkid mentioned frequently as one of the most formidable enemies of Temüjin.

But that is not the most important point here. According to more reliable sources, Ong Khan and Temüjin met for the first time under very different circumstances. That is, Ong Khan, who had been ousted by his younger brother Erke Khara and the Naiman, had to roam about over Central Asian steppes and finally returned from the Qara Qitay to Mongolia to enlist Temüjin's help. This story, which must be closer to the truh, is found also in Part IV (150) of the Secret History itself, and recounted in Temüjin's words sent to Ong Khan after the Battle of Khalaghaljid Eled (177)[3]. So, it was actually Ong Khan asking Temüjin for help, not the other way round. Such a blatant fabrication of the episode makes other episodes look suspicious, too. The anonymous author of the Secret History must have used his free imagination in describing the little-known early life of Chinggis Khan and as a result succeeded in producing a literary piece of considerable effect.

In Part III our author performs less brilliantly. This is because he has too much historical information which he cannot ignore but has to fit somehow in his narratives. The result is a series of episodes more or less loosely connected with one another. His tied hands notwithstanding, he does some interesting tricks.

> Jamukha's younger brother Tayichar steals the horses of Jöchi Darmala, Chinggis' man, and is shot to death (128). An enraged Jamukha with his thirteen küriyen's battles with the thirteen küriyen's of Chinggis at Dalan Baljud (129). Jürchedei of the Uru'ud, Khuyuldar of the Mangghud and the seven sons of Münglig Echige of the Khongkhotan desert Jamukha to join Chinggis (130). At a banquet on the Onon Chinggis fights the Jürkin (130–132). Chinggis and Ong Khan, cooperating with Minister Ongging of the Chin Empire, kill Megüjin Se'ültü of the Tatar (132–134). Shigi Khutukhu of the Tatar is adopted by Hö'elün (135). Chinggis crushes and exterminates the Jürkin (136). Mukhali of the Jalayir and Boro'ul (Boroghul) of the Jürkin join Chinggis (137). Hö'elün's adopted sons, Güchü (Küchü), Kököchü, Shigi Khutukhu and Boro'ul are counted (138). The Jürkin's origin is explained (139). Büri Bökö of the Jürkin is killed by Belgütei in a wrestling

3) This was pointed out also by Yoshida.

match (140). The Khatagin and the Salji'ud, fearful of Chinggis' power, ally with the Dörben and the Tatar; the leaders of the Dörben, the Tatar, the Ikires, the Unggirad, the Ghorolas, the Naiman, the Merkid, the Oyirad and the Tayichi'ud have a conference at Alghui Bulagh; they move to the confluence of the Ken and the Argun where they elect Jamukha their Gür Khan (141). Ong Khan and Chinggis meet them at Chikhurkhu; the enemy forces are led by A'uchu Ba'atur of the Tayichi'ud, Buyirugh Khan of the Naiman, Khutu, son of Toghto'a Beki, of the Merkid and Khudukha Beki of the Oyirad (142). They meet the Kereyid-Mongol forces at Köiten, where the former's jada backfires; the enemy leaders disperse (142). Chinggis crushes the Tayichi'ud on the Onon (144). Chinggis is wounded in the battle but rescued by Jelme (145). Sorkhan Shira joins Chinggis (146). Jebe of the Tayichi'ud enters Chinggis' service (147). The Tayichi'ud are massacred "right down to their offsprings' offsprings until their ashes were blown away by the wind"; Chinggis winters at Khuba Khaya (148). Shirgü'etü Ebügen and his sons Alagh and Naya'a take Targhutai Kiriltugh of the Tayichi'ud prisoner, but on their way to Chinggis, Naya'a lets Targhutai go; Chinggis approves of Naya'a's conduct (149).

On comparison with historical sources, the scheme above reveals several interesting, apparently intentional distortions. To begin with, the famous Battle of the Thirteen Küriyen's was not engineered by Jamukha, who was simply one of the many Tayichi'ud chieftains. This distortion is a part of the author's effort to play up the role of Jamukha throughout the Secret History so as to create more literary suspense. The episode of the Uru'ud, the Mangghud and the Khongkhotan joining Chinggis is rather clumsily connected to the following one of the banquet on the Onon by inserting a half-finished sentence: "Chinggis Khan, rejoicing in his heart that the people had come over to him . . . " As for the episode of Megüjin Se'ültü, it makes Ong Khan take part in the joint attack on the Tatar. But the fact is that Ong Khan had not joined Temüjin by that time. Not only the author inserts Ong Khan in this episode, he also puts in a statement that Chinggis had called upon the Jürkin to participate in the operation but the latter failed to show up. This is simply to justify the succeeding episode of the annihilation of the Jürkin. Büri Bökö in the episode of the wrestling match is the toastmaster for the Jürkin at the banquet on the Onon; that is why he has to be put to death. The reason why a wrestling match has to take place for the occasion is, however, that Belgütei is already a well-established figure as an accomplished wrestler (böke) in Mongolian legends. The episode of the anti-Chinggis league of tribes is a rather confused one; too many names, both personal and geographical, are involved in it. This is because the author mixes several independent incidents together and makes it appear to be a huge international

conspiracy against Chinggis. He draws even Buyirugh Khan of the Naiman into the crowd who supported Jamukha. This is again to enhance importance of Jamukha's role. This puts the author in a place to make the ridiculous statement in the following episode of the Battle of Köiten that the Naiman and the Oyirad, who lived to the west of the Kereyid and the Mongol, marched against the latter from the Argun Valley which is in the east! In the episode of the final battle with the Tayichi'ud, a seriously wounded Chinggis is rescued by Jelme. Yet more reliable sources tell us that it was Bo'orchu and Boroghul who saved his life. In Part IV (172–173), we find another episode in which a seriously wounded Ögödei is rescued by Bo'orchu and Boroghul. Apparently our author splits an original story into two and produces two more interesting episodes here. Now we come to the last episode, which evidently purports to emphasize Chinggis's deep appreciation of the sense of loyalty. Yet this episode, impressive as it is, is a product of pure fantasy. As a matter of fact. Targhutai Kiriltugh was slain in the battle by Sorkhan Shira of the Süldüs. It is amusing to note, however, that the author uses puns as a literary device. Targhutai is described to be so fat that he cannot ride a horse, because 'targhun' means "fat". The same kind of pun is used in the episode of the Battle of Köiten, where the jada causes a freezing cold weather, for 'köiten' means "cold".

Part IV has a tighter structure because it concentrates on Chinggis' relationship with Ong Khan.

> Jagha Gambu, younger brother of Ong Khan, takes refuge under Chinggis; Ong Khan himself comes from the Khara Kitad to see Chinggis; Chinggis winters at Khuba Khaya (150–151). Jagha Gambu and other officers plot against Ong Khan but are exposed (152). The Tatar are defeated at Dalan Nemürges; Altan, Khuchar and Daritai are punished for their irregular conduct (153). The Tatar are massacred; Belgütei is punished for leaking the plan (154). Chinggis marries two Tatar sisters, Yesüi and Yesügen (155). Yesüi's former husband is arrested and put to death (156). Ong Khan makes a looting raid on the Merkid but fails to share the booty with Chinggis (157). Ong Khan and Chinggis make war on Buyirugh Khan of the Naiman (158). They meet Kögse'ü Sabragh of the Naiman; Ong Khan desert Chinggis at night to go home at Jamukha's instigation; Kögse'ü defeats and sacks Senggün, son of Ong Khan; Chinggis dispatches his four generals (dörben külü'üd) to Ong Khan's rescue (159–163). In his gratitude Ong Khan adopts Chinggis as a son (164). Marriages arranged between the two houses fail to be concluded, and a feeling of alienation creeps in (165). Senggün plots against Chinggis at Jamukha's instigation, and persuades Ong Khan not to interfere (166–168). The Kereyid army attacks Chinggis at Khalaghaljid Eled (169–174). Ögödei is wounded in the battle but rescued by

Bo'orchu and Boroghul (172–173). Chinggis moves to the Khalkha River; the Unggirad are reduced into submission (175–176). Chinggis sends words to Ong Khan, Jamukha, Altan, Khuchar, To'oril and Senggün (177–181). Chinggis and his men drink the muddy water of Lake Baljuna (182). Chinggis surprises and crushes the Kereyid at Jeje'er Ündür (183–187). Ong Khan and Senggün are killed in their flight (188). Tayang Khan of the Naiman shows hostility toward Chinggis (189–190). Chinggis appoints chiliarchs and the Keshigten (191–192). Chinggis defeats and kills Tayang Khan at Nakhu Ghun (193–196). The remainder of the Merkid and the Naiman are crushed (198–199). Jamukha is handed over to Chinggis and put to death "without shedding blood" (200–201).

The first episode here is a factual account of the first meeting of Chinggis with Ong Khan, thereby contradicting the story already given in Part II. The meeting took place in 1196, but Chinggis did not camp at Khuba Khaya that winter. It was Ong Khan who wintered at Khuba Khaya in 1200, when Jagha Gambu and other officers were discovered to have conspired to overthrow him. Here the author presses two incidents chronologically wide apart into one single year just because Jagha Gambu features in both. A similar kind of distortion is found also in the episode of the Battle of Dalan Nemürges, where incidents of 1202 and 1204 are mixed. Then comes the episode of Ong Khan's victory over the Merkid, which actually belongs to 1198. The episode of Kögse'ü Sabragh faithfully reflects what happened in 1199, but the marriage arrangements, which are conceived as its direct outcome, did not take place until 1202. Such juxtaposition of episodes is clearly designed to emphasize Ong Khan's perfidy. From the episode of Senggün's intrigue on, the author had little need to tamper with his materials for the facts were dramatic enough in themselves. Still he finds chances now and then to show off his literary skill, such as Jamukha's speech to Tayang Khan describing the splendor of the Mongol army. After again predating the crush of the Merkid and the Naiman, which took place in 1208 and 1216, the author embellishes Jamukha's final speech to Chinggis with beautifully alliterated verses. And he is thoughtful enough to have Chinggis grant a bloodless death to this old sworn friend. Actually Jamukha was chopped to death. It is easy to see that the author only wants to depict Chinggis as a chivalrous ruler who values friendship.

Now that the climax of the whole story has been reached with the overthrowing of Ong Khan, Tayang Khan and Jamukha, what remains for Part V to do is only to give suitable rewards to the characters already present in the preceding parts.

Chinggis Khan is enthroned as a supreme ruler; 88 chiliarchs are appointed to head 95 chiliarchies (202). Meritorious ones are awarded with honors (203–223). The Keshigten are expanded and reorganized (224–234). Arslan Khan of the Kharlu'ud submits to Chinggis and marries the latter's daughter (235). The Merkid are finally destroyed (236). Güchülüg Khan of the Naiman is chased away (237). The Idu'ud of the Uyi'ud submits to Chinggis and marries Princess Al Altun (238). Jöchi subjugates the forest peoples (hoi-yin irgen); Khudukha Beki of the Oyirad submits to him and Khudukha's sons marry princesses (239). The Khori and the Tumad murder Boroghul and make Khudukha prisoner, but are finally subjugated (240–241). Chinggis gives his mother, sons and brothers subjects (242–243). Teb Tenggeri is killed and the Khongkhotan decline in power (244–246).

Arslan Khan, the Idiqut of the Uyghurs and Khudukha Beki seem to be mentioned here because they are sons-in-law of Chinggis' and therefore have to be included in an account of his family. The episode of the murder of Boroghul is put in here in connection with Khudukha Beki. The very last episode of Teb Tenggeri, a famous one, is here because of his father Münglig Echige. Münglig married the widowed mother of Chinggis, Hö'elün. Therefore, to Chinggis, Münglig is a stepfather and the seven Khongkhotan brothers headed by Teb Tenggeri are stepbrothers. That was why the author felt this episode necessary to complete his story of Chinggis Khan's rise to power.

We have discussed the structure of the Secret History of the Mongols above. What we have found there is an extremely skillful novelist who is able to invent interesting episodes and blend them with already known stories retold in an exciting manner. The result is a masterpiece of historical fiction unsurpassed in literary value by any later work. It is not a chronicle, however. It is not intended to be. The Secret History of the Mongols is a good novel based on Chinggis Khan's life. What more can one demand from a textbook for the students at the Ssu i kuan?