

The life and legacy of chingis khan



The Life and Legacy of Chingis Khan
Whats in a Name
Chingis Khans first name can also be spelled Chinggis, Genghis, Genghiz, Jengiz, or Tchingis??” depending on the language in which it was written and on conventions of transliteration, and his name may be written with a hyphen between the two words. At birth he was named Temuchin (also spelled Temujin), meaning “blacksmith” from the Turkic words temur (iron) and jin (smith). 1 This association with a strong metal, which Temuchin shares with Amir Timur (Tamerlane), would later be adopted by Joseph Stalin (Stalin means “man of steel”). Temuchin earned the title Temuchin Khan, or “Temuchin the Ruler,” by leading his clan, but when he was elected emperor of all Mongol people in 1206 AD, he gave up being as strong as iron for something even greater. He was given the title Chingis Khan. The exact meaning of chingis is unknown, but it is associated with the ocean and is thought to mean “limitless as the sea,” making him a “most righteous ruler” or “great sovereign.” 2

Whatever its etymology, the word implies a superlative power custom writing services uk . His Origins
Chingis Khan made significant contributions to history, but in order to understand what he accomplished, it is necessary to provide some background to his story. He was born to a clan of Mongols on the steppes of Eurasia sometime between the years of 1155 and 1167 AD. 3 Steppes are flat, grassy areas with few trees??” similar to the plains of North America.

(Compare the ecology of these two geographies.) The steppes of Eurasia form “the largest unified area of flatlands in the world,” an area too dry for farming without irrigation. 4 Such geography created unique conditions that shaped Mongol history. Without farming, the Mongols had to rely heavily on

the animals they kept: they rode horses, used oxen and camels to transport things, drank milk and ate meat and dairy products, and covered their homes with felt that they made from their sheeps wool. Their herds lived on native grasses, and since these nomads moved their homes from place to place, their animals did not overgraze any area of land. (Consider parallels with traditional Native American societies of the plains: form and portability of their dwellings, management of animals, their impact on the environment.)The GerThough they may no longer live as nomads, people in Mongolia today still have a horse-based culture, eat primarily meat and dairy products, and sometimes prefer to live in felt-covered homes.

Their traditional type of dwelling, practically unchanged from the time of Chingis Khan, is called a ger but is also known by the Russian word yurt. These structures are made of a wooden support that stands in a cylindrical form, are then covered with a thick layer of felt, and have a hole in the top (with a felt flap to close it when necessary) to let out the smoke from the household fire. A ger in Mongolia today may have an additional canvas covering to keep the felt clean and neat looking. The book *Mongolia: Legacy of Chinggis Khan* shows an excellent photo of a contemporary ger on page vi, the process of erecting a ger on pages 20-21, and a historical painting illustrating the annual chore of making felt on page 23.

5 The wooden support of the ger is made of latticework that unfolds accordion-style that is then topped with thin poles, and the whole thing can be quickly disassembled⁶ and easily transported on a cart. A European traveler to Kazakhstan and Mongolia in the thirteenth century, John of Plano Carpini described the construction and portability of a ger, ⁷ which remains

practically unchanged today. (Discuss how the design of the ger stems from necessity: lack of trees in the steppes, the portability of collapsible structures, the use of wool as a plentiful and renewable resource.

Compare the function of a ger with the tipi and the camping tent, which students may have at their homes: portability/compact storage, ease of assembly/disassembly, protection from the elements.)Some internet resources on gers: For photos of gers and detailed instructions on how to build gers, see “ Yurt Quest: In Search of Ger,” <http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.chaingang.org/yurtquest/> For other photos of gers, see Mongolia photos by Harold Christensen, University of Sioux Falls, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/~haroldc/mongol/album/home.html>

Virtual Mongols “ People” page of photos, http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.kiku.com/electric_samurai/virtual_mongol/people.html

Building an EmpireMongols during the time of Temuchins youth were divided into clans. As small groups of people migrating with their livestock, the clans did not amass political power. Without the resources that non-nomadic cultures were able to develop, the Mongols relied heavily on trade for such things as metal products. 8 Under Chingis Khans leadership, the Mongol people were unified. He led them into battle against the Chin (also spelled Jin, Kin, or Qin) dynasty in North China because, among other reasons, they had denied trade to the Mongols. 9 The Mongols were successful in their first and subsequent battles with the Chin, and as Chingis Khans armies won their battles, the Mongol

<https://assignbuster.com/the-life-and-legacy-of-chingis-khan/>

territory grew. Leadership within the Mongol clans did not pass down to Temuchin through birthright; “ strength alone determine[d] who [became] leader in the next generation.

“ 10 Chingis Khan became ruler of all Mongols through his strength, ingenuity, and determination, and Chingiss “ great principle” of rewarding loyalty and punishing treachery allowed him to maintain control over his growing empire. For example, he destroyed the Tanghut people because “ they made a promise they didnt keep.” 11 He was known for demolishing a city if the inhabitants stood against him, but those who surrendered immediately and paid tribute were (for the most part) spared. As a result, Chingis Khans empire eventually stretched from Russia to Iran and from China and Korea to the Caucasus. 12 His “ great principle” applied to military conquests and interpersonal relationships alike.

13 Though he fought in battles, Chingis Khan was afraid of dogs. When his father, Yesugei, left Temuchin with his future in-laws to get acquainted, Yesugei noted, “ You should know that hes frightened by dogs. Dont let the dogs frighten him.” 14 This can be explained by the following text on modern Mongolia: ...families keep fierce dogs to guard the settlement and protect the animals from wolves.

These dogs can be very dangerous to strangers, and when a horseman approaches a settlement, he calls from far away to get the owners to contain their dogs. 15 While it is certainly wise in any culture to avoid confrontation with guard dogs, it has been said that “ Temuchin showed himself to be steady in adversity, shrewd and cautious rather than brave or adventurous.”

16 (Explore this information to think critically about representations of Chingis Khans character and accomplishments.) Why and How There are many sources for the history of Chingis Khans life and empire, 17 so those details are not given here. The Mongols were very successful in battle, significantly increased their territory, and continued to conquer more territory during Chingis Khans lifetime and beyond.

What did they want to achieve, and how were they able to do so There are many theories about why Chingis Khan felt the need to continually expand his territory. One interpretation is based on Chingis Khans religious beliefs. Though he tolerated other religions, Chingis Khan did not practice a formal religion (Mongols at the time practiced shamanism), but he did believe in the Sky as a deity and felt a personal connection with this deity: the Ocean-like Ruler is but an earthly mirroring of the Great Blue Sky.

18 He was already successful in the great task of uniting the Mongols, so perhaps he felt his purpose on this earth was to be a ruler. If Chingis Khan believed his powers were so ordained, then his mission might be “ to conquer the world in order to establish universal peace.” 19 The seal used on his correspondence identified him as “ God in heaven, the Kah Khan, the power of God on earth. The Seal of the Emperor of Mankind.” 20 Another theory is that he used campaigns to keep his military busy. Before the Mongols were united under Chingis Khan, the relationships between clans were constantly shifting, and alliances could be broken easily.

Indeed, upon Yesugeis death, his wife found her family immediately abandoned by the group with whom they had been traveling, and young

Temuchin and his brothers were forced to fish for the family's sustenance. 21 After he became leader of all Mongols, Chingis Khan would not forget how restless his nomadic warriors were, and trying to teach them a new pattern of life, one that would stress unity above personal interest, he would need to keep them engaged in group activities. 22 This theory is more plausible when supplemented with accounts of the army's hunting practices. Between campaigns, Chingis Khan organized massive hunting trips. These were highly structured activities with soldiers working in formation and following strict rules of conduct. 23 Besides providing entertainment and food, these trips trained the soldiers to work as a tight-knit group in maneuvers they would later repeat against humans. 24 Finally, there remains the inclination to stereotype Chingis Khan as a blood-thirsty barbarian, driven by a need to conquer, to amass booty, and to shed blood. To this end, he is quoted as saying: A man's greatest pleasure is to defeat his enemies, to drive them before him, to take from them that which they possessed, to see those whom they cherished in tears, to ride their horses, and to hold their wives and daughters in his arms.

25 Such words promulgate the image of him as cruel, blood-thirsty, and power-hungry. On the other hand, consider that three times the Mongols attacked Chin territory, were successful, and returned home, and each time the Chins would resume their normal patterns of life. 26 Each time the Mongols would consider the campaign a success and leave with huge piles of riches, and they only returned to crush the Chins after Chingis Khan interpreted one of their actions as distrustful, signaling a breakdown in their relationship. It has been said that Chingis Khan did not "display any

inclination to wanton cruelty or any passion for destruction.” 27 Instead of being labeled a blood-thirsty barbarian??” though such generalizations are tempting and convenient, Chingis Khan must be considered as a man “ of his age and of his nation.” 28 At that time??” and how many other examples can we name from history??” contact between nomadic groups and non-nomadic settlements involved either trade or war. Chingis Khan believed in his nomadic way of life and seemed to think of cities as places where he could stock up on goods??” a place to go “ shopping,” so to speak. (Consider the clash of civilizations from the both perspectives: sedentary cultures and nomadic raiders.

)Whatever Chingis Khans motivations were, what made the Mongols so successful As Paul Kahn states, “ For decades it seemed as though nothing on the face of the earth could stop the Mongol cavalry, except the tropical heat of India.” 29 The hunting practices mentioned above, both as strategy and training, is one factor of their success. Another is the division of the Mongol military into smaller units. 30 Groups of 10 could be gathered into groups of 100 or groups of 1, 000. During the first Chin campaign, the Mongols crossed the border as one group and then split into smaller units who then spread out (and conquered) in all directions. 31 He also established a group of imperial guards that were chosen from each army and who were the foundation of the Chingis Khans military and administrative system.

32 Initially the Mongol military was relatively small, but the soldiers excelled as horsemen. As their ranks increased over time and they gained new technologies, such as catapults from the Chin, they could handle larger campaigns. 33 Besides might, Chingis Khan resorted to ingenuity. He

employed simple trickery against the Naimans, having each soldier light five fires at night (instead of one each) to make the army seem larger than it was from afar. 34 The Naimans were afraid of the Mongol army that seemed to grow steadily before their eyes.

Sometimes fear caused others to give in without a fight, hoping they would be spared: Korea volunteered to join the empire after witnessing the Chins final defeat. 35 And Chingis Khan capitalized on his opponents fears: when the city of Bukhara (located in modern-day Uzbekistan) was sacked during one of the battles against the Khorezm Shah, Chingis Khan announced inside the mosque, “ I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, he would not have sent a punishment like me.” 36 Witnessing the destruction of cities and the killing of its citizens gave people good reason to fear the Mongols, 37 but fear of the mythic “ Tartars” gripped those well beyond the empires borders. 38 Legacies What are Chingis Khans legacies First of all, before Temuchin was proclaimed Chingis Khan, there was no central leadership of the Mongol people. They lived in clan-based units and did not have a unified Mongol identity. 39 They became the Mongol nation under the leadership of Chingis Khan, and this formed the basis for the modern nation of Mongolia. Though formal logic tells us that denying the antecedent is fallacious reasoning, we could say that without Chingis Khan there might not have been a Mongol empire.

Chingis Khans military conquests literally changed the landscape of Central Asia. George Vernadsky reports that the Mongols destroyed the main dam on the Amu-Daria River during the siege of Urjenj, the capital of the Khorezm

Empire. 40 Their irrigation system was seriously damaged, and that, in turn, destroyed their agricultural system.

Robert Marshall reports that the destruction of the population caused the neglect of the Persian irrigation system. Without irrigation, the land became arid and could no longer support large cities, and the effects of this devastation “lasted for centuries.” 41 A thriving landscape built up over time by great cultures quickly returned to dust.

Writing was an important tool for Chingis Khans empire. The Mongols were illiterate until Chingis Khans reign, when he commanded a Naiman captive to explain their written language to him. A Mongol script (from the Naiman script that was based on the Uighur)42 was established. With a newly established writing system, the Mongols were able to record a set of laws, the Yasa, that Chingis Khan had declared. The Yasa recorded the Mongols cultural beliefs, rules of conduct, and a system of punishment, laying the foundation for Chingis Khans empire.

A court was then established to enforce the Yasa fairly. Prior to their literacy, Mongol history had been undocumented and therefore unknown, but an anonymous person wrote The Secret History of the Mongols shortly after Chingis Khans death. 43 The Secret History was written by someone within the culture, giving us first-hand knowledge of the Mongols. Chingis Khan also established a messenger system, the yam. Outposts were established where horses waited to relay messages through the empire, greatly speeding up communications. Ogodei Khan, Chingis Khans son and successor, further

developed the system, complete with post stations, post horses, and a small settlement of employees at each station.

44 Traders could follow these postal roads in safety. The Silk Roads??” that off and on for centuries linked Europe, Africa, and the Far East in trade and cultural exchange45??” had been under the control of various local powers, became unsafe during times of conflict, and, therefore, fell in and out of use. Under Mongol protection, the Silk Roads flourished, and during the Pax Mongolica46 under Chingis Khans successors, people commonly traveled the full length of the Silk Roads, greatly increasing cultural exchange. 47 In this atmosphere Europeans such as Marco Polo48 traveled to the East and returned with tales of the Mongol empire.

Unfortunately, the Silk Roads also allowed diseases to spread. The bubonic plague traveled from Yunnan and Burma eastward to China and westward to Europe along the roads of the Mongol empire. 49 Cities were ideal hosts for rats, and outbreaks of the plague occurred from time to time. However, the massive outbreak of the bubonic plague in Europe was indirectly caused by the deliberate actions of a Mongol military maneuver.

Under Janibeg Khan, the last Khan of the Golden Horde, the Mongols were fighting against the city of Caffa, located on the Black Sea in Crimea, when they witnessed an outbreak of the plague. Just before fleeing the disease, the Mongol commander catapulted plague-ridden corpses over the walls of the city. The disease was carried to European ports by boat and eventually became the Black Death that decimated medieval Europe. When Chingis Khan died in 1227, his body was brought back to Mongolia and buried in a

secret location. 50 His long line of successors were responsible for many of the Mongol contributions to history. He divided his empire among his sons, with Ogodei in the highest ranking of Khan, 51 and many generations of Mongol leaders descended from his sons. Chingis Khans grandson, Kubilai Khan became the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty (in modern-day China). Kubilai Khan received Marco Polo at his court in 1290, and an entire chapter of *The Travels of Marco Polo* is dedicated to this Great Khan.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge would later immortalize his mythic city of Xanadu in the poem "Kubla Khan." The western branch of the Mongol empire, the Golden Horde, invaded Russia (it was called Rus at the time), Poland, and Hungary. The Mongol invasions caused wide-spread terror in Europe and led to papal envoys to the "Tartars." Finally, the Great Wall of China was created to keep out nomadic invaders, including the Mongols.

Much of Chingis Khans memory is rooted in symbolism more than actual facts. He is seen as a great leader, a military genius, and the founder of Mongol identity. Chingis is a popular name in modern Central Asian cultures who regard Chingis Khan as a cultural figure. In Soviet-controlled Mongolia, Chingis Khan was vilified, but in post-communist Mongolia, he has become a cult figure. Chingis Khan is now a popular brand name for many products, including Chinggis Beer. 1. David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*.

Blackwell History of the World, Vol. I (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 388.

See also: Michael Hoang, *Genghis Khan* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1990), p. 43. Note that Turkic, designating a group of Altaic languages, should not be confused with Turkish, a modern language. 2. George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia, History of Russia, Vol. 3* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 28.

3. We know he died in 1227 AD, but as sources do not agree on Chingis Khans age at the time of his death, it is not possible to simply count backward. Some sources say he was born in the year of the pig, which would make the year 1155 or 1167, but others choose 1162. In 1962, Mongolia celebrated the 800th anniversary of his birth. David Morgan, *The Mongols. People of Europe*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), p. 55.

4. Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, pp. 4-5. 5.

Patricia Berger and Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1995). 6. A ger can be “dismantled and loaded onto an ox-cart in under an hour.” Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East: From Genghis Khan to Khubilai Khan* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 18, photo caption. On page 17, Marshall also notes that “it was not uncommon for clans simply to lift the entire structure on to the back of an ox-cart.” 7.

Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, p. 420. Marco Polo also described gers in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Ronald Latham, trans.

(London: The Folio Society, 1999), p. 79. 8. Berger, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, p. 25. 9.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-life-and-legacy-of-chingis-khan/>

Ibid., p. 27. For reasons why the Mongols retaliated against the Chin, see Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia*, pp. 15-16, 33; and Paul Khan, *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Origin of Chingis Khan* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), p. xix. 10. Kahn, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, p.

xix. 11. Ibid., p. 180. 12. An excellent map may be found in Marshall, *Storm from the East*, p.

44. For a map of the Mongol Empire at the time of his death, see National Geographic's "The Land of Genghis Khan," available online at [http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.nationalgeographic.com/genghis/khanmap.](http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.nationalgeographic.com/genghis/khanmap.html)

html. For a description of the cultures conquered and the contemporary (as of 1990) nations they covered, see Hoang, *Genghis Khan*, pp. 21-22. 13. This helps to explain his early act of fratricide. See Kahn, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, pp.

20-22. 14. Kahn, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, p. 16. 15. Berger, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, p.

14. The following account from 1996 is even more vivid: When approaching a ger, it was polite to yell, "Tie up your dogs!" There were always several around any ger, snarling and snapping at the horses' hooves. These dogs, called "brown eyes" for the golden eyebrows most of them had, were big, German shepherd-like animals with enormous heads and deep chests. These were not the cringing dogs of Ulan Bator. They were well fed, powerful, and

protective-dogs that guarded livestock and sometimes fought off wolves. A couple of them could easily kill a man. It was stupid not to yell, " Tie up your dogs.

" From Tim Cahill, " A Good Hair Week in Mongolia," Outside Magazine (April 1996). Available online at [http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.](http://web.archive.org/web/20080115081912/http://www.outsidemag.com/magazine/0496/9604fmon.html)

[outsidemag.com/magazine/0496/9604fmon.html](http://www.outsidemag.com/magazine/0496/9604fmon.html). 16. Boris Vladimirtsov,

The Life of Chingis-Khan, Prince D.

S. Mirsky, trans. (New York; London: Benjamin Blom, 1969), p. 14. 17.

See chapters 1-2 of Marshall, Storm from the East or chapter 1 of Vernadsky, The Mongols and Russia. For a thirteenth-century Mongolian account, see Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols. Some sources, such as Harold Lambs Genghis Khan: Emperor of All Men (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1927), are entertaining but set forth simplistic stereotypes about " barbarians"; many statements are dubious, especially when compared to The Secret History. 18.

For a description of the Mongols Shamanistic beliefs, consult Hoang, Genghis Khan, pp. 157. 19. Vernadsky, The Mongols and Russia, p. 5. 20.

Marshall, Storm from the East, p. 50. 21. See Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols, pp. 19-20. As meat was the preferred food, fishing would have been an unwelcome act of survival. See also Christian, A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia, p.

389. 22. For a concise summary of this theory, see Marshall, Storm from the East, pp. 32-33. 23. Ibid., pp 40-41. 24.

See Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols, p. 110; and Christian, A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia, pp. 398, 402. 25. Vladimirtsov, The Life of Chingis-Khan, p. 160. 26.

Marshall, Storm from the East, pp. 43-49. 27. Vladimirtsov, The Life of Chingis-Khan, p. 165. 28.

Ibid. 29. Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols, p.

xxvii. 30. Ibid., p. 105. 31. Marshall, Storm from the East, p.

43. 32. Vernadsky, The Mongols and Russia, p.

29. 33. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

34. Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols, p. 107. The Naimans were one of the ethnic groups who lived in the Mongolian steppe. 35. Marshall, Storm from the East, p. 48.

36. Ibid, pp. 53-54. The Khorezm Shahs empire was located just south of the Aral Sea. An excellent map of the cities in Central Asia during Chingis Khans time is Map 12. 1 in Christian, A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia, p.

308. 37. Christian, A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia, p. 403.

38. Ibid, p. 404. Note that Europeans called the Mongols “ Tartars,” but the Tatars are a separate ethnic group and were in fact the Mongols enemies.

39. Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia*, pp.

10-12. 40. Ibid., p. 41. The Khorezm empire was located just south of the Aral Sea.

An excellent map of the cities in Central Asia during Chingis Khans time is Map 12. 1 in Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, p. 308.

41. Marshall, *Storm from the East*, p. 68. 42. The Uighurs, another ethnic group in Inner Eurasia, had a written language by this time. For an account on the development of the Uighur written language and the history of writing in Mongolian culture, see Berger, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, pp.

88-95. The Uighur people currently live in the Xinjiang Province in western China. 43. Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia*, p.

31; Marshall, *Storm from the East*, pp. 21-22; Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, pp. 398-399. 44. Kahn, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, pp.

191-192. 45. For the Silk Roads during the 7th century AD, see Map 7.

1, Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, p. 178. 46.

See Daniel C. Waugh, “ The Pax Mongolica,” posted on the Silkroad Foundations web site at <http://web.archive>.

org/web/20080115081912/http://www. silk-road. com/artl/paxmongolica. shtml. 47. David Christian, “ Silk Roads or Steppe Roads The Silk Roads in World History,” *Journal of World History* 11: 1 (2000), pp. 1-26; see pages 18 and 24 in particular. 48.

For Marco Polos description of the Mongol postal system, see *The Travels of Marco Polo*, pp. 125-126. 49. Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, p. 426. 50. In 2001, archaeologists announced that they might have found the location of Chingis Khans burial.

See National Geographics “ Burial Site May Reveal Secrets That Died with Genghis Khan” (August 21, 2001), http://web. archive. org/web/20080115081912/http://news. nationalgeographic. com/news/2001/08/0820_wiregenghis. html. 51. Kahn, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, p.

169-171.