

Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World Study Guide

**Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World by
Jack Weatherford**

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Plot Summary

Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World was written by Jack Weatherford, a professor of anthropology at Macalester College in Minnesota. His book is well-known as a work of popular history. The book tells the story of Genghis Khan's life, influence and legacy, through his successors to the present day. It focuses on a number of recently unearthed and translated historical texts that, in centuries past, were unavailable, such as the *Secret History of the Mongols*. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* is effectively an extended attempt to rehabilitate the image of Genghis Khan in a much more positive light than is normal for Western historiography.

The work is far friendlier to the Mongols and is included in a string of books that have reconceived the personality and life of Genghis Khan. Weatherford argues that the Mongols are not the horrible, conquering hordes of Western imagination, but instead Mongols tended to be egalitarian, destroying local hierarchies. They also tended to treat the general population much better than the rulers they deposed and were widely tolerant of religious differences. They imposed fewer taxes and had less administration. The Mongols also promoted universal education.

Mongols were innovators in military tactics, to be sure, but they also fostered the use of modern propaganda, massive free trade routes, modern international rule of law and the free exchange of ideas. The Mongols tended to rule by consensus, rather than by orders, widely promoted the use of paper money, reduced the use of torture and created the idea of diplomatic immunity. While Weatherford's book is thought to contain a number of important historical errors, it has done much to revive interest in the Mongol Empire and the man who created it.

Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World contains an introduction and three broad parts. Part I, *The Reign of Terror on the Steppe, 1162-1206*, tells the story of Genghis Khan's youth, rise to power and adulthood through Chapter 1, *The Blood Clot*, Chapter 2, *Tale of Three Rivers*, and Chapter 3, *War of the Khans*. Part II, *The Mongol World War, 1211-1261*, continues Genghis Khan's expansion of the Mongol Empire, chronicles his death and discusses the fate of the empire thereafter, through Chapters 4-7, which see the Mongol Empire expand through much of China and all the way to Europe.

Part III, *The Global Awakening, 1262-1962*, contains the final three chapters. It begins with the rule of Genghis Khan's grandson, Khubilai Khan and his Eastern Mongol Empire. From there it explains how the Mongol Empire extended to its furthest reaches under the divided kingdoms of Genghis's grandchildren and how the Mongol Empire was eventually assimilated into the cultures they ruled due to the bubonic plague's destruction of the global economy. Chapter 10, *Empire of Illusion*, explains how Genghis Khan's and the Mongol's image was destroyed among Westerners during the Enlightenment. The book ends with an epilogue, which follows up the introduction's story of Weatherford's expedition to Genghis Khan's burial lands.



Introduction, The Missing Conqueror

Introduction, The Missing Conqueror Summary and Analysis

Genghis Khan made his own destiny. That he could conquer most of the known world seems beyond improbability. Khan grew up in a world of great tribal violence, and as a son in an outcast family, he probably knew only a few hundred people in his early life. He had no formal education. As a child, he was cowardly and cried easily; his brothers picked on him. But at that young age he already met his best friend who would later become his lifelong enemy and the love of his life, who he would make the mother of emperors. In each period of his young life, he defeated everyone who was more powerful than him until all of Mongolia was under his rule. His Mongol army would transform warfare across the world.

In a mere quarter-century, the Mongols conquered more land and people than the Romans did in four hundred years. All of the most densely populated civilizations of the thirteenth century came under his control. Khan ruled more than twice the last as any other many in history. From a million Mongol people, Khan recruited a hundred thousand men. Khan redrew the boundaries of the world, consolidating small countries into larger ones. He created the Russian state and created China by stitching together small countries. Prior to Khan, as far as we know, no one in Europe knew of China and vice versa; but afterward they had trade routes and communication that continue uninterrupted to the present day.

Despite his reputation for brutality, Khan smashed the feudal system of aristocratic privilege, created the largest free trade zone in the world through the Silk Road. He lowered taxes for all, started the first international postal system, created international law, religious freedom within his realm, abolished torture, refused to hold hostages and created the idea of diplomatic immunity. After Khan's death, his empire grew for another 150 years, and in the centuries following his death, continued in smaller forms. It was not until 1920 that the last of his descendants no longer had a kingdom to rule. Unlike most emperors, he died at an old age, surrounded by family and friends.

The Mongols made no great inventions, no new religions, had little literature and created no new agriculture. But they collected the creations of other cultures and passed them throughout the world. Thus, they were merchants of ideas. The Mongols who followed Khan were determined to move products around the world and created still new products. The cannon, for instance, was created at this time through a hybrid of other inventions.

Each country conquered by the Mongols were shocked by the conquest of an unknown tribe but flourished immediately thereafter. While the Mongols killed the aristocratic knighthood of Europe, they did not conquer and loot the cities as they thought it was not



worthwhile, so Europe suffered little and acquired many advantages. All the new knowledge helped create the Renaissance.

We have no picture of Genghis Khan made during his life. Everyone made him look like their own people. The Mongols were quite secret about his death and appearance and life. Scholars worldwide have portrayed him in varying ways. But in the twentieth century we have more reliable sources. For instance, some historians have deciphered manuscripts concerning his lost history, documents that were dangerous to decipher in Mongolia due to Communist authorities who wanted to control it. An underground scholarly movement grew up around it and the Mongol people were determined not to lose it. In response, the Soviets brutally persecuted the Mongol people and killed their scholars, but the remaining scholars put their lives at risk to understand the past.

The second major development occurred when the Soviets withdrew from Mongolia in 1990. People started to make their way in and teams of technologically sophisticated foreigners came to search the Khan family tombs. The author, Jake Weatherford's research began by studying the role of tribal people in the history of world commerce which led Jack Weatherford to travel great distances until he arrived in Mongolia in 1998. The trip led to another five years and great research. For the first time in eight hundred years, the forbidden zone of Khan's childhood and burial were open.

Many scholars were needed, so Weatherford invited others in, such as Dr. Kh. Lkhagvasuren. Together, the team collected and compared dozens of primary and secondary texts in many languages. The Secret History led them to trace all of its geographical markings. They were able to correct some misconceptions about his life and learn more about his field methods. The book presents the highlights of their findings.



Chapter 2, Tale of Three Rivers

Chapter 2, Tale of Three Rivers Summary and Analysis

The Merkid decided that they would take their revenge for the theft of Hoelun but decided to capture Borte instead, now that Hoelun was old. They chased down Temujin's clan and he left the three women behind to distract the Merkid. In contrast to his typical spontaneous reactions to events, Temujin planned and prayed for three days. He realized that he could not have the quiet life he wanted and he missed Borte terribly. So Temujin called up the protection of Ong Khan to raid the Merkid, who then recommended that he seek aid from another clan led by Jamuka, who quickly agreed. This was Temujin's first raid and it was successful, though Borte was taken away in the night and hidden. During the course of the night, Borte heard Temujin's voice and they were reunited.

After life calmed down, Borte became pregnant and gave birth to their son Jochi in 1179. At this time, Temujin's loyalty to Jamuka was renewed and Temujin joined Jamuka's followers. They swore brotherhood again and Temujin accepted the life of a herder and steppe warrior. However, as Temujin grew in popularity in the tribe, Jamuka became jealous and started to subordinate Temujin, which ultimately led Temujin to sneak his family away, creating a rift in 1181 and two decades of war between the two men as they rose in stature. Temujin was determined to build his own clan and become a khan. At age twenty-seven, in 1189, Temujin had collected many followers and decided to make a play for khan of the Mongols. Jamuka made a similar play.

Temujin quickly solidified his alliances and created an ordu or horde, creating for the first time a horde where responsibility was not based on kinship but on trust. He assigned men to different tasks and created an elite bodyguard. Temujin was ultimately recognized as khan and established an administrative court, but Jamuka refused to recognize him. The conflict would go unresolved until 1195 when Temujin was thirty-three. Ong Khan enlisted Temujin to ally with the Jurcheds to fight against the Tatars. The raid was an easy success and it brought great booty.

Temujin saw how the Jurcheds used border tribes to fight one another. He saw that tribal conflict was constant, which led him to fashion permanent victory strategies to avoid such fighting. In a conflict with the Jurkin, who broke an agreement with him, he responded by holding a public trial and having their aristocrats executed to show the value of loyalty to his allies and to show that aristocrats would not receive special treatments. He then occupied Jurkin lands and redistributed to households of his clan. He then adopted some of the Jurkin as relatives.

After the Jurkin were vanquished, Temujin moved his forces to Avarga, then a small camp but in an ideal home territory. For four years, Temujin's followers prospered and his tribe grew, though Jamuka still refused to recognize his power. In 1201, Jamuka tried to become ruler of the Mongols by challenging Temujin and Ong Khan by



proclaiming himself Gur-khan, khan of all khans. If Jamuka could win the coming war, he would rule the central steppe. And he had many allies. Eventually Jamuka pitted his army against Ong Khan and Temujin, though the latter had the greater numbers. Due to the supposed magic of Temujin's shaman, Jamuka's followers fled. Temujin chased them and had some difficulty defeating the Tayichiud, while Jamuka escaped Ong Khan.

In 1202, Ong Khan had Temujin lead a campaign against the Tartars. Typically raids let warriors escape to focus on looting, but Temujin changed this practice to achieve complete victory. He also ordered that the share of warriors be given to widows and orphans of soldiers killed. This policy enabled him to gain the support of the poorest in the tribe and helped make his soldiers loyal to him. The system was immediately effective and Temujin's armies gained more goods and animals than before. After defeating the Tatars, he captured all of their civilians and began to integrate them into his own clan, though this involved integrating thousands. Surviving Tatars were to be full members of the tribe and to show this, Temujin adopted a Tatar child and encouraged intermarriage. He also took additional women as wives from the Tatars.

In 1203, Temujin organized his warriors into squads not based on kin group or tribe and ordered them to serve as brothers. Ten squads formed companies (zagun) of one hundred men and ten companies formed a battalion (mingan), ten of which formed a tumen. Temujin picked the leaders of each tumen and used the leadership roles to break old-system lineages, clans and tribes. The whole Mongol tribe was integrated through the army and everyone in the tribe, no matter age or gender, had to perform public service.



Chapter 3, War of the Khans

Chapter 3, War of the Khans Summary and Analysis

Ong Khan was nearing death and was threatened by Temujin's growing power. Temujin wanted to secure succession from Ong and so asked if his son, Kochi, could marry Ong's daughter. Ong used the request to lure Temujin and his family into Ong's camp, where he planned to have them killed. Before Ong could strike, however, Temujin learned of the plot and fled, sending his family in all directions. With nineteen surviving men of many tribes, Temujin formulated a counterattack. He sent out word to his army units who reassembled themselves on the steppe, coming to Temujin from all directions and then converging on the complacent, overconfident Ong. Over the next three days, many deserted Ong and were accepted by Temujin, leading Temujin to absorb Ong's army. While Temujin did not capture Ong or his family, he used propaganda and rumor to ensure the people that Ong was dead.

In 1204, Temujin turned to conquer the Naiman tribe, which was allied with Jamuka. He used squads of ten to make unpredictable hit-and-run raids. He then ran a long line of troops to advance, fire its arrows and then be replaced by the next line. This caused the Naiman to stretch out in a wide line, which Temujin then broke with a chisel formation. These tactics were Temujin's innovation, producing a new type of steppe army in a united formation. After victory, Jamuka and the Tayang Khan's son, Guchlug, fled. Jamuka's Merkid clan was swallowed by the Mongols and Jamuka lived as an outcast.

In 1205, Jamuka's remaining followers seized him and gave him over to Temujin. Temujin offered to unite with him again. Jamuka then engaged in a long confession to Temujin (though the account seems inauthentic as it is too long and grandiose). But instead of asking to live, Jamuka asked to be killed in an aristocratic fashion. With Jamuka's death, Temujin had defeated every tribe on the steppe and destroyed all aristocratic lineages. He now controlled vast lands. In 1206, he was installed in office as ruler of the Mongols, assuming the title Chinggis Khan, which would be transformed by the Persians into Genghis Khan.

Khan deliberately set out to create a nation-state and establish institutions to sustain it. He started by building a strong army and making it central to government. He abolished traditional aristocracy and merged tribes, creating new laws to suppress tribal feuding, comprising the "Great Law" which was an ongoing body of legal work derived from local custom. He banned the kidnapping and enslavement of Mongols and tried to remove any cause of internal dissension. He also permitted religious toleration to prevent fighting. All religious leaders and their property were exempt from taxation and public service. The law's enforcement lay with Khan himself. The rule of law covered all, even rulers.

New administrative laws were adopted and a writing system created for record keeping. He created a position of supreme judge to punish law breakers. Khan also created his



own elite guard, often comprised of the sons of his military commanders. He used a system of fast riders as messengers and older systems of communication. Six years of peace followed, though he had to suppress disagreements among his followers and family, with a particularly nasty conflict with his head shaman, Teb Tengeri. All the while, Khan extended kinship offers to tribes in Siberia, gaining him thousands of recruits. He also sought the aid of the Uighur people, offering his daughter to the Uighur khan in marriage. By doing so, Khan accepted entire tribes and nations into his empire, creating a kind of citizenship based only on allegiance and loyalty.



Part II, The Mongol World War, 1211-1261, Chapter 4, Spitting on the Golden Khan

Part II, The Mongol World War, 1211-1261, Chapter 4, Spitting on the Golden Khan Summary and Analysis

By 1210, the Mongols grew in power and a new Golden Khan ascended to the Jurched Throne. He demanded the submission of Genghis by envoy and stifled Mongol trade routes. Genghis refused to submit, and after three days of discernment, he and his people decided to go to war. The Jurched kingdom was the second largest of the many kingdoms in modern China. Prior to the Jurched threat, Khan had subdued and absorbed the Tangut, who had 150,000 soldiers, and he continued to compile his own tactics. Khan's war against the Jurched would set the world ablaze. They prepared to cross the Gobi, as the Mongols were well suited to travel long distances. They traveled light and subsisted on little food. They stayed dispersed, communicating sporadically and living off the land.

Khan knew that no matter how powerful his army, he could not conquer fortified cities through standard tactics. So he exploited any social turmoil he could, leaving many Khitan to join the Mongols, who also helped Khan learn the land. Mongol success came from their cohesion and discipline. They steadily cleaned out unfortified villages, conscripting male villagers and using them to gather food and water. The Mongols then used the peasants as shields and battering rams. They also used constant propaganda and reconnaissance, creating confusion when they attacked. They had also acquired the ability to build siege engines from the Chinese. In some cases, he tried to draw the enemy out of their stronghold.

In 1214, Khan besieged the court of the Golden Khan in Zhongdu (Beijing). The court had just survived a palace coup and much strife was afoot. He agreed to a settlement with the Mongols, giving them much silk, silver, gold, horses and servants and recognized himself as a vassal of Genghis Khan. The Khitan would be given much of their land and their royal family would be restored. But soon after the Mongols left, the Jurched began to renege. The Golden Khan evacuated Zhongdu and left for Kaifeng, which he thought was impregnable. But Genghis Khan saw the flight as a betrayal and marched down again. On the way down, many defected to Khan and they easily took Zhongdu. On the way home from Zhongdu, with silk in tow, Khan rerouted the Silk Road into a single route. No leader had brought back the sheer amount of goods that Khan had. Once his people gained a taste for wealth, Khan had to organize supply, coordinate the movement of goods and maintain production.

When Khan returned home, he had internal dissensions to settle. He also conducted a campaign against the Black Khitan at the request of the Uighur. In 1219, Khan was



nearly sixty and seemed content to live his days in peace. He then secured a trade treaty with the sultan of Khwarizm and the sultan reluctantly agreed. But when Khan's trade caravans reached Khwarizm, the governor seized the goods and killed the merchants. Khan then asked the sultan to punish the local government, but the sultan rebuked Khan in the most offensive manner he could. Khan then discerned whether he should war again and made ready for war once more.



Chapter 5, Sultan versus Khan

Chapter 5, Sultan versus Khan Summary and Analysis

In 1219, Khan left for Khwarizm. By year's end, the Mongols had taken all of the major cities in the whole empire, leaving the sultan abandoned and dying on an island in the Caspian Sea. In four years, the Mongols conquered the cities of central Asia with ease, including Bukhara, Samarkand, Otrar, Urgench, Nishapur, Hamadan, Tabriz, and Tbilisi. They crushed every army they found, from the Himalayas to the Caucasus, from the Indus River to the Volga River. But in attacking Khwarizm, Khan attacked an entire ancient civilization combining the Arabs, Turks and Persians, one of the most sophisticated and richest countries in the world, with a high degree literacy. Since the sultan's regime was only twelve years older than the Mongol Empire, many dissensions made him easy to destabilize. Khan had an army of between 150,000 and 200,000 men, though the sultan had 400,000 men. The Mongols, nonetheless, caused many to defect, absorbed whole peoples and used their excellent tactics and propaganda organs to triumph, using Korean paper. People began to believe he was invincible.

After four years in Central Asia, Khan was in his sixties at the height of his powers but his family was already tearing itself apart over his succession. He took his four sons with him to teach them to get along and how to rule. Each son would be khan of a wide range of people, though one would be Great Khan. His sons could not agree, so Khan negotiated an agreement among them, Jochi, Chaghatai, Ogodei, and Tolui. Ogodei would become the next Great Khan to settle conflict between Jochi and Chaghatai. Around the same time as the negotiations, Borte likely died. In future campaigns, Khan made Jochi and Chaghatai lead campaigns together to teach them to work together. He tried to teach them self-control, humility and wisdom.

Mongol conquest stopped at Multan, in the center of modern Pakistan in the summer of 1222. A planned invasion of northern India was aborted. Khan then ran a massive hunt to help reconcile his sons, but his son Jochi refused to come even upon Khan's direct order. He soon thereafter died, and it is unclear why. Khan returned home and launched his final campaign against the Tangut in 1207 because they refused to furnish troops for the invasion of Khwarizm. Six months after the campaign began and only a few days before the final victory over the Tangut, Ghengis Khan died. A procession set out toward Mongolia with his spirit banner.

It is unclear how Khan thought of himself and his legacy, but it seems clear that he did not think he had many distinguished qualities. Instead, he thought the Eternal Blue Sky (the Mongol conception of God) had given him victory because of the arrogance and luxury of the civilizations surrounding him. He always led a simple life, despite the luxury available to him. At the end of his life, however, his aspirations rose and he aimed to create a "great work" and unite the world. He wanted to be a ruler of all people.



Chapter 6, The Discovery and Conquest of Europe

Chapter 6, The Discovery and Conquest of Europe Summary and Analysis

When Genghis died, his son Ogodei took over. Ogodei immediately contravened his father's policy of moderation and threw a lavish party and spent the next several years squandering his father's wealth. He also built the Mongol capital city of Karakorum, which was the only "stationary" city the Mongols had. While the city was large, it came to be filled primarily with goods and administrators for the empire.

Since the Mongols produced no goods and services of note (other than horses, which they would not trade), Ogodei had to import massive amounts of goods, and he paid an absurdly high premium for them in order to induce merchants to come all the way to Karakorum. Clearly his ruling practices were unsustainable, so eventually Ogodei had to find some civilization to loot and plunder. His main general, Subodei, suggested that the Mongols conquer the far off and unknown civilization called Europe. He and Jebe had conquered Georgia and some Russian city-states between 1221 and 1224 and had an easy time of it, but they left many of the city-states behind and he thought more were available. So, twelve years later, Ogodei agreed to set out for Europe. However, due to the pressures from the other khans to attack the Sung, Ogodei decided to send out Mongol forces east and west simultaneously, which would prove to be a mistake.

The Mongols prepared for their campaigns for two years. The five-year campaign in Europe was the height of Mongol military ability and everything went according to plan. The campaign started along the Volga and proceeded across what would later become Russia and Ukraine; the campaign would last for three years. Looting was similarly successful. By 1240, the Mongols captured the most important political and religious city in the Slavic world—Kiev. Once Kiev fell, a mass of refugees fled into central Europe to report the coming Mongol invasion. The Mongols flooded Hungary and sent a smaller force across Poland toward Germany, leading to Vienna. The Polish conquest was easy, as was the conquest of the Germans. The Mongol forces then withdrew and joined the fight in Hungary. The rout was so decisive that Hungary lost a bishop, two archbishops, and European knighthood lost one hundred thousand soldiers. The knighthood would never recover.

All the while, Christian clergy and rulers tried to figure out who the Mongols were and what they wanted. The Europeans decided that the Mongols were lost tribes of Jews and so they turned to attack the Jews all across Europe. However, the Mongol invasion stopped when the pastures of Europe ended. The Mongols required pastures for their horses. There was no assault on Western Europe. And on December 11th, 1241, Ogodei died. His other sons had either died before or would die soon afterward. Now his grandsons had to decide who would be the next Great Khan. For ten years they

would battle, leaving the rest of the world safe. The Mongols retreated back from Europe, having found little loot in European cities. In the meanwhile, they struck a trade deal with the Italians, which would last for centuries.



Chapter 7, Warring Queens

Chapter 7, Warring Queens Summary and Analysis

For ten years following Ogodei's death, women would have unprecedented power in the empire. When he died, his wife, not the most senior, Torgene, ruled as official regent of the empire. She spent her time preparing politically to get her arrogant and violent son Guyuk on the throne. On July 22, 1246, Guyuk was elected Great Khan. He first had an unpleasant interaction with Pope Innocent IV, who demanded his submission and then spent his reign persecuting his enemies, such as his mother's most trusted advisor, Fatima Khatun.

When Guyuk died, his widow Oghul Ghaimish stepped in as regent but she lacked skill. Sorkhokhtani, a vice-regent and the widow of Genghis Khan's youngest son, with the support of her four capable sons, had the election of the next Great Khan held on Genghis's burial grounds and was able to get her son Mongke elected Khan. Each of Mongke's sons would be khan, including Arik Boke and Khubilai, and her son Hulegu would be Il Khan of Persia; he would conquer Persia, Baghdad, Syria and Turkey. The other sons would conquer the Sung and then Vietnam, Laos, and Burma. They would also execute the Muslim caliph. Together they expanded the Mongol Empire to its largest size.

Mongke was a ruler in the mold of his grandfather, avoiding the excesses of Ogodei and Guyuk. He also increased the tolerance of different religions and even had Christians, Muslims and Buddhists hold a debate among one another in his court (not surprisingly, no one was convinced). Mongke, though, was less interested in religion and more in conquest of the Sung and the Arabs. To do so, Mongke first stabilized the economy, controlling government spending and slashing the deficits racked up by Guyuk. Then Hulegu would lead the attack on the Arabs and Khubilai on the Sung.

Hulegu's campaign was successful, for he exploited divisions among Muslim rulers and captured a major Imam. The Assassins, a group of elite Muslim guard, were exterminated and Baghdad was conquered. Hulegu then opened a massive trade route to Baghdad. In doing so, Hulegu overthrew the Caliph and had him executed. No other non-Muslim force would conquer Baghdad until the Americans did in 2003. However, the Mongol Empire would extend no further in the West.

Khubilai's campaign was less successful, due to his lack of experience. The campaign had many delays and Khubilai made many excuses. Mongke took matters into his own hands, first subduing the outlying kingdoms. In the second year of the campaign, the Mongols moved against the Sung directly. Mongke died during the campaign, on August 11th, 1259. Rather than assembling to elect a new Khan, Mongol leaders solidified their holdings. Mongke would be the last khan to be recognized by the entire empire.



Mongke's brothers focused their campaigns mostly on one another. Khubilai would rule the Chinese and focus on building buildings and cities. Arik Boke continued to live as a man of the steppes. Khubilai and Arik Boke were appointed Great Khan in their own ceremonies and then fought to control Kakarum, which Khubilai won. He then forced the submission of his brother. But when Khubilai held a ceremony to have himself proclaimed Great Khan, Hulegu's family refused to attend. In 1266, Arik Boke became sick and died, probably poisoned. Khubilai would not rule the eastern Mongol Empire. The Mongol Empire was not divided into four primary zones, Khubilai in the east, the Golden Horde among the Slavs, Arik Boke's family over the northern Muslims of Afghanistan and Turkey and the Persian Empire by Ogodei's grandson, Khaidu.



Part Three, the Global Awakening, 1262-1962, Chapter 8, Khubilai Khan and the New Mongol Empire

Part Three, the Global Awakening, 1262-1962, Chapter 8, Khubilai Khan and the New Mongol Empire Summary and Analysis

Khubilai Khan did not have the military prowess of his father, but he had a political talent his father lacked. He was able to unify China, something no one had been able to do from within China for hundreds of years. In Khubilai's day, most of China was fragmented. Khubilai unified them by convincing them that he was more Chinese than the Sung and by slowly bringing them under his rule. Khubilai took on China dress, took Chinese names, built Chinese buildings, performed Chinese ceremonies and did everything else he could to promote his image as being Chinese. He also built a large and beautiful palace and a city, known as the Forbidden City.

Khubilai Khan also implemented the rule of law and held to strong private property rights. He simplified the legal code and had it codified so that it could be used by local officials. He abolished the traditional bureaucratic system of government by examination and meritorious hiring so long used by the Chinese and instead used the consensual, deliberative model of decision-making characteristic of the Mongols (though this particular part of his legacy disappeared when the Ming dynasty took over). He used an administrative system that mixed the Chinese with many other ethnicities and religions so as to prevent his overthrow. Khubilai also expanded the use of paper money and organized peasants into self-managing units. They also promoted general literacy and built public schools for all, along with promoting the use of drama.

Khubilai promoted a two decades long strategy of winning the allegiance of all of Chinese civilization. The Mongols portrayed themselves as strong leaders favored by heaven, and so through slow erosion, the Sung dynasty died. Khubilai strove to preserve their achievements. When he acquired the Sung navy, he could now invade defiant islands and turned Korea into a large military and naval base, though he was unable to conquer all of Japan. However, he had pushed Japan towards cultural unification and militaristic rule. Mongols were able to conquer Burma, north Vietnam and Laos, however. They also united Korea, though they could not conquer Indonesia. But Khubilai reached the outer limits of the Mongol empire.



Chapter 9, Their Golden Light

Chapter 9, Their Golden Light Summary and Analysis

From 1287 to 1288, Mongol envoy Rabban Bar Sawma traveled Europe to try to secure agreements with many European leaders, though he almost entirely failed. Instead, the commercial influence of the Mongols was more important than their diplomatic influence, particularly as explained by Marco Polo's travels to meet Khubilai. Despite internal conflicts, the continent's wide commercial markets of the Mongols continue to function, almost turning the Mongol Empire into a corporation. Trade often proceeded by sea as well. Chinese manufacturing also spread. Through these trade routes, many ideas crossed into other parts of the world, which maintained their distinctiveness as the Mongols rarely tried to impose their culture, language and religion upon their conquered lands.

The Mongols strove to improve agriculture across the empire, especially in Persia, where thousands of years of cultivation had significantly reduced the productivity of the land. They also made it possible to exchange whole systems of knowledge. They also created hospitals and a printing office along with a center for studying the calendar, as calendars were needed for many purposes, military and commercial, and for governmental coordination generally. The Mongols had a policy of religious tolerance, created a universal alphabet, maintained relay stations and many other things, created a persistent universalism. They had no ideology of their own and so only used pragmatic solutions.

Europe likely gained the most from the Mongol world system, as they received the benefits of trade and technology while never being conquered. They slowly made peace with the Mongols and built up mining, milling and metal work. They learned of new crops and started to use paper instead of parchment, acquired gunpowder and started to use the compass. They also abandoned much classical knowledge.



Chapter 10, The Empire of Illusion, Epilogue, The Eternal Spirit of Genghis Khan

Chapter 10, The Empire of Illusion, Epilogue, The Eternal Spirit of Genghis Khan Summary and Analysis

In the end, it was the bubonic plague that destroyed the Mongol Empire. The plague originated in China and was carried throughout the known world through their trade routes. Seventy-five million people died worldwide, and as a result, commerce and communication broke down. Europe, Persia, Russia and China were now by themselves. The Golden Family could no longer communicate and newly outnumbered Mongol ruling families began to assimilate into their surrounding culture. In China, the Mongols turned to Tibetan Buddhism and their international monetary system broke down. The Mongols of the Persian Ilkhanate disappeared and the Chinese Khans fell to the Ming dynasty. The Mongols returned to their nomadic lives prior to conquest. The Turkic Mongols dissolved into their subjects.

The Ming erased Mongol history as much as they could and moved their capital to Nanjing. Indigenous rebellions expelled the Mongols worldwide, though many sought to maintain the appearance of Mongol rule, as they were seen as legitimate and to maintain the extent of their empires. However, the Mongols continued their line of descendants from Genghis in Moghulistan, becoming the Mogul Empire of India, which would not fall until British conquest. So many empires maintained the illusion of the Mongol Empire, though it ceased to exist. However, many in Europe still believed it existed, as Christopher Columbus left to meet the Great Khan in China in 1492, more than a century after the last khan ruled China.

The Renaissance Intelligentsia respected the Mongols but the eighteenth-century Enlightenment produced an anti-Asian spirit that demonized the Mongols. Genghis Khan became the central figure of attack. Racialism led to Mongols being characterized as inferior races, calling the mentally handicapped "Mongoloids" as many looked Asian (Down's Syndrome). In the nineteenth century, fear of Asians continued to spread. Christian colonialists and Communist rulers sought to rescue Asians from their "terrible legacy" of oppression by Genghis Khan and the Mongol hordes.

In contrast, Asian intellectuals found a new hero in Genghis Khan, including twentieth-century Asians who needed a figure to counter the idea of European dominance. The father of Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, a peace activist, ironically resurrected his legacy. Asians examined the idea of a Pan Mongolianism to create a common identity for themselves to transcend national loyalties. As World War II approach, Genghis Khan took on a role in propaganda and ideology along with military application. Translations of Mongol documents were mined for military strategy. The tank, cavalry



and artillery could not be combined into a fast moving military unit which seemed to make Mongol strategy viable again. Germans and Soviets studied Mongol history.

In 1944, Sayid Alim Khan, the last reigning descendant of Genghis Khan, the former emir of Bukhara, died. Through most of the twentieth century, Russia and China agreed to divide the homeland of Genghis Khan between them.

In the epilogue, the author notes that Khan's empire was the last great tribal empire of world history. His rule ended nomadic tribal wars. While some nomadic struggle would revive, it would never rule again save in the Americas. Khan helped shape the world of commerce, communication and created large secular states. He was a modern man of mobilized and professional warfare, promoted world commerce and instituted international secular law. He amalgamated cultures and his influence is greater than almost any other person in world history.

The book ends with the author describing how his team located the old burial grounds and landmarks of Temujin's history. They believed that they had found the spot where Borte was kidnapped from Temujin. The history surrounding them seemed imminently present. Each member of the team left small personal gifts on the stone. The Mongolian members of the team cried for the creator of their civilization.



Characters

Genghis Khan/Temujin

Temujin was born in 1162 to Yesugui, leader of the Borjigin tribe, and Hoelun, from the Olkhunut tribe, in what is modern day Mongolia near Burkhan Khaldun. The Secret History of the Mongols reports that he was born with a blood clot in his fist. He had three brothers, Khasar, Khajiun and Temuge, and lived a nomadic early life. His marriage to Borte was arranged at an early age and would be consummated at age twelve. When Yesugui was poisoned, his tribe refused to accept Temujin as their leader and abandoned Hoelun's family to die. For the next several years, Hoelun's family struggled to survive, which Weatherford believes made Temujin independently-minded, uninterested in class distinctions and determined not to be controlled or dishonored by others.

As Temujin grew up, a series of conflicts led him to grow stronger and wiser with respect to personal conflicts. His natural charisma gained him followers. While initially Temujin seemed content to live with his family alone, he was gradually "forced" to fight. Eventually he decided that he must lead progressively larger groups in order to subdue his rivals and bring peace to his land. He also had four sons, Jochi, Chagatai, Ogodei and Tolui. In the early 1200s, Temujin united the tribes of Mongolia, mastering all of his rivals, including his old friend Jamuka, ultimately becoming Great Khan and changing his name to Genghis.

Afterward, Genghis Khan's rampage of conquest could not be stopped. His inventive military tactics, shrewd ability to avoid the formation of conspiracies against him, his natural self-control and moderation, along with his natural penchant for bloody struggle and his belief that God had given him the authority to rule the world, led to the creation of the largest empire in world history, an empire that he imbued with the rule of law, massive trade routes, a reduced degree of torture and religious toleration. Genghis Khan died in 1227.

Khubilai Khan

Khubilai Khan lived from 1215 to 1294 and was the fifth Great Khan, ruling from 1260 to 1294. He created the Yuan Dynasty in China and was the grandson of Genghis Khan, inheriting the title from his older brother Mongke. Early on he had to wrest the disputed title of Great Khan from his brother, Ariq Boke. But the war of succession marked the beginning of the splits within the empire. Khubilai's power laid over China though he had influence in other parts of the empire. His part of the empire covered one fifth of the inhabitable land in the world. Khubilai helped to create a unified China and became Emperor in 1271. By 1279, he successfully destroyed the Sung dynasty.



While Khubilai was not a great military leader, he destroyed the Sung and carried out many invasions of surrounding areas, including Japan and Vietnam. But his major talent was in assimilating himself into Chinese culture and convincing the Chinese that he was the legitimate ruler of China by imitating their culture through adopting their styles of dress, their names and performing their royal ceremonies. Khubilai also established a powerful reputation in Europe in part through the visit of Marco Polo, through the Silk Road passage that stretched from China to Italy. He is also known for sending a famous envoy, Rabban Sauma, a Christian Nestorian priest, to travel across Europe to make trade treaties.

Khubilai ruled China relatively effectively. He promoted the growth of the economy, issued paper money, rebuilt the Grand Canal, created cities and highways. He also dramatically expanded trade. Khubilai expanded the pursuit of knowledge in China, including astronomy, and promoted mass literacy.

The Early Mongols

The Mongol tribes prior to Genghis Khan existed in a part of the world inhabited by humans for millennia and had undergone their own bronze and iron ages. They are largely of Turkic origin and lived as nomads, with great control over horses and fighting mostly among themselves, though sometimes with China, who encouraged fighting between them until Genghis Khan united them.

Hoelun

Captured from the Merkid tribe, Hoelun was Genghis Khan's mother.

Borte

Also from the Merkid tribe, Borte was Genghis Khan's wife and the mother of his four sons.

Jamuka

Genghis Khan's close childhood friend who later became his bitter rival.

Mongke Khan

The fourth Great Khan of the Mongols, the oldest son of Genghis Khan's youngest son Tolui and his mother Sorghaghtani.



Ogodei Khan

The third son of Genghis Khan and the second Great Khan who ruled extravagantly and put the empire at risk.

Guyuk Khan

The third great Khan of the Mongol Empire, he was Ogodei's oldest son and ruled arrogantly and erratically.

The Chinese

The Chinese were responsible for many wars amongst Mongol tribes but Genghis Khan ultimately united the Mongols against them and conquered large parts of China. Khubilai finished the conquest of China, uniting it and finally repressing the Sung, a long time enemy of the Mongols.

The Persians

The peoples of modern-day Iran who were ruled by the Khwarizm Empire, conquered by the Mongols in 1231.

The Slavs

The peoples of Eastern Europe who were also conquered by the Mongols but who knew so little of them that they did not see the conquest coming and assumed it was the judgment of God against them.



Objects/Places

The Mongol Steppes

The large plateaus of high elevation in Northern modern-day Mongolia where the Mongols originated and Genghis Khan grew up.

Genghis Khan's Burial Grounds

Near Burkhan Khaldun, Khan's burial grounds could not be visited by anyone but the royal family. They were protected for centuries until the Soviets conquered Mongolia.

Mongolia

The modern day nation that succeeds the Mongol Empire.

Kakarum

The capital city of the Mongol Empire created by Genghis Khan as an administrative and storage hub.

The Forbidden City

The great palace in the Imperial City (part of Beijing) during the Yuan Dynasty built by Khubilai Khan.

The Khwarizm Empire

The Persian Empire that existed from the tenth century to the thirteenth, when it was conquered by the Mongols.

The Spirit Banner

A flag pole decorated with white horse tail hairs which were said by the Mongols to contain the soul of its dead bearer. Genghis Khan's spirit banner survived until the Soviets destroyed it in 1920.



Mongol Horses

Mongols were known for breeding world-class horses and using them to great success in warfare.

The Silk Route

Often called the Silk Road, this was the largest trading route of the pre-industrial world, stretching from China to Italy. It was recreated out of smaller routes by Genghis Khan and extended and preserved by Khubilai Khan.

Local Aristocracies

Genghis Khan was quite hostile to all the local aristocracies of his conquered lands and typically utterly subdued or exterminated them.

Religious Toleration

The Mongol Empire was among the most religiously tolerant in the pre-modern world, permitting Christians, Muslims and Buddhists of all stripes to live together in peace.

Themes

Historical Revisionism

Jack Weatherford has a clear agenda in writing *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. Western historiography has, for centuries, presented the Mongols, Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire as brutal, savage and uncivilized. They have been demonized as Asian hordes, vicious conquerors and destroyer of cultures across Europe and Asia. But Weatherford argues that this is not so. Instead, he points out that Europeans in the Renaissance held the Mongols in very high esteem and that only in the Enlightenment did European historians and culture generally begin to imagine the Mongols and their leader as dark forces.

Weatherford constantly points out the ways in which the Mongols innovated institutions in order to promote the common good. First, he points out that the Mongols ruled by consensus rather than bureaucracy and he argues that they propagated this system of governance in many parts of their empire where it was not common. He argues that the Mongols spread Genghis Khan's "Great Law", which simplified many legal codes, led to the codification of others and generally created a system of international law. The Mongols promoted worldwide trade and introduced paper money, greatly facilitating the growth of wealth worldwide and spreading ideas and technology freely from country to country.

Genghis Khan is said to have destroyed local oppressive hierarchies, promote education even for peasants, and permit a wide range of religious toleration within his empire. Even his sons, who were less effective rulers, continued many of these practices. While many historians see Weatherford as somewhat whitewashing the Mongols, the main thesis of the book is not impugned by these mistakes and oversights—the case for a revision of Western historical attitudes to the Mongol Empire is strong.

Rise and Fall of the Mongols

Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World tells the story of the Mongol Empire from start to finished, and so is one of the primary themes of the book. The Mongol Empire existed from 1206 to 1368, and at its height reached from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, making it the largest contiguous empire in the world. The Empire began when the Mongol and Turkic tribes in Mongolia were unified through the rule of Genghis Khan, made Khan in 1206. The Empire grew through invasions and assimilations of whole peoples, at its fastest rate from 1206 to 1260 before the wars of succession began, when the Golden Horde and the Chagatai Khanate would not recognize Genghis Khan's grandson, Khubilai Khan, as Great Khan. While not discussed in the book, in 1304, the Mongol Khans would submit to the successor of Khubilai, Khagan Temur Oljeytu and be united once again. The Mongol Empire officially ended when Khubilai Khan's Chinese Yuan Dynasty fell in 1368.



The Mongols rise was one of the most unusual in history and arguably the fastest and most successful. Their extraordinary military skill and original military tactics enabled quick expansion, along with their ability to travel light and their experience as nomads. The Mongols were also experts at assimilating peoples into their armies and governmental structures and even, at the beginning, into their tribes. They rarely imposed heavily on the cultures they ruled and used a number of inventive ways to earn the trust and obedience of their subjects. The Mongol Empire largely fell apart with the advent of the Bubonic Plague, which split the empire into isolated pieces and ended their worldwide trade routes.

The Positive Legacy of the Mongols

Jack Weatherford's scholarly work has been in large part directed to the rehabilitation of the Mongol Empire and its leaders in the eyes of Western historians and the public at large. The book begins with Weatherford's heartfelt tale of the destruction of Genghis Khan's Spirit Banner by the Soviets and their restriction of his burial grounds. When the Soviet Union fell apart, Weatherford and a number of Mongolian historians and archaeologists were finally able to study Genghis Khan's burial grounds and use newly translated texts, such as *The Secret History of the Mongols*, to reconstruct the events of his life. Weatherford seems to have become dedicated during this time to rehabilitating his image.

Weatherford cites an enormous range of positive achievements of the Mongol Empire. Weatherford argues that the Mongols helped to spread the use of paper and printing, the compass, the use of gunpowder and even the violin. They are said to have distributed knowledge of astronomy through their diplomats and trade routes, establish worldwide commerce through the use of the Silk Route, create an international paper currency, practice religious tolerance, reduce racial discrimination, practice relatively non-interference with world cultures, rule by consensus, promote meritocratic rule, that they were road builders, supporters of universal literacy, reduce the use of torture and create diplomatic immunity.

At times, Weatherford's claims become even more dramatic, the high point of which is certainly the statement: "Under the widespread influences from the paper and printing, gunpowder and firearms, and the spread of the navigational compass and other maritime equipment, Europeans experienced a Renaissance, literally a rebirth, but it was not the ancient world of Greece or Rome being reborn. It was the Mongol Empire, picked up, transferred, and adapted by the Europeans to their own needs and culture."



Style

Perspective

Jack Weatherford is the author of *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* and is the Dewitt Wallace Professor of Anthropology at Macalester College. He uses three major non-Western texts, including the *Secret History of the Mongols*. If Weatherford has a bias, it is his express desire to wholly rehabilitate the image of the Mongol Empire in the eyes of Western historians and the culture of the West generally. Weatherford considers Genghis Khan to be one of history's great and noble kings who, only with the Enlightenment, was converted into a savage barbarian. The book is deeply revisionary and is highly friendly to the Mongols. Weather emphasizes Genghis Khan's difficult youth and the life lessons he used to transform the world. He paints Khan as a deeply pious man, devoted to loyalty, fairness and patronizing science and the free exchange of ideas.

Weatherford's bias sometimes seems overwhelming, such as when he claims that the European Renaissance was in fact a rebirth of ideas that Europe received through the Mongol Empire. Weatherford claims that Europe benefited more than any other part of the world from the Mongols because it receives all the informational and economic benefits without having been destroyed by conquest. Weatherford is also extremely critical of eighteenth and nineteenth century historians who turned the West against the Mongols, often accusing them of doing so on racist grounds and due to intimidation by the achievements of Asian cultures.

Tone

The tone of *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* combines four smaller tones: historical, narrative, adulatory and resentful. The historical part of the tone is the result of Jack Weatherford being a historian of Mongolian history. In many parts, Weatherford marshals historical facts and uses them to make his revisionist argument. The tone in these parts is relatively dry, matter-of-fact and attempts to assume a tone of objectivity in relating the history. The narrative aspect of the tone is closely tied to the historical. Weatherford aims to make the text interesting to his reader and thereby writes the historical detail in such a way as to tell exciting stories of conquest and the expansion of empire.

The tone is often adulatory, as Weatherford has a clear agenda of promoting Mongol accomplishments and changing the attitudes of his reader to the Mongol Empire. He frequently praises the Mongols for being religious tolerant, culturally respectful, for not ruling with a heavy hand, encouraging economic development, promoting a common alphabet and permitting the free exchange of ideas. In many places, Weatherford even attributes near fantastic accomplishments to them, such as setting up the historical conditions that made the European Renaissance possible. The adulatory part of the



tone is connected to the resentful element in the tone, which arises most clearly in the final chapter. Weatherford chides eighteenth, nineteenth, and even some twentieth century historians for promoting an unfairly negative picture of the Mongols. He seems almost resentful that the Mongolian Empire has been so bowdlerized.

Structure

Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World has an introduction, ten chapters divided into three parts, and an epilogue. The Introduction, The Missing Conquerer, explains how the fall of the Soviet Union made it possible to do serious historical and archaeological work in Genghis Khan's home territory, making it possible to tell a very different story about the history of the Mongol Empire. Part I, The Reign of Terror on the Steppe, 1162-1206, explains how Genghis Khan was born, grew up and came to be Great Khan. Chapter 1, The Blood Clot, focuses on Genghis's childhood, Chapter 2, Tale of Three Rivers, discusses his youth and young adulthood and Chapter 3, War of the Khans, explains how he came to power.

Part II, The Mongol World War, 1211-1261, explains how Genghis Khan and his descendants conquered most of the known world. Chapter 4, Spitting on the Golden Khan, focuses on how Genghis united the Mongol tribes and expanded out into China, Persia and the Middle East. Chapter 5, Sultan Versus Khan, explains how Genghis Khan conquered the Persian Khwarizm Empire and Chapter 6, The Discovery and Conquest of Europe, explains how Genghis's descendants conquered most of Russia and quite a bit of Eastern Europe. Chapter 7, Warring Queens, explains the dominance of the wives of Genghis's sons in the Empire.

Part III, The Global Awakening, 1262-1962, explains how the Mongol Empire fractured, and its legacy to the modern day. Chapter 8, Khubilai Khan and the New Mongol Empire, discusses Khubilai Khan's establishment of the Yuan Dynasty. Chapter 9, Their Golden Light, explains all the cultural, economic and technological achievements brought about by Khubilai Khan and the rest of the Empire's various organizational practices. Chapter 10, The Empire of Illusion, tells the story of the downfall of the empire and criticizes eighteenth and nineteenth century historiographers for turning the perception of the Mongol Empire in the West negative. The Epilogue, The Eternal Spirit of Genghis Khan, finishes the story of the introduction, with Weatherford and Mongol historians finding Genghis Khan's burial grounds.



Quotes

"Fate did not hand Genghis Khan his destiny; he made it for himself."
Introduction, p. xvi)

"This book presents the highlights of our findings without recounting any more of the minutia of weather, food, parasites, and ailments encountered, nor the personality quirks of the researchers and the people we met along the way. The focus remains on the mission of our work: to understand Genghis Khan and his impact on world history."
Introduction, p. xxxv

"[a] man of tall stature, of vigorous build, robust in body, the hair on his face scanty and turned white, with cats' eyes, possessed of dedicated energy, discernment, genius, and understanding, awe-striking, a butcher, just, resolute, an overthrower of enemies, intrepid, sanguinary, and cruel."
Chap. 1, p. 6

"Though he had sought to create a quiet life apart from the constant turmoil of steppe warfare, the Merkid raid had taught him that such a life was simply not to be had."
Chap. 2, p. 34

"All the tribes were of one color and obedient to his command."
Chap. 3, p. 55

"By the arms of Zingis and his descendants the globe was shaken: the sultans were overthrown: the caliphs fell, and the Caesars trembled on their throne."
Chap. 4, p. 79

"The hooves of our Mongol horses go everywhere. They climb to the heaven and plunge into the sea."
Chap. 4, p. 81

"War for the nomadic people was a sort of production. For the warriors it meant success and riches."
Chap. 5, p. 108

"For our sins, unknown tribes came."
Chap. 6, p. 132

"Just as God gave different fingers to the hand so has He given different ways to men."
Chap. 7, p. 160

"Asia is devouring us. Tartar faces in every direction you look."
Chap. 8, p. 193



"This Great Khan is the mightiest man, whether in respects of subjects or of territory or of treasure."

Chap. 8, p. 195

"The artists of China and Paris vied with each other in the service of the great Khan."

Chap. 9. p. 218

"Under the widespread influences from the paper and printing, gunpowder and firearms, and the spread of the navigational compass and other maritime equipment, Europeans experienced a Renaissance, literally a rebirth, but it was not the ancient world of Greece or Rome being reborn. It was the Mongol Empire, picked up, transferred, and adapted by the Europeans to their own needs and culture."

Chap. 9, p. 237

"When Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492, he was heading for Cathay, the land of the Great Khan."

Chap. 10, p. 241



Topics for Discussion

What is a spirit banner? Why is it important? How was Genghis Khan's spirit banner destroyed and why?

Briefly tell the story of Temujin's childhood and how he became the Great Khan.

What made Mongol military tactics so spectacularly successful? Give at least three arguments and illustrate them with examples.

Discuss four benefits that Weatherford believes the Mongols provided to the world.

How was Mongol culture distinct from those they conquered? Give three examples and develop them in detail.

How was Khubilai Khan's rule of the Eastern Mongol Empire different from his grandfather's?

How did the Mongol Empire fall?

How did the image of Genghis Khan and the Mongols come to be tarnished in Western Europe and the Soviet Union and how was that image rehabilitated in the East and later the West?