

## **“In autumn our horses are well-fed and ready for action” – the Ch’ing Empire and its Mongolian cavalry in the 17th and 18th centuries**

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**Abstract:** In defining the role of his erstwhile Mongolian allies – later subjects – the K’ang-hsi Emperor made the following statement: “Of old, the Ch’in dynasty heaped up earth and stones and erected the Great Wall. Our dynasty has extended its mercies to the Khalkha and set them to guard the northern territories. They will be even stronger and firmer than the Great Wall.”

Ever since the nomadic steppe-peoples and sedentary China began their long, sometimes militant, sometimes peaceful, interaction, horses invariably played an essential part in it. To the steppe side – Central-Asian Turks, Mongols or Tungus – they lent mobility and speed, to the Chinese they constituted a necessity to maintain an efficient cavalry. The last imperial house to rule China, the Manjurian Ch’ing, were themselves of Central-Asian origin, descendants of the Jurchen, who once ruled northern China in the 12th/early 13th century. Well-versed therefore in the traditional steppe-warfare – the “Ruling from Horseback” – they initially won over the Mongols as allies. Not least by their supply of horses and of auxiliary cavalry troops did the Manjus win the day: They succeeded in conquering China and maintained their rule over that territory for more than two hundred years. At the time, however, it nevertheless also came to pass that the horse’s advantage and superiority declined, being superseded by new ways in warfare, and with it the hitherto so successful “Ruling from Horseback”. It strikes one as strangely ironic that it was the formerly so successful conquerors, the Central-Asian Ch’ing, who, themselves, should finally be caught up by this development: They were the very last dynasty to rule China.

### **Introduction**

To awaken the interest of the esteemed reader in the famous – notorious? – Mongolian horses, I have chosen a number of statements across time, to allow the Mongols themselves, as well as other witnesses, to put us in the picture of their respect for, and appreciation of, the indispensable companion of the steppe-peoples:

“When travelling, always consider your horse’s provisions first.” (Mongolian proverb, Heissig 1956, p.49)

“The greatest misfortune is for one to lose his father while he is young or his horse during a journey.” (Mongolian proverb, Jagchid/Hyer 1979, p. 22)

“A child remains under the mother’s care until the feet reach the stirrup and the hands reach the pommel.” (Šarakšinova 1977-2, p. 165)

“Ruling from horseback”, the well-known phrase dating from the Han period (see also below), a phrase which has come to delineate the fleeting character of steppe-nomadic rule in general.

“To mount a well-trained stallion, carry an excellent falcon and hunt in the wild lake for the coo-coo bird, then to ride on a fine spotted horse, carry a red falcon and go to the valleys of the mountains and hunt the spotted birds, this is the happiest time of life!” (Chinggis Khan’s youngest son Tolui to his father, Jagchid/Hyer 1979 p. 20)

“Yüan arose in the northern area. By nature they are good at riding and archery. Therefore they took possession of the world through this advantage of bow and horse.” (*History of the Yüan – Yüan-shih*, Jagchid/Bawden 1965, p. 246)

[The Chinese] “have countless horses in the service of the army, but these are so degenerate and lacking in martial spirit that they are put to rout even by the neighing of the Tartars’ steeds.” (*The Jesuit Matteo Ricci*, Rossabi 1970, p. 139)

“They (i.e. the Mongols) learn to ride before they learn to walk.” (the Finnish ethnologist G.J.Ramstedt, travelling in Mongolia in 1898, 1909, 1912, Halén 1973, pp. i-x)

“When walking, their gait is clumsy, on horseback man and animal grow together to a homogenous whole.” (Ramstedt, *ibid.*)

Although admiration and respect doubtlessly speak from such statements – it was, nevertheless, more often fear and terror that the mounted steppe warriors induced in their sedentary neighbours. To them they appeared like a “storm”, to witness the “Mongolensturm” of Medieval Europe – creating empires of a size hitherto unknown, from antiquity to the 18th century. A “storm” in more modern times depicted so impressively in Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin’s famous film *Sturm über Asien* of 1928.

Indeed, the role of the horse in the history and culture of Central Asia in general and in that of the Mongols in particular cannot be rated highly enough. The reliability and the endurance of the Mongolian horse is legendary, yet is well supported by historical evidence. To give just a few examples: During his famous campaign to the west (against the Khorezmian Shah) in 1218, Chinggis Khan covered the distance of 130 miles between Bamian and Ghazni, via Kabul, in two days. His grandson Batu, invading Hungary in 1240, covered 180 miles in three days. At the beginning of the 20th century, mounted soldiers covered the 600 miles from Kalgan to Urga (Ulaanbaatar today) in nine days. During the second world war, the Russian troops reaching Berlin were mounted on Mongolian horses (Namnandorzh 1957, pp. 43-48). Tests performed in the 20th century prove the point (Veit 1989, p.166). The assumption by some scholars that the progress of the Mongol armies would have to be slow because the horses needed to graze, has been disproved, however: 1) by evidence to show the contrary (see above); 2) by the fact the horses used to graze at night (May 2007, pp.55-56); and 3) by the fact that each Mongol soldier disposed of at least four remounts – as witnessed in the account by the papal envoy to the Mongol Great-khan Güyük in 1245-48, the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini:

“The horses the Tartars ride on one day they do not mount again for the next three or four days, consequently they do not mind if they tire them out, seeing that they have such a great number of animals.” (Veit 1985, p. 60)

In this context it is nevertheless interesting to note that the Great-khan Möngke, one of Chinggis Khan’s grandsons, before his great campaign against China in 1252, sent an envoy ahead with the following order:

“To reserve all pasturage and meadowland wherever the World-King’s troops might be expected to pass, from the Khangai-mountains between Karakorum and Besh-Baligh; and all animals should be forbidden to graze there lest the pastures might be harmed or the meadows injured. And all the garden-like mountains and plains were banned and prohibited and the teeth of the cattle were prevented from browsing thereon.” (The 13th century Persian historiographer Ata-Malik Juvaini – Veit 1985, pp. 68-69).

Mongol tradition considers the horse to be the first of the five categories of domestic animals, the “tabun qosigun-u mal” (Veit 1989, p. 154). They were the Mongols’ most valued, not to say dearest, possession, and this fact is reflected in many observations and statements. To quote just two examples – one an observation made by Hsiao Ta-heng, a 16th century Ming-official, who had enjoyed a long-term experience with the Mongols during his service at the border of China:

“Ils tiennent à de bons chevaux encore plus qu’ils tiennent à d’autres animaux. Voient-ils un bon cheval, ils échangent volontiers trois ou quatre chevaux contre celui-là. S’ils peuvent se le procurer, le matin ils vont le voir, le soir ils le caressent, ils lui coupent [les poils], le tapotent et le traitent comme un bijou. On ne pourrait pas faire plus.” (Serruys, transl., 1945, p. 149).

The other example is taken from from the Mongolian Dzangar epic:

“The boy tied his horse’s eight marrow-bones together and placed them on his back saying, ‘the bones of one’s horse are not to be discarded in a foreign land...’” (Poppe 1977, p. 31).

There is, nevertheless, an interesting difference in the attitude towards horses between the Mongols and the later – Islamic – Turks, Central-Asian though they both are: in the Islamic cultures, the image of the “man on horseback” should demonstrate his agility and swiftness, his well-formed body, his courage and his strength, his ability as a warrior and his horsemanship, indeed his noble-mindedness (Kretschmar 1980, p. 418). “On foot, I am a dog who cannot stand,” says Manas, the hero of the Kirgiz national epic of the same name (Hatto 1982, p.180). To the non-Islamic steppe-peoples, on the other hand, and the Mongols in particular, horses quite literally could tip the balance between life and death (as we shall see presently) – apart from the general fact that mobility is “the very basis of Mongol society, and that all aspects of nomadic livelihood – diet, dress, dwelling and so on – are conditioned or subordinated to this mobility”. (Jagchid/Hyer 1979, p. 56) Hence, horses are not only the most important means of transportation in the steppe, indispensable in war and peace, when fighting or escaping, essential in their daily use when travelling, hunting or herding. Moreover, mares provide milk, fermented as Airag, the Mongols’ favourite summer-drink; on rare occasions horse-meat is eaten (Veit 1985, p. 66); and their blood is drunk in cases of need during campaigns. Evidence of this practice is already found in the earliest of the autochthonal Mongolian sources, the 13th century *Secret History of the Mongols* – albeit with reference to camels: The once powerful Ong Khan, escaping from his enemies and being reduced to straits as he went on, “he fed himself by milking five goats, muzzling their kids, and by bleeding his camel.” (I. de Rachewiltz 2004, I and II, I, p. 75). Last, but by no means least, horses constitute much desired objects of trade (Serruys 1975, pp. 24-29; Rossabi 1970, pp. 136-168; Sinor 1972, pp. 175-176).

Back to the question of “life and death” – in the *Secret History of the Mongols* we read:

1. Bodončar, one of Chinggis Khan’s ancestors, was cast out by the family, and in this situation he acted as follows: “Bodončar, seeing that he was no longer counted as one of the family, said: ‘Why should I stay here?’ He got on a white horse with a black stripe along the backbone, saddle-sores and a mangy tail. ‘If he dies, I will die; if he lives, I will live!’ he said and left riding fast downstream along the Onan River. He went on and when he reached Baljun Aral he built a grass hut and made his home there. While he was living there, he once saw a grey female hawk eating a black grouse that it had caught. He made a snare of the hair of his white horse with the black sore back and mangy tail, caught the hawk and reared it. When he had nothing to eat, he stalked the wild game which wolves had penned in on the cliffs. He shot and killed the game, and fed on it together with the hawk.

2. [...] When spring came and the ducks began to arrive, he starved his hawk and let it loose. The ducks and wild geese which the hawk had caught he placed all about, so that every tree-stump reeked with their stench, every dead tree with their foul smell. [...] A band of people on the move came following the course of the Tüנגgelik Stream. After Bodončar had loosed his hawk in the day-time, he used to go to those people and drank *kumis* (i.e. fermented mare's milk) with them." (SH §§ 24-29, I. de Rachewiltz, transl. 2004, I, pp. 5-6)

And to take things one step further:

3. The theft of horses may well be said to have initiated Chinggis Khan's victorious advance as a conqueror! Once more according to the 13th century *Secret History of the Mongols*, Chinggis Khan's widowed mother Hoelun Eke and her sons, outcast by their clan, led a life of poverty and privation. One day their only valuable possession, eight horses, were stolen, except one – a short-tailed, short-haired chestnut, that had been taken out by one of the brothers marmot-hunting. Upon his return, Temüjin, the oldest of the sons – he was about fifteen or sixteen at the time – got on the chestnut and went off in pursuit of the robbers,

“following the tracks in the grass”, as our text describes it. On his way, Temüjin met a young man named Boyurči, who joined him, saying: “Friend, you came to me in great trouble, but men's troubles are the same for all. I will be your companion.” Together, at the risk of their lives, the two valiant youths then won the horses back. (SH § 90, transl. 2004, I, pp. 26-27).

In this way, Boyurchi became Chinggis Khan's first and most trusted companion – what follows is history.

After my somewhat extensive excursus into the historical and cultural aspects of the horse in Mongolia, old enthusiast that I am about the affairs of the Central Asian steppe-peoples in general and their horses (on all levels!) in particular, besides being an old war-horse myself – in both cases I hope to be regarded with indulgence – it is time to return to the immediate subject in hand, the Manju-Mongolian horse-policy.

### **The last hey-days of traditional steppe-warfare: Mongolia and China in the 17th and 18th centuries**

The Ch'ing was the last of the Central-Asian dynasties to rule China – the conquerors being the Tungusic people of the Jurchid, who, from 1636 onwards, called themselves “Manju”.

In the 13th century they had once ruled over the northern part of China under the dynastic name of “Chin (“Gold”), until they had been conquered by the Mongols in 1234. They had subsequently returned to their old tribal regions around the Yalu River, where they reverted to their old life as hunters, fishers, stockbreeders and farmers. Towards the end of the 16th century, one of the tribal leaders, Nurhaci (1559-1626, Hummel, ed. 1964, pp. 594-599), rose to power in a similar fashion to Chinggis Khan, uniting the various Jurchid tribes and founding the “Aisin State”, 1616-1635, (*aisin* being the Jurchid word for gold – in reference to the old Chin dynasty).

Speaking of the Mongols during that period, they had, after 1368 and the fall of the Yüan dynasty in China, returned to their old homeland in the steppe, and, in contrast to the Jurchid, there had reverted to the disunity of pre-Chinggisid times. In the 17th century, when the Jurchid were up and coming, their Mongol “brothers” were divided into different tribal units, or patrimonies – legacy of Batu Möngke Dayan Khan (Ming Biography I, 1976, pp. 17-20; he died in 1543).

Dayan, of Chinggisid descent, it was, who briefly succeeded in rallying the Mongols under his banner, thus rightfully holding the position of Great-khan, not only as an empty claim.

A century later, the Mongol leaders again dispersed, refused to support Ligdan, their then – albeit nominal – Great-khan (1592-1634, Heissig 1979, pp. 7-40). They pursued an uncoordinated policy, with only their individual advantage at heart. Such a situation presented a most welcome opening for the new and increasingly powerful Jurchid leaders – Nurhaci and his son and successor Hung Taiji (Abahai, 1592-1643, Hummel, ed., 1964, pp. 1-3). They successfully won the dissatisfied Mongol princely leaders over – not least by the promise of a rich conquest, China. A considerable number of them, mostly of the southern Chinggisid tribes, thereupon decided to join forces with the Manjus, declaring their allegiance to them at a great convention in 1636 (Hauer 1926, pp. 395-396).

The hope of the Mongols to benefit from the Jurchids' (or, better, "Manjus") fortune in war, turned out to be justified. Joining them in their conquest of China, they victoriously re-entered the stage they had left in 1368. The northern or Khalkha Mongol princes, to begin with, had been more judicial in their view of the Manjus. Their undoing, however, was home-made. Quarrels with their western neighbours, the non-Chinggisid Oirat-Mongols, ended in a crushing defeat for the Khalkha and forced them to seek refuge with the K'ang-hsi emperor. They offered their submission in person at the famous convention in Dolonnor in 1691, amidst memorable ceremonies. (Report by the Jesuit François Gerbillon, in: J.B. du Halde 1735, pp. 263-268)

From that time onwards, we find all the tribal-based Mongolian patrimonies, whose leaders were descended from Chinggis Khan, under the protective wings of the Manjus, now firmly established as emperors of China. The non-Chinggisid Oirats made an exception – their fate being sealed in a series of wars – which we will learn more of further below.

What, then, was to be the fate of the Mongols who had decided to join forces with the Manjus? The first step taken by their new overlords was the reorganization of the Mongolian Ulus (or patrimonies) into two separate administrative units, according to the time of their respective "submission" to the Manjus: The erstwhile allies, the mostly southern and eastern Ulus, henceforth were comprised as "Inner Mongolia". The Khalkha, on the other hand, defeated, and further removed from Peking, became "Outer Mongolia". Both divisions still exist today – Inner Mongolia as the ARIM in China; Outer Mongolia as the independent Mongolian Republic.

The role the Mongols were to play in the Manjus' estimate can be learned from the K'ang-hsi emperor's own words:

"Of old, the Ch'in dynasty [i.e. Ch'in-shih Huang-ti] heaped up earth and stones and erected the Great Wall. Our dynasty has extended its mercies to the Khalkha and set them to guard the northern territories. This will be even stronger and firmer than the Great Wall." (Bawden 1986, p. 81)

On another occasion, the emperor, who had a marked sympathy for the Mongols (his grandmother being the Khorchin Mongolian princess Hsiao-chuang (Hummel, ed., 1964, pp. 300-301), is supposed to have remarked: "The Chinese turn of mind is not straight. As to the Manjus and the Mongols, even several tens of thousands of them, are of one mind. In the years I have been on the throne, the reason why I have declared it difficult to rule over the Chinese, is their not being of one mind [with us]." (Nacagdorzh 1963, p. 86)

As it was, therefore, the Mongols found themselves, in due course, organized on feudal-military lines: "So as to constitute a reserve of mobile soldiery ruled by

hereditary princes who were bound to the Manju royal house by a system of hierarchical ranks and titles, by salaries and rewards, and by marriage alliances.” (Bawden 1986, p. 81)

Although the Manjus made little change in the structure of the Mongolian society, aiming at preserving its nomadic cattle-breeding character, they nevertheless imposed a number of further administrative innovations other than the division into the two units mentioned earlier. Besides, the Ch’ing, as the new overlords, subjected the Mongols to taxes as well as a number of corvée duties. These implied the manning of the chain of watch-posts set up to police the frontier with Russia; they further implied the maintenance of the postal relay-roads, providing guides, spare horses and provisions. The Manjus mobilized and equipped the Mongols as soldiers, as well as maintaining a regular Mongol army which was trained by such age-old methods as the execution of regular large-scale battue-hunts (Bawden 1986, p. 82). The equipment of these troops had to be provided for by the Mongols themselves.

The Mongols, as allies (or, better now, as the Ch’ing’s loyal subjects) had to support all wars and campaigns of their new overlords, right until the end of the dynasty – the last military engagements with Mongol participation being the T’ai-p’ing rebellion 1853 and the war against the British and the French 1858-60, with the Khorchin Prince Senggerinchin in a commanding position. (Hummel, ed., 1964, pp. 632-634)

The wars that burdened the Mongols most grievously, however, were the Ch’ing dynasty’s campaigns against the non-Chinggisid Oirats, or Jungars, as they are called in the Chinese sources. Other than their Chinggisid cousins, they had risen to such a powerful position in the first half of the 18th century that they posed a serious threat to the newly established Ch’ing on the Chinese throne (Courant 1912). Three emperors were involved in this fight for supremacy – K’ang-hsi, Yung-cheng and Ch’ien-lung – until the latter inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Jungars in 1760. As a “by-product”, the territory which is now the province of Hsin-chiang, came under Ch’ing rule and as such still is an integral part of China. The Oirats were almost completely annihilated.

Not only were the said wars fought out largely over Mongolian territory, with the enemy’s penetration in 1732 as far eastwards as Erdeni joo in today’s Mongolian Republic, also tens of thousands of Mongols were mobilized as soldiers, and animals in colossal numbers requisitioned for mounts, transport and provisions. Although these were mostly paid for, it was often at a low valuation. Besides, their withdrawal from use, and especially from breeding, meant a heavy capital loss to the Mongol economy which drew its income almost entirely from the natural increase of its herds. (Bawden 1986, p. 100)

In order to give an impression of the enormity of the burden, I shall cite a few figures:

The first Oirat-war fought by the Ch’ing (1718-1739) cost the Khalkha alone four million heads of animals (Nasanbalzhir 1958, pp. 93-95). In the year 1728, animals worth three million ounces of silver were bought (ibid.). In the year 1730, 10,000 Mongols soldiers from the Jasaytu Khan district were mobilized (ibid.); their provisions, equipment and arms had to be paid by the people of the banners.

The second Oirat-war fought by the Ch’ien-lung emperor (1754-1760) cost Khalkha 150,000 horses, 221,000 camels, 22,300 cattle and 469,000 sheep (Nasanbalzhir 1958, p. 98), and so forth. The figures found in the Mongolian archives – fortunately still extant – are truly staggering. To put these figures into some sort of perspective, I will quote some fairly recent statistics on the number of cattle in Mongolia – unfortunately we have no comparable figures for the 18th century.

I. The Mongolian People's Republic (Barthel 1990, p. 112):

Horses – 1,985,400  
Camels – 591,800  
Cattle – 2,397,100 (including yaks and khainaks)  
Sheep – 14,230,700  
Goats – 4,566,700

II. Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia:

*Survey 1956-1965* (Sneath 2004, p. 124):

Horses, camels, cattle – six million  
Sheep and goats – twenty million

*Survey 1947-1990* (Sneath 2004, p.133)

Horses – 5,000,000  
Camels – 4,800,000  
Cattle – 4,800,000  
Sheep – 29,000,000  
Goats – 26,000,000

*Survey 1928-1998* (Sneath 2004, p.135)

Horses – 7,000,000  
Camels – 8,000,000  
Cattle – 6,000,000  
Sheep – 24,000,000  
Goats – 29,000,000

All figures are approximations.

To return to the 18th century: In view of the long years of war and the constant drain of the Mongols' resources, it is small wonder that the much-harrassed cattle-breeders increasingly took refuge in an age-old excuse not to comply with the Manju imperial demands. One such episode has been recorded as early as the 13th century, in the *Secret History of the Mongols* – an historical precedent, so to speak: in the early days of Chinggis Khan's rise to power, when Senggüm of the Kereit people planned to entrap Chinggis, the latter was warned by his old friend, Father Mönglik, to use the following excuse not to go; we read: "Let us send a message giving as an excuse that it is spring, our herds are lean, and we must fatten our horses first." (SH §168, transl.I, p. 87)

Another such example is recorded for the period in hand, the year 1631: when the Jurchid (Manju) Khan Hung Tayiji ordered his ally Ooba, Khan of the Khorchin Mongols, to join his troops in the campaign against the Chakhar Ligdan, Ooba replied: "It will not do to put into action all of our horses now; besides, the here assembled troops to fight the Chakhar are too few. We will therefore not comply with the order. After our horses have again been well-fattened, and also we, unworthy slaves, are once more prospering under the support and benevolent care of the Holy Ruler, we are ready for action and will exert ourselves in the front line." (I.Sh. 17, 1795: unpublished translation Veit, ms.)

Duke Gelegbampil of the Sečen Khan Ayimak was tardy in supplying horses and camels during the campaign against the Oirat Dawachi in 1755; as punishment, he lost his duke's rank and was sent to a military camp. (Veit 1990 II, pp.24-25)

Sangjayidorji, ruling prince of the Tüsiyetü Khan Aimak, was accused of having arbitrarily traded horses with the Russians – he was degraded. (Veit 1990 II, p. 76)

The Beile Danjindorji, also a ruling prince of the Tüsiyetü Khan Aimak, boasted in a report to the throne to have defeated the Oirat near the monastery Erdeni joo, in 1732. When his false claim to victory was uncovered, he lost his former privileges and was degraded; his eldest son lost his title. (Veit 1990 II, p. 74)

Duke Doyud of the Jasaytu Khan Ayimak was ordered in the year 1755 to convey horses from Uliyasutai to Kobdo (in the far west), during the imperial campaign against the Jungar leader Dawachi. Doyud, instead, took the horses for his own use. He was therefore degraded and had to hand the horses back.. (Veit 1990 II, p. 190)

The Mongolian records are full of similar examples, all still awaiting publication, but for the time being, the above examples will suffice.

Despite what was basically a burden, there is also evidence of Mongolian leaders voluntarily supplying animals. For instance:

Duke Cheringdoyud of the Sechen Khan Aimag/District (1755), personally – 600 horses, 100 cattle, 1,000 sheep. (Veit 1990 II, p. 35)

Taiji Püingsugrabdan of the Tüsiyetü Khan Aimag/District (1719), personally – 100,000 sheep. (Veit 1990 II, p. 101)

Duke Chamchugjab of the Sain Noyan Khan Aimag/District (1754), personally – 6,000 horses. (Veit 1990 II, p. 142)

Duke Böbei of the Jasagtu Khan Aimag/District (1724), personally – borrowed 18,000 ounces of silver in order to supply with mounts and provisions the Uriangkhai troops under his command. (Veit 1990 II, pp. 193-194)

By imperial order, such voluntary actions always were suitably rewarded by additional ranks, other honours or gifts.

## Conclusion

What, then, was the eventual outcome of this course of development?

Two points may be made, serving, metaphorically speaking, as milestones on the road to the decline of the old power of the mounted Central Asian/Mongolian warrior, and of his life as a nomadic herdsman with its inherent dynamic force, from which, once, empires had arisen.

1. The loss of the social competence of the Mongol princely leaders, who, originally descendants of Chinggis Khan, had become a kind of nobility of office (*Amtsadel*) in the service of the Manju emperor. The exploitation of the Mongolian territory and its resources, the increasingly crippling practices of the Chinese traders in Mongolia brought with it such economic stagnation, poverty and political isolation by the end of the 19th century, that the collapse of the old social order was only a question of time – as evidenced in the fall of the Ch'ing 1911 and the Mongolian revolution of 1921.

2. With the arrival of new weapons – cannons, rifles and small arms– the advantage of the swift and skilful mounted archer, which for so long had been the trademark of the Central Asian warriors and the guarantee of their success, had come to an end . Once more we are reminded of the famous dictum of the scholar Lu Chia to emperor Kao-tsu of the Han dynasty (he reigned from 202 to 195 B.C.) – quoted at the beginning of this paper only in part: “Even though an empire may be conquered on horseback, it could

not be administered on horseback.” (de Rachewiltz, ed., 1993, pp.248-249) “Ruling from horseback” has since been coined – as mentioned above – as a political term to delineate the highly mobile character of steppe-nomadic rule, with its superiority through horse and bow.

Thus the beginning of the 20th century brought with it the end of the old cycle of power in Central Asia, as Owen Lattimore had once characterized it (Lattimore 1962, p. 252; Veit 1986, p. 180). The famous Mongolian horse had lost its use in war, in conquest, and in the building of empires – though not in the daily life of the Mongolian nomadic cattle-breeders. Most important, however – its legend, lives on! To witness the following tradition: The winner of a horse-race is still praised, most ceremoniously, in a century-old *magtaal*, a panegyric (Poucha 1965, pp. 302-303; transl. Veit):

“At the head of ten thousand horses  
it runs, swift and uncheckable.  
The iron ring of the bit, pulling, it runs.  
Holding the lead of ten thousand horses,  
it runs, pulling the leash made of silken threads.  
Flashing its four elephant’s teeth,  
it runs, stretching its neck.

His fine ears pointed, his circle eyes shining,  
his hare-slim waist bent,  
his mighty body bowed,  
his thicket-like mane upwards,  
his flag-like tail blowing in the wind,  
his four firm hooves gleaming,  
his four sure feet skilful.

It is the one horse  
who has decided to attack.  
It is the Khangai clipper  
who has departed to the race.  
It is the one named ‘Ten thousand’,  
the bright and shining figurehead.”

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