

Foreword

I had the privilege to work with Igor on this project. At the same time, I also feel very sad that this became our last project and that this will appear after his death. On 1 June 2016, Igor and I met Sharon Strange at the Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW) to sign the contract for publishing *Joro's Youth* — this very piece of translation. After signing the contract, we said 'ciao ciao' to each other because both of us had other appointments. I never thought that it would become our last meeting. It was Igor's wish to publish this book through CIW as a sign of his gratitude towards CIW for welcoming him as a member of its academic community.

I had the good fortune to get to know Igor over the last 15 years. We met regularly, almost every day when we had our offices next to each other for two to three years in the Coombs Building. He has been an inspiration to me personally as well as academically. Igor was a courtly gentleman who did remarkable things and brought charm and humour to everything he did. He was one of those classic scholars who had a breadth of knowledge well beyond his immediate fields and always had something intelligent to say on many subjects. He had such a positive and sunny energy that everyone around him enjoyed his company and learned something from him.

Igor was a great humanist. He started his academic career as a historian under the supervision of Professor C.P. Fitzgerald, a great sinologist, and wrote his thesis on Yelu Chusai (who was the advisor to Chingghis Khan, the ruler of the Mongol empire, and his successor) at the Department of Far Eastern History — the predecessor of the Department of Pacific and Asian History at The Australian National University. His main research work focused on 13th- and 14th-century history. His subsequent contribution to the field of Mongolian studies was monumental. The most extraordinary contribution he made was to publish an annotated translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

It was a very difficult project that few could achieve: one has to be very good at medieval Mongolian and classical Chinese, as well as modern Mongolian, Russian, French, German, and Japanese, in which most scholarship on the Mongol empire has been written. Igor fulfilled all these conditions and did a superb job. It has not only been accepted as the standard translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, but the annotation alone is considered to be a scholarly treasure. It was not an ordinary work of translation; it consists of three volumes of nearly 2,000 pages. The translation itself consists of 220 pages, while the commentary on the translation is much more expansive — spanning 823 pages — and the rest is dedicated to an analytical introduction and historiography. For this monumental work, he was awarded the Denis Sinor Medal from the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Polar Star Medal of Mongolia, which is the highest honour given to a scholar by the Mongolian Government. Both of these were awarded in 2007. These are just a couple of the numerous academic awards and distinctions that he received from many countries and organisations as a world-recognised Mongolist.

Apart from his fascination for Chinggis Khan, he also had a great interest in Geser Khan, the ruler of the world in a Mongolian epic that has been considered an important part of Mongolia's cultural heritage. While he was still working on his second volume of *The Secret History*, we were talking about translating a short form of the Geser epic, for general reading. 'Short form' meaning just the main story lines without the descriptions repeated, which are common for Mongolian epic poems, but both of us were distracted by other projects and Igor soon started working on the third volume of *The Secret History*.

While Igor was working on the third volume, he said that he would be 'closing up shop', so to speak, after he completed the project and would then catch up on his Japanese. He was then 84 years old! Within a few days after submitting the third volume, he had a stroke. When he recovered, he told me in his very cheerful way that his doctor explained that he should continue working on his projects. He said that his 'next second-to-last' project would be taking up the Geser project that we had been talking about but as a more direct translation of the Mongolian Geser Khan epic text of 1716 'just for fun' — in other words, that there would not be any footnotes, or at least not extensive footnotes! He asked me if I would still be interested in joining him on the project and I instantly accepted his invitation. We met regularly to discuss the work and I was amazed at how well he understood the 18th-century Mongolian text, which is quite different from the 13th-century Mongolian that he

used to work on. He was never afraid of spending time on his research no matter how trivial the matter was. Once he said ‘producing good scholarship is like making yoghurt: the process cannot be hurried’.

I am extremely thankful to Igor for asking me to join him on this project. We worked on this translation for nearly two years and submitted the manuscript in early 2016. This project greatly benefited from the help and kind assistance of the following individuals: I would like to thank Hoang Oahn Collins, Igor’s long-time research assistant, for word processing the translation; Ines de Rachewiltz, Igor’s wife, for reading our draft translation and providing editorial help; Jonathan Ratcliffe for compiling the character list; Sharon Strange for assisting in liaising with the publisher and for proofreading; and Linda Allen for the copyediting.

Igor was also the most organised person I have ever known. He worked methodically on one project after another. He intended that his ‘next second-to-last’ project would be the Mongolian translation of the *Classic of Filial Piety (Xiao jing)*, which is the only original Mongolian text that survived the Ming purge of Mongolian books. Unfortunately, he was not able to launch this project before he fell ill and went to see Chinggis Khan. It seems that his Chinggis Khan did not like him working on a Confucian text!

The field of Mongolian studies has lost a giant scholar and I have lost a dear friend, a respected mentor, and a valued colleague. Igor will live on among us through his fantastic work and the wonderful memories that he has left with us as his gift.

Li Narangoa
5 September 2016

This text is taken from *Joro's Youth: The first part of the Mongolian epic of Geser Khan*, by Igor de Rachewiltz and Li Narangoa, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.