

Genghis Khan and the Golden Age of the Philippines  
By Max Maquito  
Sekiguchi Global Research Association  
The 5<sup>th</sup> International Symposium in Ulaanbaatar  
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by

Ferdinand C. Maquito, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

Sekiguchi Global Research Association

and

School of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of the Philippines

Abstract: Despite having avoided being assimilated into the Mongol Empire, the Philippines and Genghis Khan appear to have a profoundly interesting connection in the form of National Artists Manuel Conde and Carlos Francisco's movie: Genghis Khan (Ruler of Kings, Emperor of All Men), which was shown during the golden age of the Philippines in the 1950s. A survey of the Time magazine articles, which could have been a reference in making the movie, gave, with the exception of one, unflattering references to Genghis Khan. Despite not claiming to be a historically faithful rendition of Genghis Khan, the movie seems to have at least two interesting points. One is the accidental use of local horses which happen to be closer in appearance to the Mongolian breed. Another was the depiction of how Temujin was bound up when he was captured by a rival tribe. The movie was a pioneer in many respects, and has garnered acclaim from both inside and outside the Philippines. It is noteworthy that once upon a time in the Philippines, the great Mongolian conqueror inspired two of the Philippines' greatest artists to work hard even under stringent constraints, at a high-level of collaboration with each other. These are values that all Filipinos today would do well to remember.

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As an empire expands, an era of relative peace sweeps through its conquered territories, promoting the movement of people, goods, and wealth across now virtually defunct borders. Economies tend to turn vibrant in this wave of economic integration. This must have been the case with the Mongol Empire, the largest land empire that the world has ever seen. Although it is known that this empire's expansion southward during the 13<sup>th</sup> century engulfed kingdoms in Southeast Asia that are now known as Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, there is no record of a Mongol invasion of the Philippines. Perhaps, the prospect of another divine wind (*kamikaze*) deflecting the invasion of a much more superior Mongol force may not have been worth the conquest of kingdoms lesser than those in Japan, or for that matter, Indo-China at that time. Whatever golden age that Pax Mongolia ushered into its vast empire was felt indirectly if at all by the Philippines through its then thriving trade with Japan, China, and Southeast Asian neighbors.

The golden age of the Philippines that we refer to here would not come until Pax Americana, when the country has finally been freed of its Spanish, American, and Japanese conquerors.

Despite not having been forced into a relationship with the Mongol Empire, the Philippines appears to have a profoundly interesting connection to its first emperor. An online search quickly reveals that this connection comes in the form of a movie entitled *Genghis Khan: Ruler of Kings, Emperor of All Men*. This was produced, "directed", co-written, and starred in by Manuel Conde.<sup>2</sup> Thanks in part to the efforts, online and on paper, of cinema buffs and fans of Manuel Conde, this paper is able to put together one perspective on Genghis Khan and the Philippines.

### **Manuel Conde's Genghis Khan**

An avid fan of Manuel Conde eloquently sums up the movie as follows:

*Genghis Khan* is an epic about a foreigner with the peculiarly Filipino spirit of the *bayanihan*.<sup>3</sup> It aspires simply to entertain and does not pretend to perpetuate any intellectual discussion on heroism and history. It concentrates on his youth, Genghis Khan as the plain Temujin before becoming the *Great One*. It is a dramatization of one of Conde's favorite themes, the rise to manhood which demands alertness, stamina and wit. His hero prefers brains to brawn.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 3 for a short biography of Manuel Conde

<sup>3</sup> *Bayanihan* refers to the spirit of community mutual help often attributed to village life in the Philippines. Manuel Conde's artist partner, Carlos Francisco, gives a beautiful classical rendition of this spirit in one of his paintings. See Appendix 1

<sup>4</sup><http://sari-saringsinengpinoy.blogspot.jp/2011/11/genghis-khan-on-becoming-great-one.html>

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Figure 1 shows the cover for a local magazine (*Ilang Ilang*),<sup>5</sup> advertising the movie, which hit the silver screen on November 7, 1950. The movie was the first Tagalog movie to be shown in Times Theater, which was a first class theater located in Quiapo, the center then of Manila City. The movie, however, did not have a good reception, and only ran for a mere six days. In a preview of the movie, it was said to have come several years too early.

Nevertheless, in a public poll held by the Philippine Herald Newspaper in 1950, Manuel Conde was voted as most popular actor with a previous movie of his being chosen as the most popular picture.<sup>6</sup> This proved to be providential, since it enabled Manuel Conde to visit Hollywood, flying on Asia's first airlines: Philippine Air Lines (PAL). He then went on to present the movie in the Venice Film Festival of 1952, where it received international acclaim—the first Philippine movie to do so.

The Genghis Khan movie won the "Filipinos Pearl of the Orient Award" as "Most Popular Motion Picture" in the Philippine Movie Popularity Poll of 1952-53 sponsored by the Philippines Herald newspaper.<sup>7</sup> While the review in the movie's preview was accurate in predicting the poor performance in its showing at Times Theater, the review was off several years in estimating the Filipino audience's appreciation of the movie.



Figure 1. The cover of *Ilang Ilang*, advertising the movie  
Source:

<http://video48.blogspot.jp/search/label/MANUEL%20CONDE>

<sup>5</sup>*Ilang-ilang* (Ligaya't aliw ng lahat ng tahanan) -is a defunct weekly Tagalog entertainment magazine founded in 1946. Edited by the popular novelist [Inigo Ed Regalado](#), the magazine contained literary, news and entertainment articles. (Wikipedia)

<sup>6</sup> Michael Lofaro (2012) "Agee at 100: Centennial Essays on the Works of James Agee", University of Tennessee Press, p. 255

<sup>7</sup> Tiongson (2008), p. 63

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### Source of Inspiration

The Venice award and the Herald Newspaper poll redeemed the movie from its poor box office performance in Times Theater. United Artist, the American film studio, bought the distribution rights for the movie after its successful screening in the Venice Film Festival on August 1952.<sup>8</sup> All of this should not come as a surprise, since the movie was the product of two National Artists<sup>9</sup>: Manuel Conde and Carlos Francisco.

A question that comes to mind is what inspired the two artists to create the Genghis Khan movie. Manuel Conde obviously admired the great conqueror.

MC [Manuel Conde] Productions made the film about the Mongolian conqueror because Conde "Like his guts", and was fascinated by this "ordinary warrior who went out to conquer the world". As Jess Banguis noted, it was almost unthinkable that a Filipino would dare to "write, produce, direct, and star in a movie on the life and exploits of the Mongolian warrior, utilizing Filipino actors and technicians, local materials and raw talents, and using the antiquated equipment available then"<sup>10</sup>

Carlos "Botong" Francisco was also in awe of this great conqueror, and serve as the chief researcher for the movie.

Botong had already done the research on Genghis Khan, so he collaborated with Conde on the screenplay. Conde said of Botong: "Botong's mind was like an encyclopedia. Nobody could tell him he was wrong because he was positive about what he was doing. He had six trunks of Time and Life magazines in his home" Botong's research also became the basis of his costume and set designs for the film.<sup>11</sup>

This gives us an important clue about one possible source of knowledge behind the making of the movie.

Searching through the archives of Time magazine from 1923 to 1950<sup>12</sup> made the excitement of the two artists in creating the movie even more perplexing. Nearly all of the articles mentioning Genghis Khan did not portray him in a flattering light.

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<sup>8</sup> Lofaro (2012), p. 253

<sup>9</sup> National Artist is the highest recognition that could be conferred on a Philippine artist.

<sup>10</sup> Nicanor G. Tiongson (2008) "The Cinema of Manuel Conde", University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, p. 61

<sup>11</sup> Tiongson (2008), p. 61

<sup>12</sup> Time magazine started publishing in 1923. The Genghis Khan movie was premiered in 1950. We are assuming here that Botong Francisco, and, hence, Manuel Conde were aware of references made to Genghis Khan in the articles during this period.

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Genghis Khan was vicious in his conquests.<sup>13</sup> He was also vicious to his own people.<sup>14</sup> Mongolian warriors were shown to follow the same streak<sup>15</sup> Genghis Khan is associated with various 20th century extremist ideologies and their dictators.<sup>16</sup>

There is, however, at least one article that is congruent with the sentiments and perceptions of the two artists. It is a review of the book "Prelude to Battle" by Manfred Gottfried, who went to Yale where he came across Petis de la Croix' History of Genghizcan the Great. Some excerpts from this review are as follows

"The Story. Offspring of a Mogul prince, Temugin is born clutching in his royal fistlet a clot of congealed blood. Astrologers and soothsayers thereupon agree that by the blood of his enemies the child is destined to bring many peoples under his rule.

...And thus it is that posterity has known Temugin as Genghis Khan, The Great Khan, First Emperor of the Ancient Moguls and Tartars, from Peking to Samarcand."<sup>17</sup>

It could be noted that this Time magazine article was written way before World War II hostilities erupted. The other Time articles that highlighted Genghis Khan's less flattering aspect were written when the world was in the midst of widespread carnage and plunder. It was from the more peaceful period that Manuel Conde and Carlos Francisco obviously drew their inspiration in creating the movie.

It is often said that Manila right after the Second World War sustained damages in properties and lives that rivaled those in Berlin and Stalingrad at that time. It was the only Southeast Asian city where the Japanese Imperial Army did not surrender peacefully to the Allied forces. Only a mere five years after that war, it is significant to note that these two Filipino artists chose not to focus on an aspect of Genghis Khan that was often associated with the devastation of war.

In 1999, Time voted Genghis Khan as "Man of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century".<sup>18</sup>

### **Genghis Khan Movies**

The close relationship that the Philippines and the US had right after the war has been cited as one of the reasons for the golden age of the Philippines during that period. A World Bank report at that time evaluated the Philippines as the country in Asia that would

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<sup>13</sup> Please refer to Appendix 2, Reference #1

<sup>14</sup> Please refer to Appendix 2, Reference #2

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to Appendix 2, Reference #3, #4

<sup>16</sup> Please refer to Appendix 2, Reference #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11

<sup>17</sup> Wine, Women and Sword. Time, 0040781X, 4/23/1928, Vol. 11, Issue 17

<sup>18</sup> Time, December 31, 1999, Vol. 154, No. 27



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most likely follow Japan in terms of economic development.

This close Philippine-US relationship could explain the predominantly American source of reference behind the movie. Manuel Conde was warmly received in Hollywood during his visit. He was able to meet up with a lot of famous American talents, and received plenty of invaluable advice. In addition to showing an English-narrated version in the US (the first Tagalog film to be shown in the US) and submitting his Genghis Khan movie to the Venice Film Festival, Manuel Conde was advised that his horses were closer in appearance to the Mongolian breed, as could be seen in Figure 2. Apparently, he planned to employ the bigger (originally imported) horses used in the military then but was forced to use the local breed that was more common for carriages in the Philippines.



Figure 2. A scene from the movie showing the captured Temujin  
Source: Tiongson (2008), p. 70

There might be another point of historical interest in **Figure 2**, in terms of how Temujin was bound up when he was captured by a rival tribe. This could be seen more clearly in one of the behind-the-scene drawings of Botong Francisco, shown in the left panel of Figure 3. The right panel shows a screenshot of the YouTube trailer for the latest movie about Genghis Khan. The movie is a 2008 Russian-German-Mongolian-Kazakhstani collaboration entitled "Mongol", directed by Sergei Bodrov and starred in my Japanese actor Asano Tadanobu as Temujin (shown in the right panel of Figure 3.) It was filmed largely in the

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People's Republic of China, mainly in Inner Mongolia and in Kazakhstan. The film was nominated for the 2007 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film<sup>19</sup> as a submission from Kazakhstan.<sup>20</sup> It could be the most faithful cinematic rendition to date of Genghis Khan. Figure 3 shows the uncanny resemblance of the wooden stock designed by Botong Francisco to that of the Oscar-nominated version.



Figure 3. The capture of Temujin  
Source: (left panel) Tiongson (2008), p. 701 ; (right panel) YouTube

### Concluding Remarks

Manuel Conde and Botong Francisco's "Genghis Khan: Ruler of Kings, Emperor of All Men" embodied the driving force that was behind the golden age of the Philippines. Working with very limited resources, in an industry that was not as pampered as the sugar industry then, the two National Artists produced a work of art that garnered honors both in domestic and foreign shores. To work hard under stringent constraints and in a high-level of collaboration with your fellows—these are values from the golden age of the Philippines that Filipinos in the present age, including the author, would do well to remember. It is noteworthy that once upon a time in the Philippines, two of its greatest artists were inspired to do so by the great Mongolian conqueror.

<sup>19</sup> The actors, including Asano Tadanobu, spoke in the Mongolian language. Narration was in Russian.

<sup>20</sup> Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_(film))



**APPENDIX 1**

Carlos "Botong" Francisco's "Bayanihan"



Source: <http://rodelcasio.tumblr.com/post/338851004>

Note: *Bayanihan* was classically associated to this semi-nomadic aspect of village life in the old days, where the village would galvanize together to move the house of community members at no cost, except perhaps a simple meal at the end of the day and the pleasure of each other's company. Young and old would pitch in.



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**APPENDIX 2**

Time Magazine Articles

Reference #1: "Genghis Khan butchered the people of Samarkand, razed the city."  
Heirs to Attila. (1941). *Time*, 38(23), 30.

Reference #2: "When Genghis Khan, conqueror of an empire that stretched from Korea to East Prussia, died in 1227, all witnesses of the funeral procession that bore his body home to his native valleys were killed, lest the people learn of his death."  
Khan's Dust?. (1939). *Time*, 33(26), 28.

Reference #3: "Genghis Khan solved the iron-ration problem by issuing each of his soldiers a straw so that his warriors could thus tap their horses' veins and drink the fortifying blood."  
Iron Ration K. (1942). *Time*, 40(13), 48.

Reference #4: "But the Japanese had forgotten how wise in the ways of treachery the Mongols were. When it leaked out that General Pai had been poisoned, his entire Army of 18,000 men rode off in the night. With them they took all the machine guns and ammunition the Japanese had given them. Near Paotow in Suiyuan Province, vowing vengeance as terrible as any conceived by Genghis Khan, the Mongols joined forces with the Chinese."  
So Sorry. (1942). *Time*, 39(10), 23.

Reference #5: "...in alliance with Russia's "Genghis Khan fascism," National Socialism will then carve up the world."  
Background for War. (1939). *Time*, 34(12), 78.  
Review of books that discuss the background of Europe's war. "The Revolution of Nihilism" by Hermann Rauschning

Reference #6: "Driving from Palo Alto to San Francisco, to speak at a dinner of Young Republicans, ex-President Herbert Hoover hurriedly drafted a statement that turned out to be far more effective than the laboriously rewritten speeches that he polishes when he has time. 'Civilization has struck a new low with the Communists' attack on peaceful Finland. It is a sad day to every decent and righteous man and woman in the world. We are back to the morals and butchery of Genghis Khan.'"  
Reaction. (1939). *Time*, 34(24), 17.

Reference #7: "Dictator Joseph Stalin, who disposed of his Russian opposition simply by shooting it, was once widely regarded in the democracies as a sort of unwashed Genghis Khan with blood dripping from his fingertips."  
Nice Old Gentleman. (1941). *Time*, 38(22), 27.

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Reference #8: "In Odessa, the war-reduced population (normal: 600,000) scanned the leaflets which read not unlike the manifestoes of the late great barbarian Genghis Khan: 'The main forces of my Army are at the gates of the city and other large units are following them. Do not offer resistance. Surrender the city. I promise mercy to the population. Otherwise, when I do take Odessa in two days' time, I shall show no mercy to anyone.'" Pearl Swallowed. (1941). *Time*, 38(17), 28.

Reference #9: "After six years of war, blockaded China is weaker economically and militarily than at any stage of the conflict with Japan. The country is in the throes of the worst inflation since the Sung Dynasty—in the Twelfth Century, just before the invasion of Genghis Khan, when rocketing prices in Peking would change between morning and evening." Depression in Chungking. (1943). *Time*, 41(19), 38.

Reference #10: "Hitler had fancied himself in a dual role: as an artist destined to remake the world, and as an Attila or Genghis Khan destined to destroy it." Attila's Cream Buns. (1946). *Time*, 47(12), 37.

Reference #11: "Fashions in political expansion have changed since the days when Genghis Khan swept through this dry and rocky land, leaving in his wake ghastly skull pyramids to act as scare-rebels. By maintaining a big embassy staff in mud-walled Kabul, Russia has used gentler means to win Afghan acquiescence." And Now Pistachio. (1946). *Time*, 47(25), 27.

### APPENDIX 3

#### Short Biography of Manuel Conde<sup>21</sup>

Manuel Conde (born Manuel Urbano; October 15, 1915 in [Daet, Camarines Norte](#) - August 11, 1985) was a Filipino actor, director and producer. As an actor, he also used the screen name Juan Urbano during the 1930s aside from his more popular screen name. His first film was "Mahiwagang Biyolin" in 1935. He made almost three dozen films under LVN Pictures as a contract star. He later put up his own movie company, Manuel Conde Pictures, in 1947 which produced classic films, notably the Juan Tamad series (Si Juan Tamad (1947), Si Juan Daldal (Anak ni Juan Tamad) (1948), Juan Tamad Goes to Congress (1959), Juan Tamad Goes to Society (1960), Si Juan Tamad At Juan Masipag sa Pulitikang Walang Hanggan (1963)). Other movies Conde produced, directed and/or starred were Vende Cristo (1948), Prinsipe Paris (1949), Krus Na Kawayan (1956), Siete Infantes de Lara (1950) and its re-make in 1973, Molave (1961) and the internationally acclaimed Genghis Khan (1950).

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<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel\\_Conde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel_Conde)