Daoist Master Changchun is Summoned to Visit Chinggis Khan


First visit, 1222

It was now the twenty-ninth of the third month (May 11th) and the Master made a poem. After four more days of travelling we reached the Khan's camp. He sent his high officer, Helabode [Kara-ba’adur], to meet us. This was on the fifth day of the fourth month. When arrangements had been made for the Master's lodging, he at once presented himself to the Emperor, who expressed his gratitude, saying: "Other rulers summoned you, but you would not go to them. And now you have come ten thousand li to see me. I take this as a high compliment".

The Master replied: "That I, a hermit of the mountains, should come at your Majesty's bidding was the will of Heaven". Chinggis was delighted, begged him to be seated and ordered food to be served. Then he asked him: "Adept, what Medicine of Long Life have you brought me from afar?" The Master replied: "I have means of protecting life, but no elixir that will prolong it". The Emperor was pleased with his candour, and had two tents for the Master and his disciples set up to the east of his own. The interpreter now said to him: "People call you Tängri Mönğkä Kün [Eternal Heavenly Man]. Did you choose this name yourself or did others give it to you?" He answered: "I, the hermit of the mountains, did not give myself this name. Others gave it to me". The interpreter subsequently came to him on the Emperor's behalf and asked another question. "What", he said, "were you called in former days?" He replied that he had been one of four pupils who studied under Zhongyang. The other three had all grown wings, and only he was left in the world. "People", he said, "generally call me xiansheng [Master]." The Emperor asked Chinkai what he ought to call the Adept. "Well, some people", said Chinkai, "call him 'Father and Master'; others, 'The Adept'; others, the Holy Immortal." "From now onwards", said the Emperor, "he shall be called the Holy Immortal."

The weather was becoming very hot and the Emperor now moved to a high point on the Snow Mountains to escape the heat, and the Master accompanied him. The Emperor appointed the fourteenth of the fourth month (June 24th) as the day on which he would question the Master about the Way. This engagement was recorded by his state officers, Chinkai, Liu Wen and Alixian, as well as by three of his personal attendants. But just as the time was arriving, news came that the native mountain bandits were in insurrection. The Emperor was determined to deal with them himself, and put off the meeting till the first of the tenth month (November 5th). The Master begged that he might be allowed to return to his former quarters in the city. "Then", said the Khan, "you will have the fatigue of travelling all the way back here again." The Master said it was only a matter of twenty days' journey, and when the Khan objected that he had no one whom he could give him as an escort the Master suggested the envoy Yang Agou. Accordingly three days later the Khan ordered Yang Agou to take with him one of the native chieftains and

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1 As was customary at the end of spring.
2 Chinkai, a Christian Mongol, was in charge of much of the expedition that brought Changchun to see Chinggis Khan; it appears that Chinkai could not speak Chinese but had to converse with Changchun through an interpreter.
3 Modern Perwân in Afghanistan, north of Kabul.
4 Alixian was a Tangut who served the Mongols on several missions to the Jin dynasty.
about a thousand horsemen, with whom he was to escort the Master back (to Samarkand) by a different way.

We crossed a great mountain where there is a stone gate, the pillars of which look like tapering candles. Lying across them at the top is a huge slab of rock, which forms a sort of bridge. The stream below is very swift, and our horsemen in goading the pack asses across lost many of them by drowning. On the banks of the stream were the carcasses of other animals that had perished in the same way. The place is a frontier pass, which the troops had quite recently stormed. When we got out of the defile, the Master wrote two poems.

Now when he reached the Khan's camp, at the end of the third month the grass was green and trees everywhere in bloom, and the sheep and horses were well grown. But when with the Khan's permission he left, at the end of the fourth month, there was no longer a blade of grass or any vegetation. On this subject the Master wrote a set of verses.

On the road we met people coming back from the West, carrying a lot of coral. Some of the officers in our escort bought fifty branches for two bars of silver. The largest was over a foot long. But as they were on horseback it was impossible to prevent it getting broken. We now continually travelled by night, to take advantage of the cool, and thus after five or six days we got back to Samarkand. All the officials of the place came to welcome the Master in his rooms. It was the fifth day of the fifth month (June 15th).

**Second visit, 1223**

At dawn we breakfasted and after going eastward for twenty or thirty li came to a river that ran to the north. We were just able to ford it on horseback, and on the far side rested and camped for the night. On the twenty-second (September 28th) Chinkai came to meet us and we were soon in the Khan's camp.

Presently the Khan sent Chinkai to ask whether the Master wished to see him at once or to rest for a little first. The Master replied that he was ready. On this as on all subsequent occasions when Taoists interviewed the Emperor we did not kneel or bow down before him, but merely inclined the body and pressed the palms of the hands together on entering his tent. When the audience was over we were given kurmiss, and as soon as it was finished took our leave. The Emperor asked whether we were properly provided for at our lodging in Samarkand. The Master replied that previously the supplies received from the Mongols, the natives and the Governor had been adequate, but that recently there had been some difficulties about food, the provision of which had fallen entirely upon the Governor. Next day the Emperor again sent his personal officers to our tent. He had asked him to suggest that the Adept should take all his meals with the Emperor. But the Master replied: "I am a mountain hermit and am only at my ease in quiet places". The Emperor said he was to be humoured. On the twenty-seventh day the Emperor set out on his return to the north. On the way he sent us repeated presents of grape-wine, melons and greens.

On the first of the ninth month we crossed a bridge of boats and went on to the north. The Master now pointed out that the time for his discourse had arrived and suggested that the Governor Ahai should be summoned.\(^5\)

On the fifteenth (October 1st) an imposing pavilion was erected, the women of the Khan's retinue were sent away. To left and right candles and torches flared. Only Chinkai, being a *cbürbi* [chamberlain] and the envoy Liu Wen were allowed even to be in attendance at the door.

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\(^5\) To act as an interpreter.
The Master entered accompanied by the Governor Ahai and Alixian. After taking his seat he pointed out that Liu Wen and Chinkai had performed immense journeys on his behalf and begged that they might be admitted, so that they too could hear his discourse. This suggestion was followed. The Master's words were translated into Mongo by Ahai. The Emperor was delighted with his doctrine and on the nineteenth, when there was a bright night, sent for him again. On this occasion too he was much pleased by what he heard, and sent for the Master to his tent once more on the twenty-third (October 29th). He was here treated with the same regard as before and the Emperor listened to him with evident satisfaction. He ordered that the Master's words should be recorded, and especially that they should be written down in Chinese characters, that they might be preserved from oblivion. To those present he said: "You have heard the holy Immortal discourse three times upon the art of nurturing the vital spirit. His words have sunk deeply into my heart. I rely upon you not to repeat what you have heard". During the remainder of the Imperial Progress to the east, the Master constantly discoursed to the Emperor concerning the mysteries of Way.

A few days' travel brought us back to the great city of Samarkand, where we halted thirty li south-west of the town. On the first day of the tenth month (November 5th) the Master asked if he might return to his old lodging. This was allowed. The Emperor himself finally camped twenty li east of the town. On the sixth day of this month the Master went with Ahai into the Emperor's presence. Upon the Emperor asking whether those present must withdraw, the Master replied that there was no need for secrecy. He then made Ahai explain that he had led the life of a mountain recluse for so long that he had become used to the utmost quiet. To travel in the midst of the Imperial retinue, subjected to continual disturbance from the bustle and din of an army, was extremely vexatious to him and he begged that as a favour he might be allowed to travel always a little in front or behind. This too was accorded. When he was already outside the tent the Emperor sent some one after him to know whether he was in need of any cotton floss. The Master said that he did not need any.

At this season a fine rain begins to fall and the grass becomes green again. Then, after the middle of the eleventh month, the rain becomes heavier, sometimes turning to snow, and the ground becomes saturated. From the time of the Master's first arrival in Samarkand it was his habit to give what grain we could spare to the poor and hungry of the city. Often, too, he would send hot rice-meal, and in this way saved a great number of lives.

On the twenty-sixth (December 30th, 1222) we set out. On the twenty-third of the twelfth month (January 20th, 1223) there was a snow-storm and such intense cold that many oxen and horses were frozen to death on the road. After three days we crossed the Khojandmūran from west to east and soon reached the Khan's camp. Here we learnt that on the twenty-eighth, in the middle of night, the bridge of boats had broken loose and been swept away.\(^6\) The Khan asked the reason of calamities such as earthquakes, thunder and so on. The Master replied: "I have heard that in order to avoid the wrath of Heaven you forbid your countrymen to bathe in rivers during the summer, wash their clothes, make fresh felt or gather mushrooms in the fields. But this is not the way to serve Heaven" It is said that of the three thousand sins the worst is ill-treatment of one's father and mother. Now in this respect I believe your subjects to be: gravely at fault and it would be well if your Majesty would use your influence to reform them".

This pleased the Khan and he said: "Holy Immortal, your words are exceedingly true; such is indeed my own belief", and he bade those who were present write them down in Uighur

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\(^6\) Changchun had crossed this bridge just before it was washed away.
characters. The Master asked that what he had said might be made known to the Khan's subjects in general, and this was agreed to.

The Khan also summoned his sons and the other princes, high ministers and officers, and said to them: "The Chinese reverence this holy Immortal just as you revere Heaven; and I am more than ever convinced that he is indeed a Being from Heaven"! And he proceeded to repeat to them all that the Master had taught him on various occasions, adding: "Heaven sent this holy Immortal to tell me these things. Do you engrave them upon your hearts". The Master then retired.

On the first day of the New Year (February 2nd, 1223) the Chief Commander, the Chief Physician and the Chief Soothsayer all came to pay the compliments of the season. On the eleventh day we turned our horses' heads to the east, looking back for a moment towards Samarkand, already a thousand li or more behind us. We halted for a while in a large orchard. The nineteenth was the Master's birthday and all the officials burnt incense-candles and wished him long life. On the twenty-eighth Lord Li, Intendant in the Governor's office, came to say good-bye. Upon the Master's asking him whether his parting was indeed final, Li said that they would meet again in the third month. "You are ignorant", said the Master, "of Heaven's decree. In the second or third month I return to China."

On the twenty-first day we went one stage eastwards and came to a great river. From here to Sairam is about three stages. The place is very fertile and well-watered; so we stayed for some time in order to refresh our oxen and horses.

On the seventh day of the second month (March 9th) the Master had an Audience and told the Khan that he had promised to be back in three years and now that the third year had come he was impatient to be back in his mountain retreat. The Emperor replied: "I am myself on my way to the east. Will you not travel with me?" The Master said he would rather go on ahead, for he had promised his friends in China to be back among them in three years. He had by now answered all the Khan's questions and earnestly desired to be dismissed. The Khan however wished him to stay for a few days more. "My sons," he said, "are soon arriving. There are still one or two points in your previous discourses which are not clear to me. When they have been explained, you may start on your journey."

On the eighth (March 11th) the Khan went hunting in the mountains to the east. He shot a boar; but at this moment his horse stumbled and he fell to the ground. Instead of rushing upon him, the boar stood perfectly still, apparently afraid to approach. In a moment his followers brought him the horse, the hunt was stopped and they all returned to the camp. Hearing of this incident the Master reproached the Emperor, telling him that in the eyes of Heaven, life was a precious thing. The Khan was now well on in years and should go hunting as seldom as possible. His fall, the Master pointed out, had been a warning, just as the failure of the boar to advance and gore him had been due to the intervention of Heaven. "I know quite well," replied the Emperor, "that your advice is extremely good. But unfortunately we Mongols are brought up from childhood to shoot arrows and ride. Such a habit is not easy to lay aside. However, this time I have taken your words to heart." Then turning to Kishlik Darzan, he said: "In future I shall do exactly as the holy Immortal advises". It was indeed two months before he again went hunting.

On the twenty-fourth day the Master had another farewell interview. The Emperor said he was considering what to give him as a parting present and begged him to wait a little longer. The Master saw that it was impossible to start immediately and reluctantly agreed to wait. On the seventh of the third month he again attempted a farewell. The Emperor wished to make him a gift of oxen and horses, but he would not accept them, saying that he only required the usual
post-horses. The Emperor on this occasion asked Alixian, who was interpreting, whether the Master had many disciples in China. "A very great many", said Alixian. "When I was escorting him from China we stopped at the Longyang Temple in Dexing, and there I saw the tax-collector's lists of assessment." The Emperor then directed that the Master's pupils should henceforward be exempted from taxation, and he published an Edict to the same effect, sealing it with the Imperial Seal.

Alixian, as special envoy, was to accompany the Master on his journey home, supported by the Mongols Hela and Bahai. On the tenth day he had his final farewell with the Emperor, and set out. All the officers of the camp, from the darkans downward, accompanied him several miles, bearing presents of grape-wine and rare fruits, and at parting all of them were obliged to brush away their tears.