What a Regime Deletes

Cross-Domain Analysis · 🐎 *The Secret History of the Mongols* (c. 1228–1260) × 🧧 Tania Branigan, *Red Memory* (2023) · 511 pages indexed

The one idea

> **Both regimes edited their own record. They edited opposite ends of it — and what each one chose to delete tells you what it believed its claim to power actually rested on.**
> This gives you a reading instrument. You do not ask what the official account says. You ask which part of it was touched.

The Mongol case · the crimes stay in, the succession is rewritten

The *Secret History* is startlingly candid about founding violence. It records that Chinggis' father Yisügei **abducted the wife of Chiledü of the Merkids** and made her his own — she became Chinggis' mother (Section 56). Editors of the text note plainly that the History "depicts personal events in Chinggis Qahan's life that were evidently considered private, for some of the actions recorded **offended against Mongol morality**."

The tampering is not there. It is at the other end. "The original text, especially Sections 269–281 of it, **was revised in the years 1228–1260**." Read continuously, "from Section 1 to Section 268, one feels like a participant in the events that it records, and that a single person is telling the story. **In Sections 269–281, however, the text has been altered, the dates have been confused, and the impact of the narrative has been diluted.**"

> **And the specific edit is a promotion.** Chinggis' father "was never a qan, but he appears in Section 96 as 'Yisügei Qan'." A title was inserted retroactively into the ancestry — in the sections that establish who inherits.

So the Mongol chronicle keeps the abduction and launders the lineage. The violence was not the liability. It was evidence of capability, and the History's stated purpose was "to teach the descendants of the Great Qahan Chinggis how to consolidate the Empire." What needed fixing was the question of *who had the right to follow him*.

The Chinese case · the succession stays in, the violence is deleted

Branigan's subject is the inverse operation. "The Party and those it rules have **conspired in amnesia. A decade has disappeared.**"

This is described as infrastructure, not neglect: "**Amnesia was the bedrock, and maintaining it took exertion, thoroughness and discipline.** If tens of millions had starved in a famine, you shuttered the archives for decades. If your smart new trains crashed, you warned off your reporters."

And at scale: "You did it for one person, or a family, or a village. And then, as in 1989, you had to do it for millions: erase a city-full, a country-full of memory. You had to battle not just stray thoughts… but a collective experience. You had to isolate it; fence it; zero in, eradicate and replace it. **For the most part, it worked.**"

What is never edited is the chain of authority. Party continuity from 1949 to now is the one thing the record must show unbroken — which is exactly the thing the Mongol scribes had to forge.

The finding

Source	Founding violence	Line of succession
Secret History of the Mongols	Kept, in detail, including kin-abduction	**Edited** — a title inserted into the ancestry, dates confused
Red Memory / the CCP record	**Deleted** — archives shuttered, a decade disappeared	Kept, and must appear unbroken

> **A regime does not hide what is shameful. It hides whatever contradicts the story it uses to justify holding power.**
> The Mongols claimed by conquest, so conquest could be told and inheritance could not. The Party claims by continuous correct leadership, so the leadership must be told and the decade it got wrong cannot.

The instrument this yields

Read the gap, not the text. Find the section of an official record that is internally inconsistent — dates that stop matching, a title that appears without explanation, an archive closed while its neighbours are open. Whatever that section is about is the regime's actual load-bearing claim.

It is cheaper than arguing with propaganda, and it does not require you to have a competing source.

The honest limit

Absence is weak evidence on its own. Records are lost for ordinary reasons — fire, cost, indifference — and a closed archive can mean a clerk, not a cover-up. What makes the Mongol case usable is not that Sections 269–281 are missing but that they are *present and incoherent* next to 268 coherent sections. **The signal is inconsistency with the rest of the same document, not silence.**

Note also that the two cases are not equally documented. The Mongol editing is reconstructed by philologists across eight centuries; the Chinese case is reported by a journalist inside the system it describes. They are different evidentiary standards, and the pattern is offered as a hypothesis the pair makes visible, not as a proven law.