

Korean Themes in Mongolian Historical Sources of the 16th-18th Centuries

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This paper examines beliefs, legends, and themes with respect to Korea in 4 Mongolian primary historical sources of the 16th-18th centuries. Mongolia continued to experience wars and crises for about 200 years at home following the decline of the Mongolian Empire. Peace was brought in Mongolia in the 16th century and however, as the Manchu Dynasty's influence grew in China immediately it was imperative for Mongolians to reconsider their history, pride, tradition, national identity, and doctrines of emperors such as Chinggis and Khubilai. All these events generated a new wave of historical writing and as a result, some important historical works were written.

In this paper the researcher sheds light on Korean themes in the following 4 historical sources.

1. White History of the Ten Meritorious Deeds;
2. Golden History;
3. Stream of Ganga River;
4. Yellow Novel.

The themes that are examined in the epochal, local, and historical context are as follows.

1. Some views and subject matter of "White History" that proved that Korea was a primary Buddhist country and included it in the worldview of Buddhism.
2. Interesting legend that spread over "Golden History" and other Mongolian historical sources and spoke like Chinggis Khan married to Khulan, princess of Korea's Khan Bukha Tsagaan, and made her his small queen, and gradually fell in love with Khulan and forgot about his motherland and other queens, and therefore, eloquent and wise bureaucrat Argasun Khorch from Mongolia was able to persuade him by expressing himself in verse he returned to his motherland.
3. Multiethnic beliefs of 5 colors and 4 foreign countries in "Stream of Ganga River" and "Yellow History."

In addition, the researcher makes his assumption as to why Mongolians named Korea "Solongos" and in what century they started calling it "Solongos" to the best of our knowledge based on historical sources in Mongolian as well as those in Persian, Manchu, and the like. He also emphasizes that it is essential to do further in-depth research referring to facts about Korea like this in historical sources available in Mongolia and Buddhist scriptures/ sutras and extend it to other world's Koreanists.

1. “White History of the Ten Meritorious Deeds”

“The White History” is a precious source of state, law and legal thinking of Mongolia. Furthermore, this work contains deep trace of Mongolian philosophy, history, literature, and Buddhism. Although many scholars agree that this book was written in the XIII century, they hold different opinions about its author. Some of them believe that it was written by Qubilai Khaan while others say it was written a wise monk who served him. For instance, a famous Mongolian historian Sh.Natsagdorj stated “Though it is true that it was written during Qubilai Khaan’s reign, the author was not Qubilai Khaan himself but rather some other scholar or minister under his assignment.” He explained his view as follows:

“Considering the fact that the White History is greatly influenced by Buddhism; it tells about Tibetan religion and it always respects the interests of lamas, one can conclude that the author was a lama. It is certain that Pagba Lama from Tibet, who was an influential figure in Qubilai Khaan’s palace, must have actively participated in its creation.”¹ As an experienced scholar Natsagdorj tried to determine the time when the White History was written, on the basis of other historic documents from Yuan dynasty. He wrote “It may be written during Qubilai Khaan’s reign at first place, then was revised during Tugtumur Khaan (1330-1333), in particular in 1330. Guush Branashir, who was mentioned in the preface of the book, must have been that Branashir who served as the State Teacher during Tugtumur Khaan’s reign and must have played an important role in revising the book for the second time.”²

Among Western scholars, Klaus Sagaster, a German scholar of Mongol studies conducted extensive grammar and syntax research of this work by converting it into Latin transcripts while comparing several versions. The most interesting conclusion he made in his works is that he believed that the White History was written by Kublai Khaan himself. In addition, he concluded that this book was the main law of state officials of that time.

Japanese historian Inoue Osamu praised Sagaster’s work as the best research work about the White History.³

Many Mongolian scholars of legal studies and historians have conducted extensive research on the White History. Majority of them have concluded that the White History was written during

Yuan dynasty. For instance, S.Jalan-Aajav stated “The White History is one of the most important sources of Mongolian history and law. It is a very important legal document of the XIII century, which can be described as a governance program of Kublai Khaan for its true nature, role and importance.”⁴ Sh.Bira also proposed a hypothesis that the White History was written in the end of the XIII century, particularly during Qubilai Khaan’s reign.⁵ Sh.Bira believed that ideas and concepts of the White History was laid down not by Qubilai Khaan but by his religious teacher Pagba Lama.

Unfortunately, that work of Qubilai Setsen Khaan (White History) could not see our era. The version which we have is the one revised by Khutagtai Setsen, the Prince of Ordos (1540-1586) in the XVI century. Because this book is written with archaism and sophisticated words and its language is considerably different from the language of the XVI century, it can be seen that the original version was not altered or revised.⁶

We could not find any books on Mongolian history (written in Mongolian) from XIV-XV centuries.⁷ The author explained it as a result of “Collapse of Yuan dynasty and subsequent internal feudal wars for over 100 years in Mongolia”. But later, the author also argued that the historiography from late XVI and early XVII century prove that it was not completely inexistent. The historic documents from late XVI and early XVII centuries were actually written on the basis of the historic documents from XIII and XIV centuries while adding important events of that époque or explaining things from Buddhist perspectives.⁸

Facts about Korea in the White History

In the first chapter of the White History, one of the “five color and four foreign” states was named as White Korea. This term can be seen in the majority of the historic documents of the Middle Age.

In the second chapter, one can find a term “Korea of Elephant Mountain”. Historian B.Bayarsaikhan, who has published several important works on the history of Mongolian law explained this term “Elephant (Zaan) mountain might refer to Long White (Tsagaan) Mountain. The term might have been misspelled. The Long White Mountain is called **Chanbaishan** in Chinese, **Begdusan** in Korean and Golmin in Manchurian and it is situated along the border of China and North Korea. This mountain has been worshipped by Koreans as a sacred mountain

(Tebegsan) since ancient times. Later Manchurians also worshipped the mountain and considered it as their “cradle land”.⁹

Let me explain why I relate the Story of Argasun the Lutenist to Korea. Since XIII century, the or terms Solongos and Solanga have been firmly understood by Mongolian historians in historic sources as Koreans and their state. In other words, Bukh Tsagaan Khaan was understood as the king of Korea and Queen Khulan as a Korean princess. If we see them belonging to contemporary Daguur or other nationalities, it will be misinterpretation or falsification of history. Since ancient times Mongolians have understood the term “Solongos” as modern Korea and this concept has never changed. It is important in historiography which term has which meaning. Therefore, I have made this conclusion because Mongolian ancient historians named modern Korea with that term and this term has a solid foundation while being used for many centuries.

2. “Golden History” or Altan Tobchi of Luvsandanzan

Translation of fragment

...Then in the same year, in his thirty –first year, the Sim-mouse year, he went in the direction of the rising sun, riding to campaign beyond the Unegen River. That river was in flood, and the Lord was on the hither side, and he sent envoys to say; ‘Pay me tribute. If you do not, then let us fight each other.’ Chagan, the Khagan od the Solonggos, was afraid, and presented him with a girl called Khulan the Fair, the daughter of Dayir Usun of the Solonggos Merkid. He also gave him a tent covered with tiger-skin, and two divisions of people, the Bugas and the Solonggos. He also received in submission a third division of the Solonggos, namely the Chagan.

Then, as he had stayed away for three years, his Queen, the Lady Borte, sent Argasun the Lutenist to him. When the Lutenist arrived, they greeted each other, and he addressed the Lord thus;

‘ Your wife the Queen, the Lord Borte,
Your offspring, princes and princesses,
All your great people,
Are well.
The salbar-falcon lays its eggs upon the Sala-three.
Carelessly relying upon its tree
It gets its nest destroyed by an owl.

It gets its nice eggs and young eaten.

The swan and goose lay their eggs upon the reedy lake.

Relying upon the needs and seeking shade.

They get their eggs and young eaten by the buzzard.

My blessed Lord, pray listen to this.'

The Lord approved of these words of admonishment, and abandoned his great campaign and returned home. He set out for home, saying;

'My Great Queen, Lady Borte.

Whom I met before I was established,

Became my mother-like Queen,

Brought to me by my precious father,

It is hard to look on the face of the Lady Borte who has stayed at home,

While I have gone to the plains and taken Khulan.

It is shameful to be angry with each other at home.

When strangers are with us.

One of you nine champions should go ahead

And speak to the Lady Borte.'

Mukhuli of the Jalayir said; 'I will go,' and he went on in advance, and kowtowed to the Great Queen, the Lady Borte, and addressed her thus;

'These are the words of the Lord;

"I did not keep to the established rule,

I looked towards a stronger rule.

I did not follow the advice of minor and major officials,

I was seduced by the gaudy appearance of a tiger-skin tent.

In order to attract a distant people

I took the Queen Khulan to wife,""

The Wise Queen, the Lady Borte, said;

'Is it the will of the numerous great people?

It is the power of our Khan and Lord.

The Lord can decide which shall be fortunate, and favoured.

Does a woman say she will take a household upon herself?

Does an unbroken horse say it wishes to be saddled?

The old saying goes;

There is nothing wrong in health and surplus.

There is nothing good in suffering and want.

May the golden tent-ropes of the Lord the Khagan be firm.

What is it to us women.

Then Mukhuli went and met him and reported to him, and the Lord was much pleased and agreed, and he lodged in his golden palace.¹⁰

THE STORY OF ARGASUN THE LUTENIST

This story, which is preserved in more than one chronicle and version, is to be found in the 'Precious Summary' immediately following the episode which I have entitled 'Genghis takes a new wife,' I have translated here the elegant version to be found in the Altan Tobchi of Luvsandanzan. There had been some confusion in the past as to whether Argasun was in fact the lutenist or the quiver-bearer of Genghis Khan. This confusion arises from the similarity between the Mongolian words for 'lute' and 'quiver'. The Chinese translation of the 'Precious Summary', made under the authority of the Emperor Qianlong, actually prefers 'quiver-bearer', as does my present source, but it seems certain that 'lutenist' is the correct choice, and this is argued by the Mongolian scholar Damdinsuren who discussed the poem in his monograph on the history of Mongolian literature.'

Now, when the Holy Lord came with the Queen Khulan, it happened that Argasun the become drunk on hard spirits, and had taken his golden lute and spent the night elsewhere. The Holy Lord sent for Bogochi and Mukhuli, and dispatched them, saying;

'Knock out Argasun without a word.

Kill him without a sound.'

Bogorchi and Mukhuli went to him, and said,;

‘Argasun the Lutenist, we have been sent
To knock you out without a word,
To kill you without a sound,
Because you got drunk on hard spirits,
And took your golden lute and spent the night elsewhere.’

Argasun the Lutenist said;

‘The voice of a man who is to be killed should be heard.

A man who is to die should speak.

Convey this to the Lord.’

At this, the two officials did not kill him, but brought him in, causing him to carry;

From outside the tend Bogorchi and Mukhuli said;

‘The light is entering,

Your brilliant, great tent

May guilty ones and prisoners are assembled.

May you pronounce your brilliant, great orders.

The light is entering

Your great jade palace

May door and smoke-flap of your gated tent be opened.

Your anguished, suffering ones are assembled.

May you pronounce your great jade orders.

The Lord arose, and had Argasun the Lutenist brought in to him. The Lord did not speak. Bogorchi and Mukhuli did not say a word. But Argasun the Lutenist addressed him as follows;

‘When the seventy-tongued wheatear chatters,
It cannot utter the mere sound ‘jang’
As the falcon falls upon it.
As the Predestined Lord sits scolding me,
I cannot utter the mere word ‘jang’

From my eighteenth year.
I have kept your golden lute.
I study your skilful means and knowledge.
No bad habits
Are to be found in me.
It is true that I became befuddled by hard spirits.
And befuddled by hard spirits I took your golden lute.
But I had no disloyal thoughts.

At this, the Lord said;

‘My Argasun, speaking well with your mouth,
My Lutenist, speaking well with your voice.’
And he reprieved him.¹¹

3. The Stream of Ganga River by Gombojav

Gombojav, who had been named as “Wise Gombojav” and “Prince Gombojav” in history, was a historian from Uzemchin West khoshuu of Shiliin Gol province of modern Inner Mongolia. Though it is not clear when he was born, researcher Choiji from Inner Mongolia found out that he lived during the reign of Kang Xi and Yi Zheng emperors of Manchu Dynasty or between 1662-1796.¹² Gombojav went to Beijing during Emperor Kang Xi and became a well known scholar of Mongolian and Tibetan languages. He worked as the director of Tangut Language

School during Emperor Qi Long. This school was under the Institute for Governance of Outer Mongolia which was founded in 1675. This school enrolled students from Mongolian and Manchu provinces and instructed them Tangut language and letter. Gombojav wrote his Stream of Ganga River in 1725.¹³ He was fluent in four languages: Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu and Chinese.

Inner Mongolian scholar Choiji wrote “From Mongolian historic documents the term of five color and four foreign peoples indicate concrete things. This term was first mentioned in the White History written under Qubilai Khaan. From the passage that says “Qubilai Khaan...in order to pacify five color and four foreign peoples” in the White History, it can be seen that these peoples were belonged to Mongol Empire. Furthermore, if we see the imperial order of Qubilai Khaan, it is clear that “five color and four foreign peoples” belonged to the administrative division of the Mongol Empire. The order stated “Nobles of tenth, fiftieth, hundredth, thousandth, ten thousandth and hundred thousandth shall govern their people among five color and four foreign peoples”. The term “four foreign peoples” meant peoples from non-Asiatic origins.

In the early XIII century, the Mongol Empire had not been yet formed, so the term “five color and four foreign peoples” did not exist. It can be proven by the Secret History of Mongols written in 1240. There is no such term can be found in that work.¹⁴ The birth of the above mentioned term can be determined as in late XIII century. In the course of time, the meaning of the term has changed.

In Altan Tobci, talking about Genghis Khaan, this term was also used several times. More particularly, it was used in Genghis Khaan’s words before his death, one of the many poetic passages in that book. According to the legend, Genghis Khaan addressed his close ones with the words, which started as follows:

Listen my four brothers like iron ore
And my four sons like race horses
And my people of five color and four foreign peoples

The author of Altan Tobci used this term when he described about Genghis Khaan’s empire: “Genghis Khaan, who governed not only five color and four foreign peoples but also people

from 361 nations and 720 languages, has introduced peace and become as famous as Chakravarti Khaan. He used the same term when he described disappointment of Khasar and Belgetei: "Thanks to Khasar's arrow and Belgetei's strength people of five color and four foreign states had been brought under his power."¹⁵ The author did not try to hide the meaning of this expression. This has been done by others like the anonymous author of "Yellow Novel" of the XVIII century and Gombojav as well. From this it can be seen that the original meaning of the expression had been forgotten and started being used with other meanings.

4. "Yellow Novel"

The anonymous author of "Yellow Novel" tried to explain that the five color peoples were originated from single Tibetan tribe. This is an interesting explanation not only as an example of independent thinking about origins of Asian peoples from the point of view of a Mongolian author of the Middle Age, but also as an example of Lamaist tendency which believed that not only Buddhist religion but also all the peoples of Asia were originated from Tibet. According to the author of Yellow Novel, they all were descendants of mythic Tibetan king Altan Sandalit, who had ten sons. From the youngest son Burte Chino originated blue Mongols, from other son-yellow Turkestanians and from the third son-red Chinese etc.

Gombojav, famous scholar from XVIII century explained the term "five color and four foreign peoples" otherwise. In his Stream of Ganga River, he wrote: "In some sutras the term "five color and four foreign peoples" was explained as Blue Mongols, Red Chinese, Black Tibetans, Yellow Turkestanians and White Koreans they all compose five color peoples. According to the understanding of Mongols other four peoples belonged to "four foreign peoples". These so called "four foreign peoples" are people with only leg, people-girls, people with an eye on their chest and people with dog head. Such kind of fantastic things can also be found in the Tibetan historic writing "Khar Choi Bjun" compiled by Jigmed Rigbai Dorje on the basis of Mongolian sources and published by G.Huth.¹⁶ Narrating about Qubilai Khaan, the author noted: "Starting from Genghis until this one (Qubilai Khaan) many peoples have been gradually conquered, namely more than 400 000 families of Blue Mongols, Red Chinese, Black Tibetans, Yellow Turkestanians and White Koreans-all of whom belonged to one of the five color peoples, as well

as four other peoples: people-girls, left handed people, people with an eye on their chest and people with dog head.” These kinds of fantastic findings about the peoples living in Asia were common in the Middle Age. Furthermore in many European geographic writings of the Middle Age described that in Asian continent there were places where people with only leg, people having their head in their armpit, people with an eye on their chest and people with dog head etc inhabited. As we see, the Mongols did not escape from similar imagination. If we examine this original description of Mongols about Asian peoples distinguished by colors, we can find substantial amount of ethnographic reality. Color epithets were certainly given with consideration of these people’s ethnographic particularities. For instance, Koreans were named “white” because of the color of their clothes they usually wore. Tibetans were named “black” because of their black tents made of black yak wool. Tanguts living in black tents lived in the northern part of Tibet. The epithet “yellow” given to the peoples inhabited in Turkestan, could be explained by the yellow color of their buildings made of clay. The epithet “blue” referred to Mongols, can be explained by shamanist belief in “the eternal blue sky”. From the color of the sky in shamanist belief which was linked to the governing position of Mongols during conquest era, the name of “blue Mongols” was born. (compare with the term of “blue blood” which is linked to aristocratic imagination of exclusivity). It is difficult to explain the epithet “red” describing the Chinese.

Concerning the fantastic term of “four foreign peoples”, one can only assume that under the name of “people-girls” the Mongols understood mythic Amazonkas whom they might have encountered during the conquest of Middle Asia and Persia. The term of “people with dog head” might have been originated from folk memory after the conquest of northern territories, namely after encountering the people inhabiting north of Baikal and Amur. It is how Mongols of the Middle Age saw the composition of Mongol Empire.

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