

## NAME-GIVING AMONG THE MONGOLS

AN ETHNOGRAPHICO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

BY

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In many parts of the World, the reliability of the statement "nomen est omen" is trusted. According to the belief of the Mongols, name influences or may influence its holder's life, and fate. The mystical connection supposed to exist between a person and his name, appears even in the question *Tany nér chén gēdēg vē?* "What is your name?" [lit. Who is your name called?], an everyday inquiry after a stranger's name.<sup>1</sup> This same connection will be referred to later in relation with changing the name and taboo of names.

*N a m e - g i v i n g.* According to the belief in the fate-affecting role of names, special precautions are taken by the parents in selecting an adequate name for their child and in arranging the name-giving ceremony. Two types of name-giving are considered to have existed among the Mongolian nations: the Lamaistic ceremony and the more ancient custom surviving from pre-Lamaistic times. On the basis of the data in previous special publications it may be supposed that the Buddhist ceremony existed parallel to the ancient name-giving custom even from the Yüan Era on, among the different Mongolian nations, and continue to exist even today.

According to the more ancient ceremony, the name is given by the parents (formerly probably by the mother, later by the paternal side of the family cf. Bese 1983, p. 87) or by a respected (in most cases: elder) person (Jagchid-Hyer 1979, pp. 76–78). Its traces are preserved in numerous data of the special literature.

According to the records of Georgi, the Kalmouck commoners were giving names to their children in an arbitrary way at the end of the 18th century (Georgi 1780, p. 412). According to the informations given by Kozlov, the Tsaidam Mongol parents named their children themselves (Kozlov 1950,

<sup>1</sup> Luvsandendēv, A. (1957), Mongol oros tol'. Moskva. p. 286. cf. also Khalkha *Tany nér chén bē Cēvēl*, Ja. (1966), Mongol chēlnij tovč tajlbar tol'. Ulaanbaatar. p. 398. High-style: *Aldar nér chén gēdēg vē Žagvaral*, R. (1976), Mongol chēlnij chündētgēlijn úg. Ulaanbaatar. p. 107.

p. 138) at the end of the 19th century. Potanin reported that the Shirongol Mongol father went out to the main road holding his child in his arms and asked a name for him from the first passer-by (Potanin 1950, pp. 412—413).

About the turn of the century and even at the beginning of this century, traces of this more ancient ceremony are found. Among the Darkhats living at Khöwsögöl-nuur, the name is given by the father three days after the delivery (Badamchatan 1965, p. 177). Among the Mingats, the new-born child is given his name by the midwife after three days alike (Sonomcérén 1975, pp. 60—61). Among the Kalmoucks according to the publication by Darbakova, female children are given their names by their grandmothers, male children are given their names by their grandfathers (Darbakova 1970, p. 236). Among the Buriats according to the data by Basaeva, children are given their names by one of the elderly guests participating in the ceremony, or more rarely, by the parents themselves (Basaeva 1980, p. 89). Among the Khorchin Mongols, the child was named by the head of the clan within a month after birth (Kuo-yi Pao 1966, p. 419), and among the Monguors, the grandfather on the paternal line names the child in most cases, but in the case of the early death of the previously born children, the head of another, more fruitful family does the ceremony (Schram 1954, pp. 100—101). Especially in poor families, the custom described by Potanin can also be found; the first new-comer is asked to name the new-born off-spring (Schram 1954, p. 101).

Thus, we may conclude that the deliberate way of name-giving must have been fairly wide-spread among the Mongols. Though, unfortunately, we have only faint hints about the ceremonial part of this earlier name-giving custom, on the basis of the etymology of the names given so and recorded by European travellers we may suppose that it showed belonging to the pre-Lamaistic faith of the Mongols.

On the basis of records by European travellers (e.g. Radlov), the accidental way of name-giving i.e. the new-born child is named after the first object seen, the first word uttered or the name of the first visitor after birth, is described by Krueger (concerning the Khalkha Mongols — Krueger 1962, p. 82) and by Darbakova (concerning the Kalmoucks Darbakova 1970, p. 240), but the Kalmouck researcher Monraev has expressed his doubts in this respect (Monraev 1971, p. 65).

According to the publications available to me, i.e. from the 18th century, the two name-giving ceremonies have existed parallel to one another. At the end of the 18th century, Georgi also recorded that the descendants of the Kalmouck aristocracy were given names determined by Lama-astrologers, according to the rules of astrology (Georgi 1780, p. 412). Pallas provides us even with a sketched description of the Kalmouck "baptism" (Pallas 1776—1801, p. 242).

At the end of the 19th century, Pozdneev offered the most detailed information on the sacred "washing" ceremony and, in connection with it, on the ceremonial part of name-giving and the methods of name determination as well (Pozdneev 1887, pp. 412—426).

The naming ceremony was connected to the ritual washing of the child. The general rule was that it would not be carried out earlier than the third day after birth but according to the common Mongolian practice it was held in the first month. First, the father went to an astrologer, a monk whom he informed about the exact time, date and circumstances of the birth and asked him to determine if the child was born under a lucky star and to set up the day, and the necessary ceremonies, the persons participating in them and the holy books to be read. For this, the astrological book *Vaidūrya dkar-po* and the medical work *Glan-thabs* were used.

The child would have a fortunate fate in the following cases:

- if he is born in a proper way
- if he falls on his back after getting out from the womb
- if the navel string is rolled up around his chest
- if he begins to cry out loud directly after birth
- if the crown of his head is high
- if the bones of his skull are hard
- if the top of his head is not large
- if his hairs stand upwards
- if his body is clean
- if his ears jut out
- if he sucks strongly and trembles during sucking.

The lack of these omens or their manifestation in an insufficient measure and especially the birth with inborn teeth (which is a sign of Shamanic abilities) were considered as bad omens and so special, additional works had to be read beside the common prayers in order to avoid misfortune. The number of the participating Lamas was also determined by the astrologer. According to the basic rule, the participation of four *gelongs* was needed with the condition that one of them must be the astrologer visited. On such occasions it sometimes happened that about 100 monks gathered at the residences of well-to-do Khans but the commoners tried to reduce the costs by inviting 1 Lama from the monastery and 3 wandering monks or by inviting only the astrologer.

Reading prayers determined according to the *küli* of birth was followed by the washing ceremony. Water and milk were mixed in a bowl and some holy grasses were sprinkled on them. After reading some prayers, the mixture was blessed by reading some *dhāranīs* and placing a holy book on it. First, the Lama sprinkled some drops of this mixture into the mouth of the child three times with the middle finger of his left hand and then poured some

drops of this liquid into the right hand and washed the child's face and head thus cleaning him from the crimes committed in previous incarnations. According to the 8 *kūlīls* a special *dhāraṇī* was assigned to the child.

According to Pozdneev (p. 416) the astrologer determined the name by two methods described in the 12th chapter of *Vaidūrya dkar-po* in accordance with the date of the birth. Both methods (that of the 5 *yarays* and that of the 28 constellations) are detailed in the footnotes of pp. 416–419. This data was adapted by other scholars (e.g. Žambalsuren and others) although only a brief reference to these methods could be found in the 12th chapter of a printed *Vaidūrya dkar-po* deriving from Mongolia, which is kept under Reg. No. B 9164 in the Tibetan Collection of the Leningrad Section of the Institute of Oriental Studies, on the basis of a short examination carried out under the auspices of the Soviet Tibetologist L. S. Savickij. It can be supposed that the detailed description was based on oral information put down by the Russian scholar on the spot, although some written sources must have existed on the matter. Because of their importance, revealing these written materials deserves further research.

After the name-giving, the name of the child's protective deity, and the colour of the horse to be sacrificed on his behalf were made known by the astrologer. After the washing ceremony, the child had to wear the five *bus*, small slips of paper with the proper *dhāraṇīs* as protection against mischievous spirits.

Among the Khalkhas (Njambuu 1976, p. 125), Kalmoucks (Darbakova 1970, p. 238; Monraev 1971, pp. 63–64; Erdniev 1970, p. 203), Khorchins (Kuo-yi Pao 1966, p. 420), Alar-Buriats (Basaeva 1980, p. 90) and Chakhars (Vreeland 1957, p. 175) name-giving was arranged with the assistance of a holy Lama most usually together with the "washing" ceremony (Khalkha: Vreeland 1957, p. 74; Njambuu 1976, p. 125; Kalmouck: Darbakova 1970, p. 236–237; Mingat: Sonomcérén 1975, pp. 60–61; Chakhar: Vreeland 1957, p. 175) or separate from it (Darkhat: Badamchatan 1965, p. 177). Among the Buriats name-giving takes place simultaneously with the ceremony *ülgéédé oruulcha* (Basaeva 1980, p. 89). Among the Dagur Mongols the child was given his final name at an age of 7 at the same time as the hair-cutting ceremony took place (Vreeland 1957, p. 256). Concerning the Khorchin Mongols, according to the memories by Kuo-yi Pao neither a special name-giving nor special hair-cutting ceremony was existent about the 30-ies of this century (Kuo-yi Pao 1966, pp. 419–420).

The name of the ceremony appears in different forms among the different Mongolian nations: Khalkha *chūchēd ugaach/aršaalach* "to wash the child/in holy water" (Njambuu 1976, p. 125), Kalmouck *meljagudyn churim* "the fest *milangyud*" (Darbakova 1970, pp. 236–237), Chakhar *sarlin öi* "the jubilee of the first month" (Vreeland 1957, p. 175).

In general, a name was given three days after birth (Khalkha: Vreeland 1957, p. 74; Kalmouck: Pallas 1776–1801, p. 242; Erküt: Mostaert 1934, p. 10), 3–6 days after birth (Kalmouck: Darbakova 1970, p. 236), 7–16 days after birth (Khalkha: Njambuu 1976, pp. 125–127), in the first month (Kalmouck: Šalchakov in Kul'tura i byt kalmykov 1977, p. 80; Rubel 1957, pp. 121–122; Chakhar: Vreeland 1957, p. 175; Monguor: Schram 1954, p. 100) or in the first year (Caidam Mongols: Kozlov 1950, p. 138) and, as previously mentioned, at the Dagurs at an age of 7 (Vreeland 1957, p. 256) in the framework of a more or less rich festive banquet.

What kind of name was bestowed on the Mongolian child at that special occasion? The Mongols had only one personal name traditionally (Žukovskaja 1980, pp. 9–10), and the majority of the personal names consisted of s. c. "speaking" names, i.e. they were of common noun origin, thus being understandable and commentable among the Mongolian speaking population. According to Č. Sodnom (1964, p. 39.) two main types of name existed and still exist among the Mongols: the desiderata and the category of protective names.

*Protecting names.* After longer childlessness (barrenness) or after the deaths of earlier born children in infancy, the new-born in general was given names that could deceive the demons harmful to the child. These names refer to the following misleading precautions (1) the child does not belong to his parents (Khalkha: Rintchen 1956, p. 22); (2) the child is not a human being (Khalkha: Rintchen 1956, p. 22; Vjatkina 1960, pp. 233–234; Chakhars: Potanin 1950, p. 133; Buriats: Aldarova 1976b; Kalmoucks: Monraev 1971, pp. 64–65; Khorchins: Kuo-yi Pao 1966, pp. 418–419); (3) the child is not a male one (Khalkha: Rintchen 1956, p. 22; Buriats: Aldarova 1976b; Kalmoucks: Monraev 1971, pp. 64–65; Monguors Schram 1954, p. 101; Khorchins: Kuo-yi Pao 1966, pp. 418–419). As a remarkable fact it should be mentioned that even geographical names were classified among protective names by Darbakova (Darbakova 1970, p. 239).

*Changing the name.* Believing in the fate-influencing effect of names, some serious illnesses in succession, and bad luck were assigned to the "not real" name by the Mongols, so severely ill children were given a new name in the framework of some special ceremonies with the intention of securing recovery for him (Khalkha: Žukovskaja 1980, p. 14; Buriat Basaeva 1980, p. 89; Kalmouck: Šalchakov in Kul'tura i byt kalmykov 1977, p. 84; Dagur Onon 1972, p. 12; Shirongol Potanin 1950, pp. 412–413).

Some cases from the Yüan Era are quoted by V. V. Barthold on the compulsory change of name for the namesakes after the death of an illustrious man (Barthold 1970, p. 206). This phenomenon can be connected with the taboo of names of the dead. The Bulgarian researcher, Tafradžijska cites a change of name realized on the basis of the ruler's command at the 13th century (from *Jirgo'adai* to *Jebe* Tafradžijska 1974, p. 291). In general, we

can state that greater rise in rank or accession to the throne were accompanied by a change of name (see e.g. the name Činggis). Having arrived to the home of her father-in-law, the Kalmouck bride was given a new name at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Darbakova 1970, p. 240; Erdniev 1970, p. 199).

As in other religions, the Lamaist monks of Mongolian descent at the beginning of their holy career changed their names when making the *ubasi* oath (Vreeland 1957, p. 109). The brief description of this latter ceremony can be found at Pozdneev (Pozdneev 1887, p. 128).

*T a b o o o f n a m e s.* This was a very common custom among the Mongols. In the various Mongolian languages and dialects it was called by different names (in the 13th century: *qorug*, Khalkha *cêr*, the person the name of whom is tabooed: *hécüü nért*; Kalmouck *berlxə, berñsi\xə, xadomlxə, hadmalgan*: Ordos *nere gäläxu*). The pronunciation of a name was prohibited in case of death (Barthold 1970, p. 206) so the names of the ancestors are tabooed, too (Erdniev 1970, pp. 268–269).

For the children it was prohibited to call their parents or elder relatives by name (Khalkha: Žambalsürén 1970, p. 18; Inner-Mongolian: Montell 1945, p. 44, p. 53; Dagur: Vreeland 1957, p. 253; Onon 1972, p. 46; Chakhar: Vreeland 1957, p. 173), moreover the married couples, were also not allowed to call one another by name (Mongol: Šalchakov in Kul'tura i byt kalmykov 1977, p. 73; Kalmouck: Šalchakov in Kul'tura i byt kalmykov 1977, p. 74; Dagur: Vreeland 1957, p. 253). The names of the husband's elder relatives were tabooed for the new wife (Khalkha: Žambalsürén 1970, p. 18; Buriat: Basaeva 1980, p. 55; Kalmouck: Darbakova 1970, pp. 240–241; Erdniev 1970, p. 200; Monraev 1971, pp. 65–66; Ordos: Mostaert 1957, p. 258) together with the common nouns corresponding to them. As a result of this custom the so called *éérüülél* came into being, which means a change or distortion in the phonetic form of a given word and the usage of synonyms instead of the common nouns proper (cf. Aalto 1959, 1971).

The general appearance of inequality in social life was accompanied by the appearance of titles and ranks, too. Soviet researcher Žukovskaja mentions examples on the personal-name-replacing usage of them from the 13th century (Žukovskaja 1980, pp. 9–10). On the basis of a disputable concept, the personal-name-replacing usage of titles and ranks in the 16th and 17th centuries is traced back to the Shamanistic prohibition of the pronunciation of names (Žukovskaja 1970, pp. 231–234; 1980, p. 10). The above quoted phenomenon is illustrated through precedents from the lives of religious and secular personalities as well (Žukovskaja 1970, pp. 231–234; 1980, p. 10), although by citing the further lot of Činggis Khan's name, an example of the contrary case is presented, too (Žukovskaja 1970, pp. 234–236).

*B e a r i n g s e v e r a l n a m e s.* Although it was true in general, for any representative of the different Mongolian peoples that he has one name

only, at the meeting points of different religions and cultural spheres binomia could be encountered, too. Among the Kalmoucks the official name was given by a Lama or a Pravoslav priest, the other name being a nickname used in the family, Kalmouck by origin bestowed by the father or an elderly relative, or perhaps by the midwife (Šalchakov in Kul'tura i byt kalmykov 1977, p. 80; Spravočnik 1979, p. 227). Among the Buriats binomia appeared synchronously with Christianity. According to Darbeeva, this phenomenon seems to be disappearing as a result of the spread of bilingualism. Cf. also Aldarova 1976b; and Mitroškina 1981).

Among the Mongolian nations of the Soviet Union, a surname was formed from the name of the father according to Russian pattern in the 19th century. In the 20th century even the usage of a special patronym has also become common (Darbeeva 1969, pp. 52–43). In the Mongolian Peoples' Republic the usage of the patronym has appeared as a consequence of the demands of the new times (Žukovskaja 1980, p. 11).

The folklore and popular wisdom related to personal name show its importance and multiple role.

### *P r o v e r b s a n d w i s e s a y i n g s*

*Duudach nêriyg écêg êh n'*  
*Duursach nêriyg ööröö<sup>2</sup>* (Khalkha)

The name by which one is called, is given by his parents.  
The name by which one is remembered, is earned by himself.

*Nêr négtijn čih n' nég.<sup>3</sup>* (Khalkha)

Those, who wear the same name, have one ear.

*Nêr négtijn čich nég*  
*Nügél négtijn tam nég.<sup>4</sup>* (Khalkha)

Those, who wear the same name, have one ear.  
Those, who have the same crime, have the same hell.

*Zuun chünij züs üzéchéér*  
*Nég chünij nér togtoo.<sup>5</sup>* (Khalkha)

<sup>2</sup> Gaadamba, Š.—Cérênsodnom, D. *Mongol ardyn aman zochiolyn dééz bičig*. Ulaanbaatar 1978, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Mongol ardyn züjr üg. Ulaanbaatar 1956, p. 49; Cévél., Ja. *Mongol chélnij tovč tajbar tol'*. Ulaanbaatar 1966, p. 398.

<sup>4</sup> Mongol ardyn on'sogo cécén üg. Ulaanbaatar 1982, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Gaadamba—Cérênsodnom, op. cit., p. 15.

Instead of knowing hundred persons superficially  
Have only one friend!

*Caasan dêér nêrtêj*  
*Casan dêér mórtêj.*<sup>6</sup> (Khalkha)

He has a name on paper  
And footprints in snow.

*Chêluülž javach nêr*  
*Chêvtêz chocroch jas.*<sup>7</sup> (Khalkha)

After death one's name spreads from mouth to mouth,  
One's bones remain lying motionless after him.

*eme k'edui sâd gewutš'i*  
*unisenesen tšäšinâā mör-wugui*  
*uduriï qadžart'u nere-wugi:*  
*ere k'edui mû gewui'tš'i*  
*tš'endëe nere't'i*  
*tš'ii p'un alba'tâ bâd-imâ.*<sup>8</sup> (Ordos)

Had a woman been very good  
she would not have had traces besides her mortal remains, and  
would not have had a name even at a place of one day's walk.

Had a man been very bad  
his name would have been enlisted in the military recruiting  
registers.

*sân ere guuruudëe nere't'i*  
*sân eme unisenesen tšäšinâā uduriï qadžart'u nere-wugi.*<sup>9</sup> (Ordos)

A good man has a fame all over the country  
A good woman has no name at a place of one day's walk from her  
mortal remains.

*Nêrêe bodož jav.*  
*Bjaraa mêtëz örgö.*<sup>10</sup> (Khalkha)

Live always thinking on your name  
Lift anything in knowledge of your bodily strength.

<sup>6</sup> Gaadamba—Cêrênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Gaadamba—Cêrênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Mostaert 1957. p. 488.

<sup>9</sup> Mostaert 1957. p. 489.

<sup>10</sup> Mongol ardyn zújr üg. Ulaanbaatar 1956. p. 50.

*Nér oloch nasny*  
*Nér chugarach ódrijn.*<sup>11</sup> (Khalkha)

Meriting a fame lasts a lifetime  
Loosing it takes only a day.

*Nêrijn chor*  
*Nüürnij chijr.*<sup>12</sup> (Khalkha)

The poison of the name,  
The filth of the face.

*Sajn nêriyg chusavč oldochgij*  
*Muu nêriyg chusavč arilachgij.*<sup>13</sup> (Khalkha)  
*sən nern chæv čign olldgo*  
*mu nern chusv čign hardgo.*<sup>14</sup> (Kalmouek)

Although a good name is wished,  
it would not turn up.  
Although a bad name is scraped,  
it would not disappear.

*Nér chugarsnaas*  
*Jas chugarsan dêér.*<sup>15</sup> (Khalkha)  
To have your bones broken is better  
Than having your fame infringed.

*Nér chugarachaar*  
*Jas chugar.*<sup>16</sup> (Khalkha)  
*Chünij gazar nér chugarachaar*  
*óoriijn gazar jas chugar.*<sup>17</sup> (Khalkha)  
Transl. cf. above.

*Èvrennj nerən hutachin orčd,*  
*cogc machmud targ.*<sup>18</sup> (Kalmouek)  
Transl. cf. above.

<sup>11</sup> Gaadamba—Cêrênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Mongol ardyn zújr üg. 1956. p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Gaadamba—Cêrênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Luvsandêndêv, A. Mongol oros tol'.  
Moskva 1957, p. 286.

<sup>14</sup> Kalmycko-russkij slovar'. Moskva 1977, p. 376.

<sup>15</sup> Mongol ardyn zújr üg. 1956. p. 75

<sup>16</sup> Gaadamba—Cêrênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Mongol ardyn zújr üg. 1956, p. 76.  
Luvsandêndêv, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>17</sup> Cêvél, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>18</sup> Kalmycko-russkij slovar', p. 376.

*Nérê chucharanchaar*

*Jahaa chuchara.*<sup>19</sup> (Buriat)

Transl. cf. above.

*Déélêe šined n'*

*Nérêe cêvêt n'*<sup>20</sup> (Khalkha)

One should keep his gown new  
and his name clean.

*Sajn chün bûrd*

*Sajn muu nér*

*Salgûj chosolž javdag.*<sup>21</sup> (Khalkha)

Every good man is inseparably accompanied  
by his good or bad fame.

*Chün nérêe, togos šuvuu ódóó.*<sup>22</sup> (Khalkha)

This man [is proud] of his name  
As the peacock [is proud] of his feathers.

*G o o d w i s h e s*

*bajâ nere't'i bol!*

*nojon t'solo't'i bol!*<sup>23</sup> (Ordos)

Have a rich name and a noble rank!

*R i d d l e s*

*Chùchêd bajchaas zuüsén chonch*

*Chün bolgond minij surgijg gargana.* (Khalkha)

(*Chünij nér*)<sup>24</sup>

The bell sticked to me from my childhood  
Rings news on me to everybody.

(Personal name)

<sup>19</sup> Čeremisov, K. M. (1973), *Burjatsko-russkij slovar'*. Moskva, p. 340.

<sup>20</sup> Gaadamba—Cérênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Gaadamba—Cérênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Cêvêl, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>23</sup> Mostaert 1957. p. 463.

<sup>24</sup> Gaadamba—Cérênsodnom, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

The above survey was devoted to dealing only with strictly ethnographical data of previous special publications available to the author. Other aspects of studying personal names are to be included in other publications.

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