A Study of the Proto-Turkic tor 'general'

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Despite all attempts to explore the proto or ancient Korea, there still remains many unveiled or unsolved that are considered very important. For example, what tribes ancient Korean states consisted of, what ethnic groups played the main role in the early stages, and the relation of the early Korean states and states of northern tribes. To solve these problems, two different approaches have been applied up to the present, i.e., archaeological and philological or historical methods. The archaeological approach has been always useful. However, archaeological evidences were often not sufficient to make a matter entirely clear nor to solve alone the problem without assistance of other scientific methods. In Korean studies, especially in case of ancient Korean matters, most frequently applied approach was historical approach based on philological studies. The philological studies in Korean studies largely depends on Chinese materials which are greatly rich in resources than any others. After the Orkhon inscriptions which are the oldest inscriptions of Turkic were found, however, some doubts began to arise about the credibility of Chinese sources concerning so called history of barbarians, against whom Chinese had consistently confronted as most annoying enemies1. Nowadays most scholars accept that Chinese sources about history of barbarians were based on etnocentrism. Therefore, Chinese materials can be useful resources, but not a conclusive or extensive in studying the history of barbarians.

I would like to suggest and place stress again on the importance of historical and comparative linguistical approach in studying the proto or ancient Korean history. For example, many of the ancient Korean

1 In Chinese history, it is very interesting that since the 1st century A.D. almost half of its period China was ruled by the northern Altaic tribes whom Chinese called barbarians.
place names, official titles and animal names still remains vogue in terms of etymology. Regarding this matter, some connection between Korea and Tungus or Mongolian has often been proposed but Turkic influences on the early Korean societies have not been so seriously considered by any scholar. Before Tungus and Mongolian tribes emerged around the 8-9th century, the most influencing tribes in Central Asia including Mongolia and Manchuria were Turkic tribes since Hyung-nu empire, a confederation state of the Altaic tribes, whose ruling tribe was probably of Turkic.

In series of my articles dealing with this problem, I have already given some Turkic loan-words in ancient Korean, e.g., koču (koču-ka) "a title of the supreme leader of Kokuryō", koy (kony) "title of the first king of Paekje", kakan (ka-kan) "a title of high rank official of Silla", ǝlah (elik-ka) "a ruler's name of Paekje", ǝluk (ãük) "a title of paekje queen", toksuri (toksuri) "eagle", ori (or) "duck", turumi (tununya) "crane", wǝri (börü) "a big and wild dog or wolf", etc.

In this paper, I present an additional evidence of close relation of Korean and the Altaic tribes, especially Proto-Turkic in studying the etymology of tori.

In a Runic manuscript from Miran and Tunhuang in Eastern Turkestan which is one of the oldest Turkic manuscripts, we find the word tor in the ancient Turkic official title baγator meaning 'hero'. The word baγator also occurs in an Uygur text in two forms; Uyg. (USp 22:18) baγator and Uyg. (ThS IV:12) bator. Kuman which is a middle Turkic


3 Most scholars read the Turkic word baγatur with the last vowel being /u/ not /o/. Actually it is very difficult to determine the exact qualities of Proto-Turkic labial vowels in many cases. However, in this case, we can determine the vowel from the Chinese transliteration of the word 都利 (tori). See the article, Choi Han-Woo, "On the determination of labial vowels of Ancient Turkic", Central Asiatic Journal, Vol. 35:1-2, pp. 41-53.
has the form *bayatur meaning 'brave man'. On the other hand, this Turkic word was borrowed into Mongolian; Mo. *bayatur 'hero, warrior', MMo. ba'atur id. In Middle Korean, there is pator 'hero, warrior' which was borrowed from Mongolian in the 13th century. The word bator (< *bayator) in Mongol continues in the name of capital city of the Mongol Republic, Ulan Bator.

I think that this word consists of two words; baya and tor. The word baya is probably the same word as bqa 'frog, toad'. In Turkic, the phonetic change of /q/ and /γ/ is very common between vowels, e.g. Uyg., MK buqa 'bull', Chag. baya id., Kum. baya id. Actually, the word bqa in Uyghur is attested in the form of baya in both Kypchak and Osman. Here we can induce that the word bayator might mean 'prince of toads or frogs' or the like, designating a hero metaphorically.

It is not surprising that baya in the word bayator is the same as the word bqa meaning "toad or frog". As is well known, in the ancient period, Hyung-nu and Turkic peoples took their titles from animals' names, for example, bəqa tarqan 'ruler of frogs', bəqa qayən 'king of bulls', bərə kayən 'king of wolves', sonkor tigin 'prince of hawks', etc. This tradition seems to have something to do with their totemism. We can find this kind of example in an ancient Korean state Puyə. In the Puya state, the ruling organization of the state was based on the four-governors system under the reign of ruler-king. We call the system Sachulto 四出道 meaning 'four out-way'. The four governors' titles took after animals' names, i.e. horse, bull, fig and wolf. It is very interesting that, although the animal toad never seems to be a symbol of hero or warrior, we Koreans also have the term "Tukkəbi Chang'kun(將軍)" meaning 'warrior or hero of toads' literally. This term must be a Korean translation of the Turkic term bayator 'hero of toads'.

On the other hand, it is surprising, in Korean source that the title *tor appears in the name səthɔrtor (蘇伐都利) who was the leader of an

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4 On the other hand, the word bqa is not of Turkic origin, but of Chinese origin; compounded of ACh. ma > M. ma, C. ma "frog", Sino-Jap. ha id. (Giles 7590), Sino-Ko. ma id., and ACh. ra > M. ha, C. ha "frog, toad", Sino-Jap. ka id. (Giles 4199), Sino-Ko. ha id. cf. Mo. baxa "frog, toad".
ancient Korean village Kohṣ (고墟) of Silla\(^5\). In another ancient Korean
source, this man was called 蘇伐公 in Chinese. From this we can see
that the Chinese word Kung 公 meaning "prince, duck" is a translation
of tori (< *tor).

The word tor which does not occur except in the word bayator in
Turkic, continues to survive in Korean in the form of tori meaning 'a
brave boy' or the like. The word tori consists of *tor and a denominal
suffix -i which is very common in Korean. This tori was used as the
symbol name of Koreans twice recently, as the name of mascots, i.e. ho-
tori 'little tiger like boy, brave boy' in 88 Seoul Olympic and kkum-tori
'boy of vision' in EXPO 94. Koreans must have been sure that tori is of
Korean origin.

On the other hand, the word tor was found in the ruler's name of
Hyung-nu empire muktor 冒頓, the most powerful emperor who reigned
in the 2nd century B.C.. Interestingly, the Korean people would have
pronounced the Chinese word 冒頓 'muktor', instead of 'mao-duon'.
Ancient Korean who had a close relation with Hyung-nu people must
have known the ruler well. For this reason, the Korean people usually
called and pronounced the ruler 'muktor', even though they would have
written mau-duon 冒頓 in Chinese according to the Chinese tradition
because there was no Korean writing system. As we know well, there
was a strong military alliance between the first Korean state Kochosen
and Hyung-nu to fight against China.

Then what is muktor? Conclusively speaking, muktor is a Korean
translation of Hyung-nu title qarator, meaning 'black tor' or 'sacred tor'.
In the ancient Altaic tribes, the colour black was considered strong or
sacred. We know well that many old place names in Central Asia use the
word in front of them as adjective. Ancient Koreans only translated qara
into the Chinese basic word, 墨 mouk, but they didn't translated tor,
because it was already well known to Chinese as a barbarian ruler's

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\(^5\) סאָבֶל was developed to 서울 or seoul came from סרָבָּר, i.e., סרָבָּר > סאָבֶל > 서울 > 서울. On the other hand, we don't know the original meaning
of סרָבָּר whose meaning was developed into capital city in later periods. All I can say
here is that the possibility it mean originally capital city or the like is very slim.
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title. From this, we can induce that the word tor is of proto-Altaic. Koreans didn't translate tor probably because the word tor was very familiar or already became one of Korean vocabularies.

The Korean word tori, which was transliterated by two different Chinese characters, appeared in the 12th century. The meaning of the word, however, has significantly evolved from hero to a young man who becomes a Buddhist priest. This semantic change reflects social change in that period: Beginning from the 5th century, Buddhism spread rapidly and exercised its strong influence over the Korean peninsula in the 8th century and on. Shamanism and totemism had been popular religiously in Korea before Buddhism. In this society, the ultimate leadership was given to shamans in the earliest period and then to warriors who gradually replaced shamans. In the times of the warriors' rule, tori or tor was given to heroes or strongest warriors.

We can find the similar case in the Turkic word böge. The word böge is only found in the title of the 10th century ruler of Uighur böge kaghan who was the first Turkic ruler accepting Manichaeism. The title böge meaning "a sage" originally comes from böge "diviner". There is another example of bakši 博士, This Chinese word was borrowed into the Altaic languages. In Ancient Turkic, this word designated a healer or shaman who has a shamanistic or divine spiritual power. In the later period the meaning of the word bakši was changed into "religious teacher" both in Turkic and Mongolian. In the 10th-12th century, this word began to mean a scribe. In Old Uighur and Middle Mongolian, it gives more specific meaning, i.e., a scribe able to write in the Uighur or Mongolian script. In Middle Turkic, the meaning of the word became more diverse,

6 In accordance with this, we can give another example, i.e., Chinese translation of the rulers titles of Puγǝ state in Chinese texts. As I mentioned above, the titles of the four governors of Puγǝ were derived from various animals' names, i.e. maka, uka, cǝka and kuka. In referring to these titles, Chinese writers translated all animals' names in the titles except ka meaning "ruler or leader" which was a barbarian's title probably very familiar to the Chinese people.

7 One of the oldest Mongolian script hP'ags-pa gives the form barši for the Chinese loan-word.

8 Both Uighur and Mongolian alphabet was originated from Sogdian alphabet. Mongolian alphabet is a slightly modified one of Uighur alphabet.
i.e., scribe, secretary, singer, surgeon, etc. Interestingly, the word 博士 in modern Korean designates a person with a doctorate degree.

Concerning the etymology of the Korean word tori, one believes that the word tori came from the similar Korean word tor meaning "stone". He argues that tori therefore contains the metaphorical meaning of stone, i.e., the longevity in good health⁹. This theory based on its mere similarity of the form is not persuasive at all.