吐谷浑语札记
——沿着伯希和的足迹

Some notes on the Tuyuhun (吐谷渾) language: in the footsteps of Paul Pelliot

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摘　要：本文尝试揭示伯希和 1921 年鉴定为蒙古语族的吐谷浑语其实并不属于蒙古语族的主流，而是一种副蒙古语。对伯希和假说的深化基于我们现有的汉语历史音韵学知识，以及现存四个吐谷浑语词与其蒙古语和副蒙古语同源词的语音对应。

关键词：吐谷浑、蒙古语族、副蒙古语、蒙古语、早期中古汉语、蒙古语分类

ABSTRACT: This article attempts to demonstrate that the Tuyuhun (吐谷渾) language, identified by Paul Pelliot in 1921 as Mongolic, does not actually belong to the mainstream of Mongolic, but rather represents yet another para-Mongolic language. This refinement of Pelliot hypothesis is based on our current knowledge of the Chinese historical phonology, as well as on the sound correspondences found in the four extant Tuyuhun words with their cognates in Mongolic and para-Mongolic.

KEYWORDS: Tuyuhun, Mongolic, para-Mongolic, Mongolian, Early Middle Chinese, Mongolic languages taxonomy

Among many contributions by Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) to numerous fields of study, his contributions to the field of Mongolian historical linguistics have had their most everlasting effect, as recently convincingly argued by Christopher Atwood (2013: 433). However, his numerous notes on the tribal languages in the North of China, in spite of the wealth of information contained in them, seem to remain mostly forgotten; or in the best case scenario, they earn just a passing mention, like, e.g., in Pulleyblank (1983: 452).

In this contribution I will attempt to discuss Pelliot's theory regarding the Mongolic-language speaking nature of just one of these tribes: the Tuyuhun (吐谷渾), presented in his 1921 publication. While, as the reader will see below, Pelliot was essentially right, some additions and corrections of details can be further made from the point of view of our present knowledge.

Before the discussion of concrete data, several general notes are in order.

Tuyuhun separated from Xian-bei (Särpi, 鮮卑) in third century AD, but the first Chinese dynastic history, where they are mentioned is only the *Wei shu* (魏書) 'The History of Wei', compiled in 551-554 AD. However, in terms of the date of compilation, the *Song shu* (宋書) 'The History of Song', compiled in 488 AD precedes the *Wei shu*. There is no prior mention of Tuyuhun. Consequently, it is more prudent to rely on Early Middle Chinese readings of Chinese characters used to transcribe Tuyuhun words than on their Late Han readings.

Although it is well known that the classification of Mongolic languages is notoriously difficult, for the practical purposes I will use here in general the taxonomy proposed in Janhunen (2003). Namely, all historically attested and modern Mongolian languages are called 'Mongolic', with the exception of only partially deciphered Khitan and fragmentary attested Xian-bei (Särpi) and Tabɣač that are referred to as 'para-Mongolic'. The term Mongolian is reserved to Middle Mongolian, Written Mongolian, and the modern languages that constitute today the uninterrupted core of the Mongolic-speaking territory: Khalkha, Chakhar, Khorchin, Buriat, etc. As a matter of fact, only the distinction between 'Mongolic' and 'para-Mongolic' will be relevant here.

The first two words that Pelliot discusses are 處 'you' and 可寒 'qaɣan' in the phrase 處可寒 'you qaɣan' (Chinese 爾官家) in SSh (96: 1a). For the first of these words Pelliot reconstructs Tuyuhun *chu or *chü on the basis of Middle Chinese *ts^{h}iu or *tśiu, and futher argues that this word is unlikely to reflect Turkic *sän* 'you' or Tungusic *si* 'id.', but should rather stand for

Mongolic *či* 'id.' < *ti (1921: 326-328). While this argument is essentially correct, there are still some difficulties that need to be resolved. First, while *chù* 'to dwell', 'to be at' or *chù* 'place' are legitimate Mandarin readings of 處, they can by no means to be substituted as reconstructions of EMC, let alone actual Tuyuhun phonetic shapes. Second, Pelliot's *tś^{h}iu or *tśiu have wrong vowels, as not even Karlgren has posited there final *-u*. Cf. different EMC reconstructions for處:

Chart 1: Different EMC reconstructions for 處

Character	Karlgren 1964	Pulleyblank 1991	Schuessler 2009	Baxter and Sagart 2014
處	tś^{h}i̯o: tś^{h}i̯o-	tɕ^{h}i̯ə' tɕ^{h}i̯ə^{h}	tś^{h}jwo^{B} tś^{h}jwo^{C}	tsyhoX tsyhoH

Therefore, one can see that the vowel in the Tuyuhun word must have been mid back, and not high back, whether it was some kind of [o] or [ʌ]. If the vowel in the Tuyuhun word was indeed a front high *i as in Mongolic *či* 'you', we would expect that it would be transcribed with one of the characters belonging to 脂 or 之 rhymes. Consequently, Tuyuhun 處 *č^{h}o 'you' does not look completely like a Mongolic word *či* 'you', but might well be a para-Mongolic word. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the word for 'you' is not attested (or so far is not deciphered) in the extant para-Mongolic materials. However, the correspondence of Mongolic *-i-* to Khitan *-o-* is attested, cf.:

Eastern Middle Mongolian *takiya* 塔乞牙 (MNT §141, §264), 惠捏嬪撾 (E 12.21, E 24.18, E 25.26, E 34.26), Western Middle Mongolian *taqiya* تاقيا (LM 66b: 11.1) 'chicken', cf. Khitan *t[i].qo.a* 娸濜圯 'chicken', further confirmed by Jurchen *tiko* 'id.', clearly borrowed from Khitan.

Eastern Middle Mongolian *moqai-a* 'snake-Loc' 抹^{中}合牙 (MNT §164, §177), *moqoi-i* 'snake-Acc' 憙衡撊衡撾嬪 (E 10.33), Western Middle Mongolian *moɣai* موغاى (MKD 238), مغاي (LM 69a: 11.1), *moqai* موقاى (RH 199C13) 'snake', cf. Khitan *mu.ho.o* 啓楠园 'snake'.

Thus, Tuyuhun *čʰo 'you' is likely to be not just a Mongolic, but a para-Mongolic second-person singular pronoun.

The second word 可寒 (EMC kʰâᴮ ɣân), better known in its more frequent Chinese transcription 可汗 (EMC kʰâᴮ ɣânᶜ) in the phrase 處可寒 was also correctly identified by Pelliot as the common Inner Asian title *qaɣan* 'great *qan*, emperor'. While Pelliot is also right that this title was for the first time used by Xian-bei (1921: 328), the ultimate origin of *qaɣa- part appears to be Yeniseian as I have pointed out elsewhere (Vovin 2007), and does not need to concern us any longer. What is of interest here, is that the final *-n* appears to be of a Mongolic and/or para-Mongolic origin, and was probably added by Xian-bei in the process of borrowing (Vovin 2007: 184-185).

The third word discussed by Pelliot is Tuyuhun *akan 阿干 (EMC ʔâ kân) 'elder brother' also attested in SSh with a note that it is a Xian-bei word (96: 1a). Once again, Pelliot states largely correctly that this is a word of Mongolic origin, and reconstructs Tuyuhun *aqan. However, his proposal that the final *-n* is a fleeting Mongolic *-n*, that leads regularly to the development *aqan > *aqa* cannot be accepted. The main problem here is that neither in historical attested nor in any modern Mongolic languages we find a form *aqan or *axan with final *-n*:

Eastern Middle Mongolian *aqa* 阿中合 (MNT: multiple attestations starting with §18 and ending with §280), *aqa* 嫮搁 (E 9.11), Western Middle Mongolian *aqa* اقا (LM 69b: 13.8), (RH 200B25), *aɣa* اغا (LM 65b: 8.1), Written Mongolian *aqa*, Khalkha *ax*, Chakhar *ax*, Ordos *axaa*, Daghur *akaa*, Eastern Yugu *aɣa*, Monguor *aɣa*, Dongxiang *aɣa* (孙 1990: 126), Kalmyk *axᵃ* (Muniev 1977: 56), Buriat *axa* (Cheremisov 1973: 65) 'elder brother'.

The absence of final *-n* in Mongolic languages is also confirmed by Mongolic loans into Turkic, where the earliest attestations of *aqa* 'elder brother' are no earlier than (late?) thirteenth century (Nadeliaev et al. 1969: 48). Consequently, the Tuyuhun form *akan like Xian-bei *akan must be really a para-Mongolic form, which further supports the observation made in conjunction with Tuyuhun *čʰo 'you' above.

Please note, though, that there are different shades of para-Mongolic. In the case of this particular word, Mongolic and Xian-bei/Tuyuhun are closer to each other than either of them to Khitan, because the latter has a special word *ia* 薾 'elder brother', apparently unrelated to Middle Mongolian *aqa* or to

Xian-bei/Tuyuhun *aka-n 'id.'

The most difficult case is with the fourth word that Pelliot used for the demonstration that Tuyuhun spoke a Mongolic language. This is Tuyuhun 莫賀 (EMC muo^{C} / mâk ɣâ^{C}) 'father', also found in SSh (96: 3a). Pelliot reconstructed the reading of this word as *m^{w}ak-ɣa (1921: 329), but the reconstruction of 莫 as *m^{w}ak is certainly incorrect, as it conflates two different EMC readings of this character: *muo^{C}* and *mâk*. Pelliot then proposed to view this transcription as an apheresis of Written Mongolian *abaɣa* 'paternal uncle', but this faces several serious problems. First of them is that in the fifth century AD, when SSh was compiled, there has yet been no shift of *m-* > ^{m}*b-*, which characterizes the Chang'an dialect of High Tang in the eighth century AD, so it is unlikely that Chinese *m-* was substituted for Mongolic or para-Mongolic *b-*. Second, if Tuyuhun 莫賀 'father', read as EMC *mâk ɣâ^{C}*, is indeed related to Middle Mongolian *abaqa* 'paternal uncle', it is not clear why Tuyuhun intervocalic *-k-* or *-q-* is transcribed this time as *-k-ɣ-*, while previously we saw it transcribed as *-k-* in the case of *akan 'elder brother'. There is a widespread myth about the non-systemic nature of Chinese transcription of foreign languages, but this is just a myth: we have to remember that the Chinese writing system is inherently syllabic, and that not all imaginable syllables are available; therefore it has its limitations (it is not IPA, after all). These limitations can be easily seen in the gaps of distribution in syllabic structure, but transcribing *-k-* or *-q-* is as *-k-ɣ-* is not due to one of them. Third, Pelliot's idea about the apheresis *abaqa* > *mwakɣa is ingenious, but unfortunately there is little evidence for it from other Chinese transcriptions of Mongolic and para-Mongolic words, and even less from within Mongolic (excluding Monguor) or para-Mongolic evidence.

I can think about two possible explanations to get us out of this etymological quagmire, but both of them are based on para-Mongolic, and more exactly Khitan evidence. In both cases, it would require to accept EMC *muo^{C} ɣâ^{C}*, and not *mâk ɣâ^{C}* as the reading for Tuyuhun 莫賀 'father'. I believe that none of them is perfect, but ultimately any of them fares better than Pelliot's explanation.

A. Tuyuhun *muo^{C} ɣâ^{C}* 莫賀 'father' may reflect Khitan *m.o ai* 堅园厕 'great father', a term which is believed to refer to 'eldest paternal uncle', or to 'maternal grandfather' (Kane 2009: 97, 101). There are two problems with this

explanation. First, it is the correspondence of Khitan *-ai* to *-â* in Tuyuhun. But eventually it may be no problem at all given the variation between Eastern Middle Mongolian *abaqa* 阿巴ᵑ合 'paternal uncle' (MNT §11, §150, §177, §242, §277, §281, HYYY 1:14b3) and Western Middle Mongolian *abaqa* اباقا 'id.' (LM 70a: 1.7) vs. Written Mongolian *abaqa* ~ *abaya* ~ *abayai* 'id.' on the one hand and the variation between *-ai* in Mongolic and *-a* in Khitan on the other, e.g. Eastern Middle Mongolian *ta'ulai* 塔兀來 (MNT §239), *taulai* 討來 (MNT §257, §272) 'hare, rabbit' vs. Khitan *tau.li.a* 樑叡圯 'id.' Second problem is more serious, as it requires the explanation of *-ɣ-* in Tuyuhun *muo*^{C} *ɣâ*^{C} 莫賀 'father'. Possibly, it could have been of a prothetic origin, like some cases of *-ɣ-* in Written Mongolian, but there is no further supporting evidence for this.

B. Tuyuhun *muo*^{C} *ɣâ*^{C} 莫賀 'father' may reflect hypothetic Khitan *m.o hor* 堅园兕 'great person', consisting of Khitan *m.o* 堅园 'great, big' and *hor* 兕 'person', but so far not detected in the deciphered Khitan corpus. The usage of the collocation 'great person' for 'father' is found elsewhere in East Asia, e.g. Shuri Okinawan *taarii* (大人) 'father'. The final para-Mongolic *-r* could have been reflected as *-t* in EMC, or it could be simply ignored, especially in the case of oral transmission. The only problem is the correspondence of Tuyuhun *-a* to Khitan *-o-*. But I trust it is a pseudo-problem as well, because although other cases of this correspondences cannot be presented due to the paucity of Tuyuhun data, there are plenty of examples of Mongolic *-a-* corresponding to Khitan *-o-*, and as we have seen above, Tuyuhun does not always agree with Khitan vs. Mongolic, as was in the case with the root *aka for 'elder brother'. Anyway, here are some examples of Khitan *-o-* corresponding to Mongolic *-a-*:

Eastern Middle Mongolian *noqai ~noqa-* 那ᵑ孩 ~ 那ᵑ合 (MNT: multiple attestations from §21 to §255) 'dog', *noqai* 那孩 (HYYY 1:6a3) 'id.', *noqoyi* 撚衡撊衡撣嬪 (E 7.26) 'id.', Western Middle Mongolian *noqai* نوقای (MKD: multiple attestations starting from 136, see especially 259), *noqai* نوقاي (LM 66b: 9.3), نقاي (LM 68b: 7.5), cf. Khitan *ńi.qo* 奘濠 'dog'.

Eastern Middle Mongolian *bara'un* 巴ᵑ剌温 (MNT: multiple attestations

from §59 to §280) 'right', *bara'un* 巴𠯿剌温 (HYYY 1:25b7) 'id.', Western Middle Mongolian *barawun* براوون (MKD 112), *bara'un* براون (LM 71a: 10.3) 'to the right', cf. Khitan *bo.ra.ia.an* 厨劒蒄錞 ~ *bo.ra.a.an* 厨劒圯錞 'right'.

See also the example for 'snake' above.

I personally prefer the explanation B, in spite of the fact that the collocation 'great person' = 'father' so far has not been found in Khitan. Apart from this, it offers us the minimum of problems, and presents quite a straightforward semantics corresponding to the Chinese gloss 'father' for Tuyuhun *muo*^{C} *ɣâ*^{C} 莫賀 in SSh. Certainly, one can speculate that Chinese at the time might have been confused with Tuyuhun marital customs, where a distinction between a 'father' and his brothers might be blurred due to the levirate practice, but essentially every Chinese dynastic history where Tuyuhun are mentioned takes notes of these marital customs, so one can easily turn the tables around and ask the question whether the Chinese were *that ignorant of their neighbors' customs* to confuse a 'father' with a 'paternal uncle'?! I do not think so. If I am right about the interpretation of Tuyuhun *muo*^{C} *ɣâ*^{C} 莫賀 'father' as *mo ho(r) 'great person' = 'father', then it is another drop in the bucket in favor of defining Tuyuhun as para-Mongolic, and not just as Mongolic. At least, I believe that so far I have managed to demonstrate that that Tuyuhun has more para-Mongolic than Mongolic features

In conclusion, I take my *chapeau* off to Paul Pelliot. He was a real scholarly giant, who was able to demonstrate for the first time that the language of Tuyuhun was some kind of Mongolic. But there was no notion of the division between Mongolic and para-Mongolic in his days. Karlgren ruled supreme in the field of Chinese reconstruction, and the first really distinct opposition to his views did not materialize until several years after Pelliot's passing (Pulleyblank 1962-1963), (Iakhontov 1965). Khitan, except some pioneering attempts at decipherment (and largely unsuccessful), was virtually unknown at this time, as the real breakthrough in the decipherment of Khitan was made by the Khitan research group (清格尔泰等 1985) only forty years after Pelliot passed away. The fundamental achievement of the Khitan research group served as an impulse for a small but robust circle of scholars world-wide to further elaborate and refine the results. Moreover, Mongolian historical linguistics was essentially in its crib at the time. None of the wealth of information easily accessible to us today was available to Pelliot almost one

hundred years ago, and yet he managed single-handedly to achieve this stunning identification of the Tuyuhun language just relying on his erudition, intuition, and stunning knowledge of Chinese sources. I feel honored and humbled at the same time being able to dedicate this article to the everlasting memory of the great French scholar, doubly because I have the privilege now to live in his country and to work in the city where he has worked.

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E 24	Edict of Dharmabalaq's Widow I, 1320 AD
E 25	Edict of Kun-dga-blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-dzang-po, 1321 AD
E 34	Edict of Togon temür qan V, 1345 AD
HYYY	Hua-yi yi-yu, 1382 AD
LM	Leiden Manuscript, 1343 AD
MKD	Mukaddimat al-Adab, before 1492 AD
MNT	Monggol niuča tobča'an, 1264 AD
RH	Rasūlid Hexaglot, 14th century

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