TWO RECENTLY PUBLISHED P'AI-TZU DISCOVERED IN CHINA

BY
I. de RACHEWILTZ (Canberra)

In Lishi yanjiu 历史研究 1980: 4, 124–132, the well-known Chinese scholar Ts'ai Mei-piao 蔡美彪 has published an interesting and informative article entitled 'Yüan-t'ai yüan-p'ai liang-chung-chih k'ao-shih 元代闡牌兩種之考釋 ['Investigation and Interpretation of Two Round Tablets of the Yuan Period'] (hereafter: Ts'ai). In it Ts'ai discusses two p'ai-tzu 牌子, or tablets of authority, found in China in the '60s.

The first of these, an iron p'ai-tzu of the round, medallion type was found in 1965 in Lan-chou 蘭州, Kansu 甘肅, and is now kept in the Kansu Provincial Museum in that city. Although undoubtedly an important discovery in view of the rarity of such objects, it presents little historical and philological

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1 Born 1928. Author and editor of several works, including the important collection of Yüan inscriptions in p'ai-hua entitled Yüan-t'ai p'ai-hua-chi li-tu 元代白話碑集録 [Collected Records of Stele in P'ai-hua of the Yuan Period], (Peking, 1958), and co-author with Lo Ch'ang-p'ei 羅常培 of Pa-ssu-pa tzu yü Yüan-t'ai Han yü 八思巴字與元代漢語 [The 'Phags-pa Script and the Chinese Language of the Yuan Period], (Peking, 1957). At present he is Board Director of the Chinese History Society and of the Chinese Society of Mongolian History, Fellow of the Modern History Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Member of the Research Committee of the same Academy.


3 For all information concerning the two p'ai-tzu, I rely entirely on data supplied by Ts'ai in his paper. Further information on the size and weight of the Lan-chou p'ai-tzu can be found in Kao-pu 考古 1980: 6, 542.

4 Of the great number of oblong and round p'ai-tzu that must have been in circulation in the vast Mongol empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, only less than a dozen are known to have survived; and of these the two described by Ts'ai are,
interest, since it is identical with the Bogotol p'ai-izu, as evident from the illustration (I) on p. 132 of Ts'ai's article, which reproduces the rubbing of the face of the p'ai-izu containing the five lines of Mongol text in 'Phags-pa script. The Bogotol p'ai-izu, or 'Vinokurov Tablet' as it is used to be called, has been published and written about several times: by A. M. Pozdneev (1881 and 1897), Haneda Tôru 羽田恒 (1930 and 1957), N. Poppe (1941 and 1957), and others. Ts'ai had access to the works of these scholars, which he quotes in his article without, however, mentioning Poppe by name. Since his transcription and translation of the text of the p'ai-izu (pp. 128–129) are essentially in agreement with those of Pozdneev and Poppe it is not necessary for me to dwell on them.

The second p'ai-izu is far more interesting and raises problems of interpretation. It was found in 1962 after demolition work in the unearthed foundation of Yang-chou's 揚州 old western wall dating from the end of the Yuan (1357), near the South Gate.

Like the Lan-chou p'ai-izu, the Yang-chou p'ai-izu is also round, but the top or 'crown' has a perforation for attachment instead of a loop like the Bogotol p'ai-izu. The Yang-chou p'ai-izu is, apparently, of bronze, measuring 17 cm in height by 14 cm in width. An interesting feature is that on one apparently, the only ones available in China today. See Münküyev, op. cit., p. 199 ff.; Ts'ai, p. 127.


7 Cf. Pozdneev, Leksik, p. 154; Poppe, The Mongolian Monuments, p. 58. See also Lüxigi, op. cit., p. 113. From references on pp. 128 and 130 of his article, it appears that Ts'ai was acquainted only with the first edition (1941) of Poppe's monograph. This is the edition that was translated into Mongolian in traditional script and published in China in 1960. See H. G. Schwarz in ZAS 14, 1 (1980), 215. Ts'ai's 'Jar-jiq' in line three of his transcription of the text (p. 128) is, of course, a misprint for 'Jar-hiq'.

8 See Kang Chien-t'ing 江震庭 in Wen wu 文物 106 (1959 : 5), 41–42; 146 (1962 : 11), 48–53; and 156 (1963 : 9), 10–20, for reports of finds made during and after the demolition work. See also ibid., 156 (1963 : 9), 11, for a plan of Yang-chou showing the position of the various walls and gates of the city.

9 It is not absolutely clear from Ts'ai's description (p. 129) whether the p'ai-izu is made of bronze or copper.
The meaning of this terse formula is that the holder of the p'ai-tzu, being a courier on urgent official, i.e., military, business, was authorized to move about and travel at night, availing himself of the government post-service network (chan ṣā = mo. ḫam), and requisitioning horses, equipment, provisions, etc., while en route. The 'round tablets' (yūan-p'ai 圖案牌) in use during the Yüan and variously designated, according to their type and importance, as 'new round tablets' (kai yūan-p'ai 新圓牌) and 'falcon tablets' (kai-ch'i-ling-p'ai 捕鷹牌), were originally meant to be carried only by special messengers and envoys (shih-ch'en 使臣 = mo. 使者) on important assignments; however, as Haneda has pointed out, they were issued not only to military and civil officials, but also to other privileged individuals, such as members of the Mongol aristocracy and the Buddhist clergy, as well as to merchants. According to Ts'ai's investigation, round p'ai-tzu of the type found in Yüan-chou were issued by the regional military command also to the leading officers of the private armies of powerful landlords during the period of political unrest at the end of the Yüan dynasty.

Near the left edge of the p'ai-tzu is engraved its serial number: Hsüan tzu shih hao 玄字拾號, i.e. HSÜAN 10. The system employed is the one according to the order of characters in the Ch'ien-tzu wen 千字文, or One Thousand Characters Literary Text, with each character of this text followed by a number in conventional sequence.

The Mongolian inscription consists of a single line in Phags-pa script, which Ts'ai (p. 130) reads as follows: muqu disiq gerd. According to Ts'ai, the word muquid is the Mongol form of the verb muqugda- 'to destroy, to bring to an end' occurring in the Secret History of the Mongols. As for the word gerd, it corresponds always according to Ts'ai to ered, which has the force of an imperative, i.e., 'must, for sure' (wu-pi 務必). Thus, the interpretation of the Mongol text is 'will certainly be destroyed' (pi chu-mieh 必滅). With regard to the Persian inscription, Ts'ai has deciphered only the last word, which he reads as kuush, meaning 'to be killed' or 'to put to death, to execute' (pei-sha 被殺, ch'i-ssu 處死).

In my view, both these interpretations are off the mark and unacceptable as they proceed from an incorrect reading of the two texts. I read the Mongol text as muquridb i'er (i.e., ered). The verb muquiri- 'to go round about; to patrol', is a rare and obsolete word, but it appears in the Secret History § 278 where the following sentence: ordo-yin qoyina'un urida'un khebe'til muquiri. The night-guards shall go round about (= patrol) at the rear and the front of the Palace. K'er (i.e., gerd) 'tablet of authority', the Mongol term for p'ai-tzu. The Mongolian text of our p'ai-tzu means literally 'tablet of authority to go round about', or 'tablet authorizing [the holder] to go round about', i.e. to travel and return to the point of departure.

The Persian text consists of three words, the first of which is barely legible. It is, however, almost certainly bīlīḥ by God. The initial b is quite clear, and so is the final h. The second word is šab 'night', and the third is gāšt 'going round about', from gaštān 'to go round about, to tour, to patrol, etc.'. Thus, the Persian text reads bīlīḥ šab gāšt, lit. 'By God. Night going round about [tablet]'. This interpretation is confirmed by the Persian text of the Mongolian-Persian-Chinese p'ai-tzu mentioned earlier, in which the word gāšt also occur, in combination with lauh 'tablet', in the expression lauh šab gāšt 'tablet of night going round about', i.e. 'tablet authorizing [the holder] to go round about at night'.

In conclusion I wish to thank my friend and colleague, Dr S. A. A. Rizvi of Canberra, for his help with the Persian text of the inscriptions.

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13 See Genschö ekiden zakkō, pp. 94–98 (= Haneda Hakuushi, L, pp. 103–105; and Résumé, pp. 8–9); cf. Munkázyev, op. cit., pp. 191–193. The difference between the various types of round p'ai-tzu and the range of privileges attached to them deserve further study.

14 See Ts'ai, loc. cit.

15 The character ho̓ is the third character in the Ch'ien-tzu wen, so that HSÜAN 10 would correspond to our C 10. We do not know, however, the range of the numerical sequence fixed by the authorities at the time. The serial number of the Mongolian-Persian-Chinese p'ai-tzu is Ti tzu wu-shih hao 地字五十號, i.e. Ti 60 (= B 50).

16 See E. Haenisch, Wörterbuch zu Mongol un niuux tobo'an (Yüan-chou p'i-shi). Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen (Leipzig, 1939); rep. Wiesbaden, 1962), p. 111, s.v. 'muluthpašu'.

17 I confess that I find this part of Ts'ai's paper rather puzzling.