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TRIBE AND TRIBAL SOCIETY IN THE 6TH CENTURY TURK EMPIRE

BY

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Wide-ranging and stimulating debates have been centred around the correct and final conception of «tribe» as well as around the precise content and adequate use of this term when applied both to socio-cultural (ethnic) or political units, and to a pre-state, «tribal» phase of social evolution and its survivals in later societies, up to the present.[1] In spite of the wide range of opinions, which include even the rejection of the term and the concept of tribe, the starting point — though it is mostly unexpressed — remains practically unchallenged: *i.e.* the common conviction that the part of mankind living outside the urban civilizations in space and time, consists of tribes, and that consequently the main aim of the efforts of scholars is to discover their boundaries and at the very least the main criteria for distinguishing between them. As the only way towards the solution of the increasing theoretical problems is expected from new case studies which provide further material for a more complete and more perfect abstraction, the idea of «tribe», a result of fitting together all the fragmentary abstractions, becomes more and more complex, and the experts rightly feel pessimistic sometimes as regards the possibility of applying the term itself.

Historical-philological research, however, made in an insufficiently documented period of history, is of necessity free from the danger of over-complicating this aspect of the problem, if only because of the scantiness of data compared to the abundant material available to the anthropologists and sociologists, and because of the impossibility of further field investigations. The conspicuous peculiarity of historical researches lies in the compelling practical necessity to judge a historical phenomenon — explicitly or by silence — on the base of the very scanty material which we happen to possess at the time. As general experience has shown that this method, if

[1] Cf. the recent related symposium: *Essays on the Problem of Tribe*. Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society, Ed. by June Helm, Seattle and London, 1968; see further the outline of the problems in the opening paper by Morton H. Fried, *On the Concepts of «Tribe» and «Tribal Society»*, pp. 3—18.

carefully and cautiously applied, can be successful or at least can facilitate further research, as well as correct the unavoidable mistakes, it can be questioned, whether complete knowledge of all tribal traits is unavoidably necessary for using the term «tribe» (for example temporarily or supplied with distinctive indications), for societies of a certain level of socio-political development.

Moreover, from this historical standpoint, we may also query the theoretical approach to tribal organization as mentioned above, that is the eclectic generalization drawn from heterogenous abstractions — as this method is also erroneous from a logical viewpoint. As we have to be aware of the evident differences between certain societies, because of divergent or changing internal and external factors, it is natural to expect to find particular traits at various places, of varying degree and importance (in addition to the common or general features of course). That is, we may expect various specific clusters of tribal features rather than the whole complex of the discovered tribe-forming factors in every case. As a matter of fact, an expectation of discovering a comprehensive and universally valid concept of tribe would imply the preconception of completely identical and immutable socio-political structures all over the world in the tribal phase of human history. This assumption, however, which would be rejected by most researchers could not — judging by the above mentioned difficulties — in all probability be a fruitful working hypothesis either.

Finally, the comparative lack of historical material, and also the emergence of new kinds of problems as well, call for additional methods of investigation, implying other types of questions too. For example, when we are looking for tribal traits in the historical past, we first have to decide which of the recorded «countries», «peoples», «kingdoms» etc. represented tribal society, which of the ethnic units mentioned may be considered a tribe and so on. By means of these dissimilar and, if possible, combined efforts at analysis, we may reasonably hope to become more familiar with the real nature of certain tribes. Firstly for further generalization, as long as every single feature is not expected to be necessarily universal. Secondly for an adequate way of specification, as long as we expect no more exclusive criteria, separative boundaries and isolation etc. than those experienced and reflected, even if imperfectly, in the sources.

This hope has arisen and been strengthened in the course of a lucubratory examination of Chinese sources on the social structure of the steppe empire which was named *Türk* after its leaders and organizers (552—744). Fortunately, the significance of this power induced Chinese scholars to record its history at some length, both in coherent texts and in brief notes, though the views and attitudes of the historiographers always remained alien to the opposing neighbour. The striking and natural distinction of the steppe-dwellers, from China as well as from other sedentary, agricultural countries,which is the obvious reason for the alienation and even aversion for their subject matter and for

the regular opposition to the foreign power described, is their different way of life, *i.e.* their livestock-breeding, nomadic pasturing economy with all the consequences implied. Although not expressed by frontiers, that is by a strict territorial separation from the politically opposite empires, or from the subjugated, economically different peoples of their own empire, this primary determinative factor may still represent an active motive for separation, not only because of the frequent and victorious wars waged by the powerful nomads,[2] but also because of the high prestige given to their own economic activities — as every economic activity is highly valued in its own sphere — connected with usual under-estimation of the others. This kind of difference was able to wield the multicomponent, huge empire of the 6th century nomadic horsemen into a unique entity, appearing in the Chinese view as an integral whole, called *Turk* ~ *T'u-chüeh* ~ *Türk*, a name borrowed from the indigenous designation of its rulers.[3]

Naturally this nominal unity of the Turk Empire was also a consequence of the Chinese claim of considering it an integrated political counterpart, endowing it with the attributes of the Chinese ideal of state unity (not more than a desire in China either at the time of rise of the Türks); nevertheless, the comprehensive denomination could perhaps indicate a real tendency toward integration, reflected in the contemporary usage of the name too. Obviously the validity of the term must have been closely connected with its actual — and fluctuating — authority. That is why the first heyday of the Turks, in the 6th century, seems a suitable period to discuss both their primary characteristic, *i.e.* their economy in full vigour, and the corresponding political power of their empire protecting the prosperity of their economy. Moreover, this is certainly one of those periods when they could indeed be originators, leaders or at least participants in those activities which were attributed, partly from habit, to the «Turks»: the *T'u-chüeh* by the Chinese sources (although the latter took an interest in and received information from the khaghan's court,

[2] On the divergent reasons for nomadic wars, often connected with commercial purposes, see Hilda Ecsedy, *Trade-and-war Relations between the Turks and China in the Second Half of the 6th Century*: *Acta Orient. Hung.* XXI (1968), pp. 131—180; also further details, with references (and with the related chinese characters) on the history of the 6th century.

[3] Cf. E. G. Pulleyblank, *The Chinese Name for the Turks*: *JAOS* LXXXV (1965): 2, pp. 121—125. The name *Türk* was used by the envoys of the Turk Empire from the earliest times, and it occured in the 8th century inscriptions apparently as an ethnic name for that part of the population closely related to the khaghan. Nevertheless the use of the name must have been co-extensive with the area of their political — military superiority rather than with their actual ethnic sphere. The name was borrowed for and by other components of the empire too, in a simplificatory way as well as in consequence of the name's authority (*e.g.* for and by the Hungarians, subjects of the Turk Empire's successors, long after the fall of the Turk's power too).

primarily concerning the Eastern Turks). By implication, these considerations suggest a limitation on the starting point for the examination, because the Turks could answer the above mentioned requirements only from the time of their independence (552) onwards, when they might be correctly characterized by the Chinese descriptions of them stating that they lived on pastoral livestock-breeding (CS, PS, SS) and hunting (CS, PS).[4]

Like other pastoral societies, the Turks were, since millennia, of a perpetually moving, «nomadizing» nature, with a relatively high capability and possibility for mobility, thus they cannot be definitely determined or properly distinguished by the actual territory temporarily occupied by them — even if for a considerable time — in the large and sparsely populated steppe area of that period. Therefore, it may be premised that the importance of non-territorial ties may be expected to increase in their world, first of all that of the kinship-relations.

The more or less distinct units of steppe societies are referred to in the historical documents by terms used ambiguously and inconsistently, by a nomenclature which emerged from a different social background and was adapted occasionally, to divergent alien formations. When it is impossible to confront these vague terms with contemporary internal sources, as in the case of the early Turks, only the context can help us to clarify their content. In these fortunate cases we may try to recognize in them — as much as possible — the characteristic features of similar societies, and to eliminate those aspects of their content which may be due to their different social background in the country of the historian in question, *e.g.* in China.

In the first laconic Chinese records, apart from the legendary beginnings of the Turks, their comparatively small nucleus, prior to their independence,

[4] Previously, after their mythic past, on the slopes (CS: on the southern slopes) of the *Chin-shan* ~ Altai (CS, SS, PS), they were forced to work as smiths in the empire of the *Juan-juans* who were defeated by them in 552. After the first signs of their independence, however, they seem to have been engaged principally in livestock-breeding, as *e.g.* in 551 it was a convoy of horses that was considered by the future khaghan *T'u-mên* a worthy gift to the Chinese emperor. — For more convincing evidence, the structural traits of the Turk society will be gathered — if not otherwise stated — from the three authentic, earliest coherent documents, from the *Chou-shu* (abbreviated as CS), chapter L; *Sui-shu* (SS), LXXXIV and *Pei-shih* (PS), IC, Po-na edition, Peking 1958, — mostly disregarding additional sporadical records at this occasion, in order to avoid suspicion of an incidental character concerning the information in question. For a full translation of the related chapters of the CS and SS see N. Ja. Bičurin, *Sobranie svedenij o narodach, obitavšich v Srednej Azii v drevnie vremena*, I—III, Moscow—Leningrad, 1950—1953 and Liu Mau-tsai, *Die chinesische Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken (T'u-küe)*, I—II, Wiesbaden, 1958.

Other abbreviations: HTS: *Hsin T'ang-shu*, SC: *Shih-chi*, Peking 1958; TCTC: *Tzŭ-chih-t'ung-chien*, I—X, Peking 1956; THY: *T'ang-hui-yao*, I—III, Peking 1957²; TT: *T'ung-tien*, Kuan-wu-chai, 1901.

was described by Chinese social terms (certainly not earlier than the middle of the 6th century). These first *T'u-chüehs* consisted of a few hundred families (*chia*)[5], and they all belonged to the *A-shih-na* clan (*hsing*) on the female line (*shih*);[6] and on the basis of this latter information they used to be mentioned as an example of matrilineal or even «matriarchal» society. As a matter of fact, a few traces of the matrilineality can really be discovered in the myth of the female wolf origin, ancestress of the Turks, despite the fact that a strong patriarchal rule, patrilineality etc. can be noted among them from the very beginning of their history. In this latter period, when they became stronger and eventually independent, the people under *A-shih-na* rule were consistently described by the term 部落 *pu-lo*, — by a term used for foreigners who were mostly characterized as a patriarchal group led by a chief, and generally translated as «tribe».

It is remarkable, however, that this line of social development («family» →«[matrilineal] clan» → «tribe») is given additional detail by the sources mentioning an early flourishing phase of the Turkic history, when they lived as an independent *pu-lo* (CS, PS), after their separation (from the *Hsiung-nus*) (CS). Usually this short mention is not given much attention, because the remark about the *Hsiung-nu* origin of the Turks seems valueless — unless taken in a broader sense, assuming the presence of their remotest predecessors in the *Hsiung-nu* Empire — and because the doubtful features of the myth are accentuated by a fragmentary and disparaging record of the myth of origin.

Apart from the fact that myths may be evaluated for their factual basis for the historical processes preserved and condensed in them, the original «tribal» phase of the Turks has to be taken into account, since the process completed up to this time agrees with the evidence of the specific «tribal»

[5] CS, PS: «several hundred families»; SS: «five hundred families».

[6] 家 *chia* «family»: a term primarily opposed in China to 國 *kuo* «state»; later on it was used as a designation for an individual family or a small extended family. 姓 *hsing* «clan»: an old Chinese kinship term, traditionally etymologized as a «matrilineal clan», though this latter was not characteristic for China in her historical times; as a term of kinship, it was opposed to the patronymic, patrilineal clan 族 *tsu* or 宗族 *tsung-tsu* including all the members of the households, with the ancestors and offsprings, representing an administrative unit of the society. Since the term *hsing* thus remained a designation for the relationship proper, *e.g.* for a wife's relations, it might be used — in the case of foreigners — for matrilineality too. 氏 *shih*: the family name of a married woman, belonging to her husband's *tsu*. Cf. M. V. Krjukov, *Formy socialjnoj organizacii drevnich kitajcev*, Moscow 1967, where, p. 200, the *tsung-tsu* is characterized as «the main socio-ethnic unit» and the *hsing* as a patrisib, opposed to the *tsung-tsu* as a patriclan. — As no real matrilineality and only one type of kinship-group of the early Turks can be traced in the Chinese source material, the term «sib» is not used in this paper, the term «clan» is used instead, with restrictions and attributives where possible.

aspects of the independent Turks (see below). But the main reason for mentioning it here is, that in the case of a succession of historical phases «tribe» — (matrilineal) clans — «tribe», we do not have to suppose that there was a primary and inevitable archaic «matriarchal» phase of the Turks and of tribal history in general, as it is mostly assumed on the basis of legendary stories like that of the genesis of the Turks.

In the text of the only complete variant (CS), an early historical period of the Turks was followed by a «mythic» period, including totemistic legends; and finally we are given the data of the real history of the rising Turks. Their tribe (*pu-lo*), preceding the mythic period, being probably of patrilineal character (judging from the Chinese terminology as well as from the general experience among steppe nomads), was attacked in an unindicated past, and their *tsu* (patrilineal clan, see Note 6) was destroyed (CS, PS), *i.e.* practically all the male members died. Only a small boy (!), brought up by a she-wolf, remained alive to continue with her the clan, even if on the female line. (*I.e.* the clan, consisting of the offsprings of both of them, was considered to have originated from the she-wolf.) The patrilineal continuity, maintained by a male member of the original clan, is expressed by another detail of the same myth informing us that the ten boys, sons of the female wolf, sought wives *from outside*, that each of them could found a *hsing* «clan» (CS, PS). The inadequacy of the term *hsing* — with its traditional etymological consequences, implying matrilineality — is shown in the records of the actual Turk history also by a few obvious inconsistencies of its usage: *e.g.* the *A-shih-na* clan was called a *tsu* by the TT, chapter CXCVIII, while in the previous chapter of the same source it was named a *hsing* (TT, CXCVII).

Thus the introductory short information of the related chapters of Chinese sources can complete the social history of the Turks to the following periods: patrilineal (as a rule; in prosperity) — matrilineal (temporarily, in need) — patrilineal (after having been strengthened and advantageous conditions having been provided). For the «matriarchal» phase only a short time is left in the text too, and its perspectives are revealed by a subsequent detail relating about the ten sons of the she-wolf among whom the wisest became the chief (君長 *chün-chang* «head (of foreign tribes)», cf. PS, SS). By all means, beside this short catastrophic period, other similar moments, too, might have contributed to the formation of a myth like this; and therefore, this period ought not to be supposed to be the beginning of the development of the Turk society, and consequently the related mythic stories cannot be considered as proofs of a «matriarchate» on the steppe in historical times (maybe, rather as counter-arguments).

The word *chia* «family» — one of the three Chinese terms describing the earliest Turks — is not a usual term in the Chinese sources either in connection with nomads in general or concerning the Turks. In those cases when attempts

were made to indicate the size of population, the word 帳 *chang* «tent» was used instead, *i.e.* the number of «households» was given. This term shows a tie which goes, as a matter of fact, beyond the kinship connection: it represented a possible economic atom of the society (and probably contained an extended family).

It is the *hsing* which proves to be the common and regular name in the Chinese records when designating the natural units of the kinship-structure of nomads, irrespective of the degree and nature of the actual political organization, the size of the empire in question etc. Naturally certain terminological inconsistences are also to be met with, especially in later periods, in connection with the Turk Empire too: several sub-tribal groups or even tribes are mentioned as *hsings*, the term still preserving some kind of relationship between the groups concerned.[7] Nevertheless, this habitual use of the term for the steppe does not imply the sense of matrilineality; generally it is used in connection with clans or tribes of obviously patrilineal — patriarchal character; *e.g.* the dynastic clan *A-shih-na* was mentioned as a *hsing* till the very end of the Turk Empire.

The *hsing*s, that is kinship-groups different from and opposable to the political framework of the Turk Empire, still remained connected in one respect with the female line, i.e. in those cases when a married woman's kinship-relations were concerned. Their family-connections could have some influence of matrilineal nature, if only because of the rudimentary hierarchy of kinship-groups (apparently: as entire wholes). It can be seen *e.g.* in the case of *Mu-han* (*Muqan*) khaghan's (553—572) son *Ta-lo-pien*. Though he was described as a person of unfavourable appearance and nature, the sources confess that he was disregarded because of his mother's «low» origin, while his rival *An-lo*, a son of *T'o-po* khaghan (573—581), was esteemed by the Turks for his mother's «high» origin so much that he was made the khaghan after *T'o-po*'s death instead of the earlier candidate *Ta-lo-pien*.[8] That is why in

[7] Cf. *e.g.* 三姓葛邏祿 «the *Qarluq*s of three clans», *i.e.* the three-tribe *Qarluq*s (even the names of the separate tribes are recorded by the HTS, chapter CCXVII B). In many similar cases the word *hsing* was used in the sources as a synonym for *pu-lo* «tribe», mostly in connection with related or allied tribes.

[8] We read in the SS about *Ta-lo-pien*: 以其母賤, 衆不服; 葛羅母貴, 突厥素重之 «as his mother was of humble origin, the people did not submit [to him; while] *An-lo*'s mother was of high origin, and the Türks had respected him heretofore.» In the related passage of the PS: «. . . *An-lo* was really noble (實貴) . . .» the character 實 is an obvious mistake for 母, judging from the parallel construction of the sentence and from the logic of the text; the commentary to the TCTC concluded similarly, when accepting the information of the SS as authentic: TCTC, vol. VI, p. 5449; cf. Bičurin, I, pp. 234—235, and Liu Mau-tsai, I, 43. — As both 賤 «mean, low» etc. and 貴 «honourable, noble» etc. concern some kind of social position, and as both *Ta-lo-pien*'s and *An-lo*'s mother were khaghan's wives, it must have been the prestige of the clan they had come from which influenced

581, after *An-lo* proved weak to calm the discontented tribes during his short rule, *Ta-lo-pien* was given only the name and rank *A-po k'o-han* (*Apa qayan*) by the new khaghan *Sha-po-lio* (*Išpara*) (581—587), when the latter tried to avoid the collapse of his empire by yielding partial power to a few other members of the *A-shih-na* clan in different non-central parts of his realm. *Apa qayan*, excluded from the political power because of — and together with — his maternal relatives, left *Išpara*, head of the Eastern Turks from this time on, and with his own tribe (*pu-lo*) he joined the dissident Western Turks, led by *Ta-t'ou* (*Tardu*) khaghan; but in the following years he and his people, helped by the new power in the West, caused many troubles to *Išpara* and his Eastern Türk Empire. (Cf. PS, SS.) This personal rivalry in power, representing competing political groups interwoven with divergent kinship interests, calls attention to those complex structural conflicts which could and must have contributed to the partition process of the Türk Empire to an eastern and a western part in 581.

From the same story we may see that *Ta-lo-pien*'s mother, a member of the khaghan's family (and soon a decisively important member of the tribe of his son *Apa qayan*, see later), did not originate from the *A-shih-na hsing*; nor did *An-lo*'s mother, though this can be inferred only indirectly. Similarly, a close relation of exogamous groups is to be noticed as early as in the myth of origin, in the detail mentioned above (supported by other variants, other types of informations etc.) about the ten sons of the wolf-ancestress, each of whom founded a clan and brought a wife «from outside».

Now, on the basis of these data related to a politically important sphere of the Turk Empire, we may recognize the basic unit of the Turk society, differing in size and quality from «tribe»; it is called *hsing* by the Chinese sources primarily and generally, even if inconsistently, and it may be interpreted with good reasons as a clan — in the sense of a (maximal size) exogamous patrilineal kinship-group. This common social formation, characteristic all over the Turk Empire during its whole history, seems to have functioned, as a rule, latently under the structure of political organization as long as the supra-kinship power could be maintained by the ruling clan, but the kinship-ties regained their importance and appeared again and again at the time of the weakening of political authority (as in the period of partition of the Turk Empire). In

their status in their new family, that is probably also *Ta-lo-pien*'s maternal relations motivated the events of the determinative year 581. The natural conclusion that this affair of *Ta-lo-pien* was connected with his whole family relationship — and not *e.g.* with the place and rank that his mother had personally in the khaghan's family — is suggested by *Apa qayan*'s every action, supported by «his people», «his tribe» (衆, 部落), — probably by those who were not related or were opposing the khaghan's «people» and «tribe». (The influence of the prestige of a wife's relations on her and her children's fate is not unknown later on either on the steppe.)

this phase of the nomadic history, when the increased or otherwise discontented rival kinship-groups aspired to share in the power first of all through those clan-members who were closely related to the leading clan, *i.e.* through women (or at least on that pretence), the whole system of relationship — being opposed to the political power held by the strongest tribes, led by their ruling patrilineal clans — might appear really as of «matrilineal» character, parallel to the mythic beginnings of the Türks, their tribe having been destroyed, — without changing, however, the nature and structure of the empire — forming again patrilineal nomadic tribes, able to regenerate when meeting favourable con- ditions again.

All this involves also the assumption that — if the *hsing* is to be interpreted as «clan» — it was the network of *hsing*s, i.e. clans, common in most tribal societies (even if not overlapped by a cohesive control of another, say, political kind), that must have represented the ever-lasting basis for the Turk society too, surviving both external and internal political storms. Beside those many cases guaranteeing the probability of this supposition, including the survivals of the clan-system till today, we may find also a number of documents explicitly stating that the Eastern Turks were indeed a complex of clans. One of these sources originates from 607 (大業 *Ta-yeh* period, 3rd year), from a critical time of the Eastern Turk khaghanate, weakened and endangered, needing Chinese military help and therefore being at the mercy of China. In a letter written — naturally — in Chinese, attributed to 啓民 *Ch'i-min* khaghan (SS, PS) and his Chinese wife (PS), addressed to the emperor *Sui Yang-ti*, a term can be found for «the Turks» as a whole, characterizing them in an unusual way, from a non-tribal viewpoint. By a repeatedly occuring term, not common in Chinese and thus possibly, of Turk origin,[8a] the realm of the Turks, their whole population is described as 突厥百姓 «the hundred [*i.e.* many] clans (*hsing*s) of the Turks» (SS, PS).

It is not difficult to realize after all that the complex of economic and social traits touched on so far, were able to influence the Turks and other nomadic empires towards an integration of their rather heterogeneous population. The cohesiveness brought about by a common or similar way of life, not strictly limited to an isolated territory; and the strong kinship-connections which did not prevent a large-size, continual concrete and social mobility of exogamous kinship-groups, render possible and make necessary such a continent-wide system of contacts which can advance intercultural interferences as well as ethnical—linguistical affinity or at least proximity inside the empire and on its political boundaries. (Cf. *e.g.* the religious tolerance on the steppe; the mixed racial-anthropological structure, especially in ancient times; the close connection between the languages of rider-nomads of Eurasia, for example

[8a] See Mori Masao's opinion to this effect also about other passages of the letter: *Tōyō Gakuhō* 48 (1965), 49—79 (with references).

those called Altaic, at least in respect of their vocabulary; and so on.) This possibility for a certain degree of integration, required and realized by the nomadic organizers of the empire, *i.e.* by the Turks, was reflected in the Chinese records in the summary denomination showing them a united «country» *T'u-chüeh* (sometimes even as a 國 *kuo* «state», from simplificatory habit too, as told above, pp. 247 - 248); and the more or less homogenous population was designated by the sources as a 種 *chung* «kind, ethnic, race» *etc.*, though in the case of certain subjects of the Turk Empire the obvious differences are still indicated by a few hardly interpretable comments such as «their language is slightly different» etc.

This mobile unity of the Turk Empire (its unity and mobility mutually postulating and restricting one another)was fastened by cultic ties too. Beside the widespread use of the name *Türk*, originally a designation of the mythic ancestors and founders of the empire, the wolf-ancestress and the myth of origin of the *A-shih-na* clan were also «inherited» by the central political groups of nomads, increasing in number and importance. A similar process can be noticed in the role of their cultic centre too, which coincided — not incidentally — with the khaghan's residence (with his virtual residence) at the «mountain» *Ötükän* (CS, PS: 於都斤山, SS: 都斤山, later on transcribed in many other ways). Nevertheless the primordially political importance of this cultic symbol and the fictive nature of the myth of common descendence is revealed by the fact that the insignia commemorating the totemistic ancestress (the flag decorated with a head of wolf) were monopolized by the head of the *A-shih-na* clan, the later khaghan (SS, PS), and that the worship of ancestors and other spirits was the priviledge of the khaghan and his high-ranking subjects (CS, PS: 諸貴人 «[all] the noblemen», «high-ranking people» etc.; a term with no direct reference to any aspect of the kinship-organization, and probably a sign of some kind of political hierarchy).[9] Finally, when — in spite of all these unifying efforts — the balance of the empire was upset, there remained only the unity of the ruling group, *i.e.* the method of division of their territory between the members of the *A-shih-na* clan that could be destined to protect the unity of their rule, with temporary result.

Both because of the obviously nominal and by nature mobile integrity of the Turk Empire and because of the evidences of *e.g.* the Chinese sources, we may rightly seek for a smaller, but constant and naturally integrated unit of the Turk society, taking a position between the empire and the kinship-groups, able to oppose the clan-system in order to found a basis for the political power of an empire, and strong enough to disturb the authority of an empire-sized political power too, as happened several times. For this biggest unit of

[9] The rudimentary and mobile hierarchy of military-political character among the Türks and other problems of their society — attested to a certain extent also by the Chinese sources — are to be treated in a separate study.

the Turk society in the Chinese records we find the consistently used term *pu-lo*, showing no kinship-concern, or at least no basic connection with the kinship-structure; that is why, when analyzing the content of this term from the poor and indirect information given, we may seek in it for the diagnostic markers of the largest naturally functioning social unit of the Turks and other nomads, a potential society itself, say: «tribe».

Approaching a tribe's determinatives in a negative way, it must first be admitted that, although independent and viable communities (societies) seem — as a rule — to have a name of their own, a nomadic tribe's name used to belong exclusively to the tribe in question only till the moment of its expansion, when the name could and might be used by the subjects too. According to the mythic details of the Turks' prehistory, the name *Türk* originated from the rising period, when the strengthened Turks lived in the neighbourhood of the Altai, directly before their first appearance in history in 542—545, when they already formed a *pu-lo* (CS, PS, SS). After their independence and victorious conquering wars, the whole empire took their name, in their enemies' view at least, and their tribes, growing and separating under the leadership of various princely members of the *A-shih-na* clan, all kept the comprehensive name *Türk* — as an ethnic name. Consequently the separate *pu-los* had no name of their own, but were named only after their heads, and thus we read about *Apa qayan*'s tribe, *Ch'i-min* khagan's tribe or about «the tribe led by *Išpara*» etc. (When name-less, chief-less, small groups of the Turks arrived in China, they shortly disappeared from the Chinese historiographer's view and probably from the history too.) The emergence of the name and the birth of an independent, self-controlling tribe is for certain closely connected, as expressed by a variant of the origin-myth too, where the name *Türk* appeared at the moment when the eldest son was selected as a chief: 主 *chu*, cf. CS, PS. Later on, however, the actually present subjects of the undivided empire appeared only as a name-less «mass»: 衆 *chung*.

The boundaries of a nomadic tribe, especially in ancient and prosperous times, cannot be determined upon territorial bases either, — though they were not devoid of certain territorial relations, see later. (The Chinese sources, if giving such details at all, indicate either the sphere of a tribe's authority — far beyond the actual territory of the tribe's everyday life — or point out the place of the residence of the head of tribe.) Beside pasturing and other regular natural motion, the territorial framework of an empire might be cross-cut and re-organized several times for political reasons, as happened in 581, and this relatively peaceful — and unsuccessful — integration attempt weakened even the existing or newly formed territorial ties.

As the kinship-relations existed within and without a *pu-lo* — or an empire —, they do not serve to define the *pu-lo*. (The leading clan's role is to be explained primarily by its political function which do not necessarily

no place to go home»,[13] therefore he escaped westward, to *Tardu* khaghan's Western Türks. His tribesmen, who obviously had left him in the meantime, returned to him only then when, with *Tardu*'s military support, he started again eastward, now against *Išpara* (SS, PS), in order to get back his (their) 故地 «old land».[14]

According to these events, a tribe can be destroyed either by losing its home residence — where women live with the small children —, i.e. by losing the residential territory; or by a catastrophe separating its leader from the population, even if he is not killed. (When *Apa* joined his survivors of his people again, they joined, as a matter of fact, *Tardu*'s army; *Apa*'s tribe was not able to revive.) But the leader — *Apa* — represented his tribe primarily

[13] 還無所歸. The Chinese word 歸 is used mostly in connection with a return to the birthplace or at least to the home residence, and here this translation is reinforced by the biography mentioned in Note 12, relating about *Išpara*'s treacherous attack: «then [he] took the northern residence (牙 «tent»), seized its whole population and killed his (i.e. *Apa*'s) mother, [so that] *Apa*, when returning, had no place to go home.» The fact that the loss of the territory of tribal residence is concerned here, can be hidden by translations formulated in a figurative way, cf. Bičurin, I, p. 236: «Abo po vozvraščenii ne našel pristanišča dlja sebja . . .»; or Liu Mau-tsai, I, 49: «Als A-po zurückkam, hatte er keine Bleibe mehr . . .», while the same passage is translated by Liu Mau-tsai, I, 101, in *Ch'ang-sun Shêng's* biography like this: «Als A-po zurückkam, fand er kein Heim mehr.» — In the text of the SS, chapter LXXXIV and PS, IC, a superfluous character (其) may be disturbing: 因其先歸 «following him [*Išpara*] went [to his] home earlier»; apparently *Išpara* preceded *Apa* when arriving at *Apa*'s tribal residence in the North. Szŭ-ma Kuang corrected the text accordingly, omitting 其, cf. TCTC, vol. VI, p. 5465. Bičurin, I, 236 seems to accept it; so does Liu Mau-tsai, too, I, 49, referring to the TCTC, cf. Liu Mau-tsai, II, 525—526 (Note 260).

[14] Cf. TCTC, VI, 5465. This «old land», the territory held and defended, and later on insisted upon by *Apa* and his tribe, was probably identical with the complex of those «lands» which were described by the Chinese sources among nomads from the *Hsiung-nus* on as 分地 (SC) or, cf. CS: 地分. The term in question occurs in remarks stating that, though nomadizing and having no constant place, «each of them has (his) due land».Both Bičurin's and Liu Mau-tsai's related translations may be misleading, for terminological reasons; cf. Bičurin, I, 40, the record about the *Hsiung-nus*, SC, chapter CX: «otdelennyj učastok zemli», and I, 230 (CS): «každyj imeet svoj učastok zemli [nado polagatj pastbišča]»; Liu Mau-tsai, I, 10 (CS): «. . . eigenes Land». On the basis of these or similar translations, this expression is suspected sometimes to mean private landed propertyt Naturally: it is a nonsense under tribal conditions, because a piece of land can be used *e.g.* by a family — in peace, but it cannot be conquered or defended against the constan. danger of tribal armies. By the way, these two characters do not represent a Chinese term for free holding, for private possession of land — rare and peripheric in China too, and expressed in various ways; in the 3rd century *e.g.* just *fên-ti* «torn land» meaning a trial of large land property, but by no means smallholders' «share» of land. Among nomads it could mean but a piece of land, a place of habitation at least, apportioned to the members of the tribe, — apparently by the chief and probably not independently from their rank.

by his mythic origin, thus «legalizing» (both virtually and politically) the existence of the tribe, — his mere person, deprived of all his clan-connection, was not able to do so; it was the «old land», the tribal territory with the offspring and other family-connections which formed the real basis of the tribe — this also accords with the Chinese records, indicating by the term 部 (i.e. *pu-lo*) that part of the tribe which remained at home.

The other information of basic importance implied in the fate of *Apa*'s tribe may support the common observation in nomadic societies that in great danger or in other actions of vital significance all the warriors, practically all the able male members of a tribe were involved, since after a defeat *Apa*'s army seems to have been catastrophically destroyed, and since there was no (other) army to defend such an important place as the territory of tribal residence. This may recall the story of the first mythic tribe, the male members of which were killed in one single battle, while at home only children remained or, as told by the legend, only one boy to continue the clan.

Thus two factors have proved to be primary determinants of a tribe: tribal territory (whether legalized or not by a mythic ancestor and his or her representative as a leader) and tribal army (to conquer and defend both tribal land and other conditions of livelihood, when needed). Only the third main component of nomadic life remains to be examined, *i.e.* the livestock of a tribe, so that the primordial criteria and the most important requisits of a tribe's existence could be rightly connected with the prime necessities of the nomadic economy. (The tribal army of nomads, being responsible directly and constantly for the existence and size of the population, territory and livestock, and including all the full-right members of the tribe, has to be considered the most effective factor of the economy.)

Logic alone shows that while a herd could be grazed by a mere handful of people in peaceful times, its defence against other tribes required tribal armies. There is also textual evidence testifying that at least in principal and in extreme cases, *e.g.* in wartime, so frequent on the steppe, the livestock of a tribe was held and defended by the tribe as a whole. This is best attested by a much later, undated Chinese source, stating that among livestock-breeders every *pu-lo* «tribe» had only one kind of brand, at least for horses.[15] Though a conclusion to the same effect could be inferred from several periods of the Türk history (when a tribe or tribal confederacy lost its political importance, because its herd was destroyed or robbed all at once, by an attack, marauding war etc.),

[15] Cf. THY, vol. III, chapter LXXII, pp. 1305—1308; there we find several dozens of horses' brands (馬印) of different *pu-los*: tribes or other more or less independent communities, called sometimes after the name or clan-name of their heads. This record, of course, does not exclude a closer connection of certain persons or groups with a part or some pieces of the livestock, but it must be of significance that there seems no need and possibility to make further distinction within the herd of a tribe.

we also find a short account from this first period to reveal textually too, that a whole grazing field and thus a whole block of grazing livestock must have belonged to a whole warring tribe, represented by a united army. We may see it, for example in 599, when *Ch'i-min* khaghan was called in to China, to the region of 大利城 *Ta-li-ch'êng* (in Suiyüan, established for *Ch'i-min*), in order to defend the place against foreign, mainly Türk attacks. Soon his tribe was considered too populous by his enemy *Tu-lan* khaghan, and with an intention to destroy *Ch'i-min*'s power, *Tu-lan* led attacks to seize 啓民畜牧之地 «*Ch'i-min*'s pasturing land» (SS, PS). The land named after *Ch'i-min* certainly belonged to the whole tribe, for obvious textual reasons, and also because «his» pasturing land was defended — and used too, judging from the consequences — by his tribesmen.

Now that we have seen a few illuminating examples of tribes in key positions from a historical point of view, during an important period of the Türk Empire,[16] it is possible to point to those main factors which determined the extreme perspectives of nomadic tribes in the Türk Empire, i.e. the units of maximal size and effectiveness in the Türk society, based — as we have seen — on the nomadic economy. In accordance with our analysis, the «ideal pattern» of a nomadic tribe may be characterized by a common territory (of habitation and pasture), a common army and commonly held livestock, even if this unity could be realized only temporarily and was to be realized only in extreme cases, mostly in wartime. Therefore the tribes of the Türk Empire, at least among its nomads, appear principally as economic units, their economic aspect and importance being in direct ratio to their prosperity, that is: to the actually given conditions of nomadic economy. That is why, instead of forming closed groups, they function as aggregates, incorporating all those who are willing to live within the scope of their economic activity and cultural sphere — until a considerable increase of the population, when a new tribe is to be formed, thus avoiding over-population while large free steppe areas are available.

From the above Chinese or other source material no attempt can be made at a numerical definition of the «ideal» size of a tribe, particularly because it has to correspond directly with many factors, varying with space and time. The two extreme tendencies, however, may also be inferred from the pattern outlined above. The process of a tribe's growth is apparently closely

[16] While remaining within the chosen textual framework for methodological reasons, I do not want to deny that some of these conclusions could have been drawn also from other documents, even from fragmentary ones, — on the contrary: neither contemporary, nor later records about the Turks seem to discredit this view of their society — in several respects not at all specific — outlined on the basis of the related material from the early period of the Ancient Turkic history, when the network of events and peoples in their empire was not as complex as in later periods.

related to its effectiveness, if not otherwise, by means of military power (cf. the excessive militarism of *e.g.* the Mongolian Empire and its inheritors, in correlation with its tremendous size and authority). The decrease of the population of a tribe may be due both to wars and to deficiencies of economic conditions, but — before recent times — under a certain size no livestock-breeder community could prove viable on the steppe, being at the mercy of the forces of nature and of other societies; even comparatively unsignificant ravages could eradicate them or at least ruin their way of life and prepare their assimilation. (Cf. *e.g.* the fate of the Türk ethnic fragments, disappearing in China without leaving a trace.)

Naturally a proportionate and prosperous nomadic tribe had the best chance to found an empire in order to provide a basis for their way of existence, *i.e.* for nomadic economy realized in units of tribal size. Consequently the political power of an empire-forming nomadic tribe (or tribal confederacy etc.), harmonizing with the objective interest of the separate tribes, had to remain of fundamentally tribal structure,[17] in spite of the doubtless integrative tendencies rendered possible in a nomadic empire.

To conclude, in the Turk Empire, due to the nomadic pastoralism of its rulers—organizers, three spheres can be distinguished: a basic network of exogamous, patrilineal kinship-groups — *clans* —, endowed by nature with a considerable concrete and social mobility; separate, even territorially determined economic units — *tribes* —, based on the non-isolating kinship-system and thus being aggregates both in economic and in other ways (except for their leading clans, especially when belonging to an empire); and a *political power*, maintained by the military superiority of one (or a few) tribe(s) which can be represented by its (their) leading clan(s) too. In consequence of the mutual interference of these spheres, under suitable conditions these social formations did not remain in a constant and unaltered state: an ensemble of prosperous clans might get organized economically too, thus approaching — and reaching — the state of a tribe; and a tribe was able to function as an independent society, although only temporarily, until an empire was organized by one of the independent tribes. In the time of weakening of the supra-tribal political authority, the tribal unity could be challenged by the rising clans, opposing the central power with their «matrilineal» relationship, mainly because of the kinship-structure — and hence: a strong patrilineality — of the nomadic ruling groups, enlargeable only through marriage, i.e. by women, related to their original clan too, in this way securing intertribal mobility and

[17] As indirect evidence of the basically tribal structure of the Turk Empire, see the method of taxation: the tax was requested or robbed by war from the «tribes», «peoples» as a whole, characterized by the size of their army, e.g. in 605 (*Ta-yeh* period, 1st year), cf. SS, LXXXIV and PS, IC, 鐵勒傳 *T'ieh-lê chuan*.

a natural possibility for a wider integration. Nevertheless, because of the unchanged character of the economy, in the empire of the Türks — as in other nomadic empires — weapon-made political integration protected and secured the life-conditions of the nomadic-pastoral tribal segmentation and its kinship-based regenerative dynamics — until the time when this became impossible, in consequence of the history of non-nomads.

Now, when discussing over this evidence concerning the social organism of the Türks from a wider, theoretical—ethnological viewpoint, mainly in respect of the research in the field of «tribe» and «tribal society», it seems reasonable to be less pessimistic than those who consider the problem too rigidly (although, no doubt, non-considered usage of these terms may be much more dangerous).

On one hand, in the case of a multi-factorial and, if possible, detailed analysis, the term «tribe», when used consistently and with an eye to eventual specific traits, cannot impede researches to characterize a society adequately. On the other hand, the term «tribal society» also may be useful and harmless, if a historical phase is meant by it, but without an expectation of finding everywhere an extrapolated cluster of «tribal traits» or final and unchanging social formations. It seems reasonable to decide occasionally, on the basis of the given data, what social form can be named in a certain sphere by the term «tribe», intended to designate a whole society (or a potential society), but also admitting social formations of other size and type in the same sphere (e.g. political, economical, religious communities, secret societies etc.). Finally, the success of the investigation may also depend on the fact whether the subject of our research, *i.e.* the tribal society in question is analysed on the basis of the factors significant enough to describe its specific traits and the eventual general consequences as well. (Cf. the case of the nomads: the dominant factors of their economy proved to be suitable for this purpose.)

Last but not least, it seems obvious upon the evidence of nomadic societies, that the term «tribal society» may be suitable for a pre-state historical phase which, however, did not necessarily consist (or at least not constantly) of communities organized — economically, politically etc. — as tribes, at least in the whole course of their historical past, but perhaps not even in their isolated, obsolete form in modern times.