МОНГОЛ УЛСЫН ИХ СУРГУУЛЬ
МОНГОЛ ХЭЛ СОЁЛЫН СУРГУУЛЬ
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Том. XXIX (300) 2008 97-100

# ON A PHRASE OF *THE SECRET HISTORY OF MONGOLS* IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

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*The Secret History of the Mongols* is the first literary and significant work of Mongolian culture. It was written for the royal Mongol family some time after Genghis Khan's death in 1227 AD by an anonymous author and probably originally in the Uyghur script, though the surviving manuscripts all derive from a Chinese transliteration and translation of the 14th century.

*The Secret History of the Mongols* has been translated into twenty two languages including Mongolian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Kalmyk, Buriat, Kazakh, Touvinian, Uighur, Turkish, Persian, Marathi /Indian/, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Russian, English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. About 160 editions have been published in twenty eight countries. The first western to discover *The Secret History of the Mongols* and offer a translation from the Chinese glossary was the Russian sinologist Palladiy Kafarov. In 1952 a brief English translation was made by Kwei Wei Sung in *Medieval India Quarterly* and later in 1957 he compiled it as a book. The first full translation into English was by Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols: For the First Time Done into English out of the Original Tongue and Provided with an Exegetical Commentary* in 1982. Between 1971 and 1985, Igor de Rachewiltz published his translation in eleven volumes in the series *Papers on Far Eastern History* accompanied by extensive footnotes commenting not only on the translation but also various aspects of Mongolian culture and in 2004 he compiled it as two volumes. Paul Kahn /1984/, Urgunguu Onon /2001/ and N.Dorjgotov and Z.Erendo /2006/ published their translations.

There are numerous expressions and phrases, which are too complicated to translate. In this article we compare the expression /§167/ in Mongolian and foreign scholars' translations which is as follows:

… caqa'an-a saca'asu
qara-da qaqa'asu …
Хадмал: …白行搶著呵黑行噎著行...

Mongolian scholars transliterated and explained this expression in different ways like:

'čaγaan-a sačaasu qara-da qaqaasu' by T. Dashtseden[1];

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‘čaγan idegen-dű janggiraju

qar-a miqan-du qaqabasu’ which means ‘choke with dairy product and block up meat and oil’ by Mansan[2];

‘čaγan-a sačabasu

qar-a-da qaqabasu’ means ‘when drink milk and choke when eat meat’ by Eldentei Ardajav[3];

čaγan-a sačabasu

qara-da qaqabasu’ by Irinchin[4];

Hu. Dorba[5] considered that this expression means ‘to die’ in his translation.

čaγan-a sačabasu

qar-a-da qaqabasu’ by Sh.Gaadamba[6];

Prof.Yondon[7] clarified in his article that “Most scholars contemplated this expression as ‘to become old’ which based on the Chinese glossary; but this Chinese word ‘to become old’ sometimes means ‘to die’. It’s explained in the Kafarov’s translation, unfortunately future scholars did not keep their mind on it”. Also he made clear explanations that this expression exactly means ‘to pass away’.

‘čaγan-a sačabasu

qara-da qaqabasu’ explained ‘pass away’ by D. Tserensodnom[8];

Prof. Sh.Choimaa[9] explained this expression ‘becoming old and passing away as nobleman’

D.Purevdorj[10] considered that “It’s clear that ‘white’ is dairy product (kumis, milk) and black is meat. So ‘choke on dairy products and gag on meat’ means to become old and die”.

Now let us see the English translations.

1. …Will choke
   On the ‘white’
   Will gag

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[1] Т.Дашцэдэн (1985) Монголын Нууц Товчоо, CSM, t XXI:1 Уб, 97 тал

[2] Mansang (1985) Sine-e-ber orčiγulju tayilburilaγsan mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan, Kőke qota, 164 тал

[3] Eldengdei, Ardajab (1986) Mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan-u seyiregűlűl tayilburi, Kőke qota, 482 тал

[4] Yekemingγsan Irinčin (1987) Mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan, Kőke qota, 138 тал

[5] Kű. Dorba (1987) Mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan, Šinžiyang-giyin aradiyin keblel-yin xoro, 117 тал

[6] Ča.Гadamba (1990) Mongγol-un niγuča tobčiyan-u seyiregűlűl eke, tayilburi , Уб, 92 тал

[7] D.Yondon (1992) “Some complicated words of the Secret History of Mongols”, Korea-Mongol Joint Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 316-324 pp

[8] Д.Цэрэнсодном (1993) Монголын Нууц Товчооны орчуулга тайлбар, Хөх хот, 128 тал

9 Ш.Чоймаа (2006) “Монголын түүхэн сурвалж бичгийн цуврал” 1, Уб, 104 тал

[10] Д.Пүрэвдорж (2006) Монгол Улсын Нууц Товчооны шинэ орчуулга тайлбар, Уб, 238-239 тал

[11] F.W.Cleaves (1982) The Secret History of the Mongols, Harvard University Press, 91 pp

On the 'black'… F.W.Cleaves[11]

On the footnote it's explained: "Will choke on liquid food (principally milk products), and will gag on solid food (principally meat).

2. … when you're so old you choke on white milk,
so feeble you gag on black meat… Paul Khan[12]

3. … when you choke on the white,
when you gag on the black… Urgunge Onon[13]

It's explained on the footnote: The 'white' refers to milk and to liquids generally, the 'black' to meat and solids. … Some Mongol scholars have suggested that *sacha'as*, 'if you choke', and *qaqahu*, 'if you gag', also meant 'die' in old Mongolian.

4. … Choke on the white milk
and are stifled by the black meat … Igor de Rachewiltz[14]

He explained that: 'Will have reached the age when men choke on the white milk, and are stifled by the black meat'…The 'white' foods comprise milk, milk products such as kumis, and liquid food in general; and the 'black (*qara*) ones are meat and solid foods.

5. … emit your last breath
As you got stuck a curdle in your windpipe or
You got stuck a lump of meat in your throat …N.Dorjgotov and Z.Erendo[15]

Using his own transliteration approach F.W.Cleaves and Igor de Rachewiltz explained that white comprises milk products and liquids and black as meat and solid foods. Paul Khan didn't explain any word. But the translated descriptions do not wholly represent the meaning of the expression and the Mongolian way of thinking. This expression is an idiom. For Mongolian translators, we would like to mention here that it would be better if they explained this expression by footnote. As principle of translation approach using footnote is the best way to explain the words, phrases, idioms etc.

This caqa'an-a saca'asu qara-da qaqa'asu expresses the death. Mongolians symbolize their food by black, white, red, yellow and blue colors. Passing away is represented by white and black in this expression. Mongolians consider that water and vodka are as black food and dairy products are as white one. There are many words, and phrases, which express if someone passed away. This expression of the *Secret History of Mongols* is an example of periphrases. Because the meaning of the expression connects to food but the hidden meaning is dying or passing away. So direct meaning of this expression is 'to choke with dairy or meat' and an indirect or connotative meaning is 'to pass away'.

Analyzing above the explanations and translations we have suggestion of how this expression translates:

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[12] Paul Kahn (1984)'The Secret History of the Mongols', North Point Press, 80 pp
[13] Urgunge Onon (2001) 'The Secret History of the Mongols', London, 138 pp.
[14] Igor de Rachewiltz (2004)'The Secret History of the Mongols', BRILL, 86 pp.
[15] N.Dorjgotov, Z.Erendo (2006) 'The Secret History of the Mongols', UB, 98 pp

‘Pass away caused by choking while eating dairy products or stifling while eating meat’.


**Summary**

Монголын Нууц Товчооны 167-р зүйлийн “цагаанд цацваас хард хахваас” хэмээх хэлцийн англи орчуулгуудыг харьцуулан үзэхийг оролдлоо. Эл хэлцийн “цагаан, хар” гэсэн үгийг шууд “white, black” гэж шууд орчуулсан ба цагаан нь цагаан идээ буюу шингэн хоол, хар нь мах буюу хуурай хоол хэмээн зүүлтээр тайлбарлажээ. Гэвч хэлцийн ил утга нь идээ ундаатай холбоотой боловч цаад утга нь насан егүүтэх, мөнх бусыг үзүүлэх гэсэн санаа бөгөөд монгол хүний сэтгэхүйн онцлог цаашлаад өвөрмөц хэлцийг үгчилж орчуулсан нь учир дутагдалтай санагдлаа.


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9. Монголын Нууц Товчоон (2005), Сонгомол эх, Уб, 66 тал.
10. Urgunge Onon (2001) ‘The Secret History of the Mongols’, London, 138 pp.
11. Paul Kahn (1984)‘The Secret History of the Mongols’, North Point Press, 80 pp.
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16. D.Yondon (1992) “Some complicated words of the Secret History of Mongols”, Korea-Mongol Joint Studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, 316-324 pp.