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**Oirat (Western Mongolian) Buddhist terminology based
on the 17th century *Cuxula kereqtü* by Zaya Paṇḍita
Nam mkha'i rgya mtsho (1599–1662)**

Abstract

The paper shares some information about Buddhist terminology in Oirat, the Western Mongolian language. Among the Oirat translations of Zaya Paṇḍita Nam mkha'i rgya mtsho (1599–1662) there is the *Üzeqser tusatai cuxula kereqtü kemekü* (in short *Cuxula kereqtü*). Written most probably in 1650–51, this text has been compared by scholars to the Classical Mongolian work *Čiqula kereglegči* by Širegetü güüsi čorji from the 16th century.

The last chapter of the Oirat *Cuxula kereqtü*, a glossary of Buddhist terms differs from the Mongolian version *Čiqula kereglegči* considerably. The Oirat work includes the titles of over forty Tibetan sources quoted by Zaya Paṇḍita, which were not mentioned by Širegetü güüsi čorji.

In the present paper the comparison is made between Buddhist terms in Classical Mongolian and Oirat language. The results support the hypothesis that both scholars used Tibetan original(s) for their Mongolian works.

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Studying Mongolian Buddhist terminology is a philological task, which is interesting not only for scholars. In the nineties of the 20th century, Buddhism again started to play very important ideological role, with the revival of Buddhism among Mongols in Khalkha Mongolia, Buryatia and Kalmykia. Eradicated in those regions in the thirties of the 20th century Buddhism today has appeared once again in rebuilt monasteries and in everyday religious practices of the Mongols. Buddhist concepts are explained, rethought, translated

and reformulated. Understanding of Buddhist terms in the native language becomes crucial for the studying of Buddhist principles. In the past, during the second wave of Buddhist proselytization in Mongolia in the 16th–17th centuries Buddhist scriptures were translated from Tibetan into Mongolian language. The Mongolian Buddhist terminology from the time of the first Buddhist conversion in the 13th century was revised and a full Buddhist vocabulary was developed. It is however difficult to speak about a generally agreed standard for Buddhist terms in Mongolian. For example the vocabulary used by Širegetü güüsi čorji in the 16th century and the translation of terms in the Mongolian version of the *Mahāvvyutpatti* dictionary (in short: Mvy)¹ in the 18th century differ considerably. In the 18th century the Tibetan language served as a universal tool (similar to Latin in medieval Europe) for all scholars of the Tibetan Buddhist world and Mongols therefore preferred to compose their religious commentaries in Tibetan. Mongolian Buddhist terminology was no longer used or understood.

Today, with the third wave of Buddhist dissemination among Mongols, Mongolian language(s) again become crucial for explaining forgotten Buddhist notions. Many translations of Buddhist texts from different languages (Tibetan, English and Classical Mongolian) are made and different Mongolian Buddhist terms from different periods are used. In such circumstances research on the Mongolian Buddhist terminology is a desideratum and it may help contemporary Mongols to better understand Buddhist notions. This paper is hoped to share some information about Buddhist terminology in Oirat, the Western Mongolian language.

The Oirat Buddhist vocabulary was developed in process of translating Buddhist texts from Tibetan starting from the 17th century. Zaya Paṇḍita Nam mkha'i rgya mtsho (1599–1662) is the well known Oirat Mongolian translator of Buddhist scriptures. Over 200 translations from Tibetan into Classical Mongolian and Oirat (Western Mongolian) are attributed to him. The time of his zealous missionary activity among Oirat Mongols marked the beginning of the second phase of Buddhist propagation in Mongolia. One of his achievements was the invention of the so called “Clear Script” (*tod üseg*) in 1648. Thanks to a system of diacritical signs this script eliminates the shortcomings of the polyphonic Mongolian-Uigur script. The development of the script divides Zaya Paṇḍita's activity into translations written before the composition of the script, in Classical Mongolian, and after, in the Oirat language.

Among the Oirat translations of Zaya Paṇḍita there is the *Üzegser tusatai cuxula kereqtü* (in short *Cuxula kereqtü*). Written most probably in 1650–51² this text has been compared by scholars³ to the Classical Mongolian work *Čiqula kereglečī* by Širegetü

¹ Y. Ishihama and Y. Fukuda, *A New Critical Edition of the Mahāvvyutpatti. Sanskrit-Tibetan-Mongolian, Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, Materials for Tibetan-Mongolian Dictionaries, Vol. 1, The Toyo Bunko, 1989; *Mahāvvyutpatti*, ed. by R. Sakaki, Kyoto, 1916–1925.

² S. Luvsanvandan, *Oiradyn Zaya bandidyn orchuulgyn tukhai medee*, in “Khel zokhiol sudlal”, Tömus VI, Fasc. 1-3, Ulaanbaatar 1968, p. 133.

³ V.L. Uspensky, *Some rare Oirat Manuscripts in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Library*, in: *Aspects of Buddhism. Proceedings of the International Seminar on Buddhist Studies, Liw, 25 June 1994*, Oriental Institute.

güüsi čorji, the famous translator of Buddhist scriptures in the 16th century⁴. Being a manual of Buddhism *Čiqula kereglegči* offers a detailed cosmological description of the Buddhist World. Thanks to this it served as basis for spreading new, Buddhist ideology and was used as a source by Mongolian historiographers, such as Sayang Sečen in his *Erdeni-yin tobči* in 1662. The Tibetan original of the Mongolian *Čiqula kereglegči* has not been found, though large parts of the text seemed to be translations of the Tibetan Abhidharmic treatise *Shes bya rab tu gsal ba*⁵. This was composed in 1278 by 'Phags pa bla ma Blo gros rgyal mtshan for the Mongolian prince Čingim (Jingim 1243–85), the elder son of Qubilai Khan, the founder of the Yuan dynasty in China⁶.

Two manuscripts of the Oirat *Cuxula keregtü* were compared for the present study: one from Ulan Bator (main text)⁷ and one from St. Petersburg (used as complimentary copy)⁸.

Similarly to the Classical Mongolian *Čiqula kereglegči*, the Oirat *Cuxula keregtü* can be divided into three main parts. The last one (Ulan Bator ff. 72b5–110b15) contains a glossary of Buddhist terms⁹. This part differs from the Mongolian version of *Širegetü güüsi čorji* considerably. The Oirat work includes the titles of over forty Tibetan sources quoted by Zaya Paṇḍita, which were not mentioned by *Širegetü güüsi čorji*. Among these sources there are: *Sūtrālamkāra*, *Ratnāvali*, *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra*, *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra*, *Hevajra-tantra*, *Vajrajñānasamuccaya-nāma-tantra*, *Kālacakra* and other Buddhist texts and commentaries.

Warsaw University, Warszawa, "Studia Indologiczne", no. 4, 1997, pp. 196–7. On the *Cuxula keregtü* see: Č. Damdinsürüng, *Mongyol uran jokiya-un degeji jayun bilig orosibai*, Ulaanbaatur, 1959. p. 328, no. 40; S. Luvsanvandan, op. cit., pp. 132–133.

⁴ W. Heissig, *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen*, Asiatische Forschungen, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1959, pp. 26–34, facsimile of the manuscript pp. 28–83. This manuscript was used for the present study.

⁵ On the relationship between the *Shes bya rab tu gsal ba*, the *Čiqula kereglegči* and the Oirat *Cuxula keregtü* see A. Bareja-Starzyńska, *A Brief Study of the Mongolian Transmission of the Buddhist Treatise Šes bya rab gsal' by 'Phags pa bla ma Blo gros rgyal mtshan*, w: *Tractata Tibetica et Mongolica. Festschrift für Klaus Sagaster zum 65. Geburtstag*, Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz und Christien Peter (ed.), Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2002, pp. 13–20. About differences in depicting Tibetan history see *Tibetan History in the Mongolian Sources: the Oirat 'Cuxula keregtü'. A Preliminary Study* to be published in the Proceedings of the VIIIth International Seminar on Tibetan Studies in Bloomington, 1998. Polish translation of the *Čiqula kereglegči* by A. Bareja-Starzyńska, forthcoming.

⁶ It was translated into Mongolian in the 13th century. The 18th century copy entitled *Medegdegün-i belgetey-e geyigülügči* has been found and studied by V.L. Uspensky (forthcoming). I am very thankful to V.L. Uspensky for making the manuscript of his study available to me.

⁷ It is kept in the State Library in w Ulan Bator, No 8318/96, 294 Y-741, Chinese paper, ff. 114 11 x 39,5 cm. Colophon f. 114r14–114v21.

⁸ See V.L. Uspensky, *Some rare Oirat Manuscripts in the Collection of the St. Petersburg University Library in: Aspects of Buddhism. Proceedings of the International Seminar on Buddhist Studies, Liw, 25 June 1994*, ed. by Agata Bareja-Starzyńska and Marek Mejer, Oriental Institute, Warsaw University, Warszawa, "Studia Indologiczne", no. 4, 1997, pp. 195–202.

⁹ The glossary was fully transliterated and a critical edition based on two manuscripts, from Ulan Bator and from St. Petersburg was prepared, forthcoming.

Leaving apart for a while the question as to whether both treatises, Classical Mongolian *Čiqula kereglegči* and the Oirat *Cuxula kereqtü* were based on the same Tibetan original, it is worth examining the Oirat terminology used by Zaya Paṇḍita.

Each Buddhist term that occurs both in the Classical and Oirat versions was examined and, if possible, identified with its Tibetan and Sanskrit equivalents. Four hundred and three Buddhist terms included in the third part of the *Čiqula kereglegči* were compared with those in the Oirat *Cuxula kereqtü* and it has been established that one hundred eighty eight of them were translated in a different way.

In many cases Zaya Paṇḍita's translations follow the Tibetan syntax, in which the adjectives and numerals come after a noun. This is an interesting feature of the Oirat *Cuxula kereqtü* and may prove the Tibetan origin of Zaya Paṇḍita's sources.

For example:

'four fearlessness' – Oirat: [103a20-21] *ülü ayouxu dörbön*
 Mongolian: [51v22] *dörben ayul ügei*
 Tibetan: *mi 'jigs pa bzhi* Mvy 130-134, 781-785
 Sanskrit: *vaiśāradya*

or:

'special knowledge' – Oirat: [103a32] *öbörö sayitur uxaxui dörbön*
 Mongolian: [52r5-6] *dörben öbere öbere üneker uqaqui*
 Tibetan: *so so yang dag par rig pa bzhi* Mvy 196
 Sanskrit: *pratisaṁvid*

In these two examples: *ülü ayouxu dörbön* and *öbörö sayitur uxaxui dörbön* the Oirat terms are modelled after the Tibetan terms and even numerals appear at the end of the terms similarly to the Tibetan: *mi 'jigs pa bzhi* and *so so yang dag par rig pa bzhi*, respectively. In Širegetü güüsi čorji's translation and the Mongolian version of the *Mahāvvyutpatti* Mongolian terms occur with numerals at the beginning of each term, according to the Mongolian syntax.

Another example showing independent translation of Zaya Paṇḍita, not following Classical Mongolian vocabulary of Širegetü güüsi čorji are terms describing twelve elements of chain of dependent origination (in Sanskrit *pratīyasamutpāda*, Tibetan: *rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'i yan lag bcu gnyis*), which Širegetü güüsi čorji translated into Mongolian as *arban qoyar sütün barilduysan* [52v8]. Some of the elements are translated quite similarly, for example the whole term *pratīyasamutpāda* in Oirat is: *arban xoyor sütün barilduxui* [104a20-21]. Some elements of this term are translated exactly in the same way by both authors, for example Sanskrit term *upādāna* 'grasping' as Oirat *abxui* and Mongolian: *abqui*, Sanskrit term *jāti* 'birth' as Oirat *törökü* and Mongolian *töröküi* or Sanskrit term *jarāmaraṇa* 'aging and death' as Oirat: *ötölkü ükükü* and Mongolian: *ötelküi üküküi*.

However, several terms are rendered differently. In all such cases Zaya Paṇḍita's translations follow closely Tibetan versions. For example: Sanskrit *avidyā*, Tibetan: *ma rig pa* – 'ignorance' is translated in Oirat as *ese uxagsan*. In this case the Tibetan term was understood as combination of a negative particle *ma*, which is rendered in Oirat as *ese*,

and verbal form *rig pa*, treated by Zaya Paṇḍita as perfectum, because translated in Oirat by nomen perfecti < *uxa-*, *uxasan*. This term is translated in Classical Mongolian differently, as *mungay* ‘stupid’, ‘ignorant’.

To give another example: Sanskrit *bhava*, Tibetan *sriḍ pa* ‘to exist’ is translated into Oirat as *boxui*, nomen futuri < *bol-* – ‘to be, to exist, to become’. Again Zaya Paṇḍita treats the Tibetan form as a verb, while the Classical Mongolian term *sansar* corresponds to the ‘wheel of existence’, in Sanskrit *saṃsāra*. Two Mongolian versions of the *Mahāvīyutpatti* 2251 offer different translations: a version from St. Petersburg *bolqui*, similarly to Zaya Paṇḍita, while in the Tanjur version of the dictionary it is translated as *sansar*, same as Širegetü güüsi čorji.

Below the twelve elements of chain of dependent origination are fully presented:

Oirat *arban xoyor šütün barilduxui* [104a20-21]

1. ‘Ignorance’
Oirat: *ese uxaqsan* [104a22]
Mongolian: *mungay* [52v8]
Tibetan: *ma rig pa* Mvy 2242
Sanskrit: *avidyā*
2. ‘disposition’
Oirat: *xurān üyiledküi* [104a22]
Mongolian: *üiledküi* [52v8]
Tibetan: *’du byed* Mvy 2243
Sanskrit: *saṃskāra*
3. ‘consciousness’
Oirat: *teyin medeküi* [104a23]
Mongolian: *medeküi* [52v9]
Tibetan: *mam par shes pa* Mvy 2244
Sanskrit: *viññāna*
4. ‘name and form’
Oirat: *nere kigēd dürsün* [104a23]
Mongolian: *nere öngge* [52v9]
Tibetan: *ming dang gzugs* Mvy 2245
Sanskrit: *nāmarūpa*
5. ‘six bases (of cognition)’
Oirat: *zuryān törön tügeküi* [104a24]
Mongolian: *jiryuyan törölki* [52v9]
Tibetan: *skye mched drug* Mvy 2246
Sanskrit: *ṣaḍāyatana*
6. ‘contact’
Oirat: *kürgeküi* [104a24]
Mongolian: *kürteküi* [52v9]
Tibetan: *reg pa* Mvy 2247
Sanskrit: *sparsa*

7. 'feeling'

Oirat: *medereküi* [104a25]Mongolian: *seriküi* [52v10]Tibetan: *tshor ba* Mv 2248Sanskrit: *vedanā*

8. 'desire'

Oirat: *baxa* [104a25]Mongolian: *quričaqui* [(52v10)]Tibetan: *sred pa* Mvy 2249Sanskrit: *trṣṇā*

9. 'grasping'

Oirat: *abxui* [104a25]Mongolian: *abqui* [52v10]Tibetan: *len pa* Mvy 2250Sanskrit: *upādāna*

10. 'existence'

Oirat: *bolxui* [104x25]Mongolian: *sansar* [52v10]Tibetan: *srid pa* Mvy 2251Sanskrit: *bhava*

11. 'birth'

Oirat: *törökü* [104a26]Mongolian: *töröküi* [52v10]Tibetan: *skye ba* Mvy 2252Sanskrit: *jāti*

12. 'aging and death'

Oirat: *ötölkü ükükü* [104a26]Mongolian: *ötelküi üküküi* [52v10]Tibetan: *rga shi* Mv 2253Sanskrit: *jarāmaraṇa*

Referring back to the problem of the original sources of the Classical Mongolian *Čiqula keregleči* and Oirat *Cuxula kereqtü* and their relationship it may be proposed that both authors used the manual of Buddhism which could have been written in Tibetan, however Zaya Paṇḍita broadened his version with many other sources.