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MONGOLIAN
IN TIBETAN SCRIPT

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The literary language of the Mongols rests on an unbroken tradition leading back to the days of Chinggis Khan, and has increased rather than decreased in importance and vitality during the last three or four hundred years. This is all the more remarkable since it has never received much encouragement from the lamaist monasteries and temple-schools, which from the beginning of the 17th century have been the official centres of the spiritual life of the Mongols. The initiative in favour of the native language has lain with the progressive and national minded princes of Inner Mongolia¹, though it must not be forgotten that in Chakhar and probably also other parts of Mongolia the official administrative language of the chancelleries remained Manchu till well into this century. In all Mongolian temples with a few notable exceptions all ceremonies and services are conducted in Tibetan and all theological studies are based on Tibetan texts. The considerable output of printed Mongolian translations of the sacred Tibetan works was due to a demand created by an indigenous literary tradition which led its own life beyond the pale of the Lamaist Church in the movable camps of the princes and commoners. The position of Tibetan in Mongolia can on the whole be compared to that of Latin in Western Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages.

So it is not surprising that numerous Mongolian lamas, though

¹ See Walther Heissig: *Das mongolische Publikations- und Uebersetzungswesen der Mandju-Zeit*. *Sinologica* III, 1953, pp. 208 sqq.

fully conversant with Tibetan, are unable to read and write their own language. When such lamas want to express themselves in Mongolian, they fall back upon the only script they have learnt to master, viz. the Tibetan. I have often seen Mongolian lamas jot down Tibetan notes which on closer inspection proved to be plain Mongolian masquerading as the sacred language.

This practice is so widespread that a tolerably stable norm has apparently evolved. Its main features may be summarized as follows. As might be expected, the Mongolian tenues *č* and *t*, which are aspirated, are represented by the Tibetan aspirates *č'* and *t'*, while the Mongolian mediæ *ǰ*, *d* and *b*, which are not fully voiced, are mostly felt to be equivalent to Tibetan *č*, *t* and *p*. Mongolian *γ* and *g*, whether occlusive or fricative, are so unmistakably voiced that it is natural to find them consistently written *g*. *q* and *k* are both rendered as *h* in conformance with actual present-day pronunciation. Owing to peculiarities of Tibetan phonology *z* occurs irregularly for initial *s*. The remaining consonants are transcribed mechanically.

While the consonants are thus rendered quite satisfactorily, the Mongolian vowel-system raises some problems, which have been only partially solved. The three Mongolian vowels *u*, *ö* and *ü* are lumped together as *u*, a procedure for which some justification can be found in the retracted articulation of *ö* and *ü*. An initial vowel is introduced by the 'a-č'un, but otherwise this sign is as far as possible avoided, which explains such spellings as *bla-ma-nar-run* for *bla-manar-un*, or *hil-par-ri* for *kilbar-i* etc. In diphthongs the use of 'a-č'un was circumvented by resorting to the spellings *as* (= *ai*), *os* (= *oi* and *ui*) and *us* (= *üi*) and trusting to the reader to adopt the modern Tibetan pronunciation of those syllables. Unfortunately a final consonant cannot be written after such a diphthong, and recourse must be had to emergency measures. This explains *sas-'n* for *sain* (with a reintroduced 'a-č'un to indicate that there is no vowel after the *n*) or *čus-le* for *čüil* (with an entirely unphonetic final *e*, probably on the analogy of *üile*).

The above remarks will now be illustrated by a transcription of two brief Mongolian texts, each containing virtually the same Mon-

golian wording in two parallel versions, first in ordinary Mongolian characters and afterwards in Tibetan script. They are both advertisements from North China firms trading with the Mongols of Inner Mongolia. The fact that tradesmen find it expedient to address their Mongolian lama customers in Tibetan script speaks for itself.

I

The first text is the legend of two enamelled signboards from a Chinese carpet-maker's shop, approximately 75 cm high and 50 cm broad. They were exactly alike and had, evidently adorned either side of the entrance to a shop. They were offered for sale in Kalgan in the spring of 1939, and though no bargain was concluded, I was able to secure a photograph of one of them, from which the text given below has been transcribed.

The left half contains two vertical lines of Mongolian writing, and to the right the same text is repeated in Tibetan characters, filling ten horizontal lines. The whole is surrounded by a narrow ornamental border and set in a wooden frame with a metal handle or loop at the top. The Mongolian text is influenced by Manchu orthography, as is so often the case in South Mongolia. All *e*'s and *u*'s are dotted, in *yayuma* the long Manchu *u* (*wy*) occurs, and the Chinese word *pusi* is written entirely in Manchu letters. The Tibetan version is in ordinary book-characters (dbu-čan).

Mongolian script: *Manu pusin-u ner-e ji čang yung* (.) *Manu*

Tibetan script: *Ma-nu p'u-ze-nu ne-re ji č'an yun* (.) *Ma-nu*

öber-e-'in kigsen olan jüil büri öngge büri-'in kebesen

'u-per-yen hig-sen 'o-lun čus-le pu-ri 'ün-ge pu-ri-'in hi-pe-sen-nu

yayum-a narin büdülüge čöm baimui.

ya-ga-ma na-rin pu-tu-lug čum pu-rin-ne pas-mos.

»The name of our shop is Chi Ch'ang Yung. Carpet-wares manufactured by ourselves in all kinds and colours, fine and coarse, are all in stock.»

As will be seen, the Tibetan text follows the Mongolian version with only slight variations. *kebesen yayuma* has become a genitive group, and before the last word *bürine* has been inserted. Neither alteration affects the meaning.

II

The second specimen is an advertisement from the Mongolian printing-house of the Sung Chu Ssu in Peking. It is, or was, situated in a northern extension of the temple, separated from it by a narrow alley. (There is a notice of the establishment and some pictures by G. Montell in Sven Hedin: *History of the Expedition in Asia 1927—1935*, vol. IV, Stockholm 1945, p. 441 and pl. 30). When I ordered some books at the establishment in 1939, they were delivered wrapped up in thin Chinese paper with the advertisement printed on it by means of a carved printing-block, 27 cm broad and 31 cm high.

Across the top of the print is the name of the firm transcribed into Tibetan and Mongolian letters: *t'en č'in ho'u — t'iyen čing qau*, i.e. t'ien ch'ing hao »the Heavenly Pure Establishment» (Giles 11208—2188—3884). The full name and address is given at the bottom in Chinese as Pei-p'ing Sung-chu-ssu hou-shen t'ien-ch'ing-ching-chū »the shop of heavenly pure canonical works in the northern quarter of the Sung Chu Ssu in Peiping» (Giles 8771—9310—10458—2597—10295—4025—9813—11208—2188—2122—2955).

The bulk of the print consists of three columns of text, to the left Tibetan in Tibetan cursive script, in the middle four vertical lines of Mongolian in Mongolian script, and to the right the same Mongolian text once more, this time in Tibetan book-characters, distributed on twelve horizontal lines and accompanied by the following explanation in cursive Tibetan, inserted probably for the benefit of puzzled Tibetans: *'di ni sog-po skad yin-no* »This is Mon-

golian language». Only the second and third column will be discussed here.

The first Mongolian text is in normal Mongolian orthography with Manchu characters only for the Chinese words (*sung ju si, pusi*). The two Mongolian texts run as follows:

Mongolian script: *Begjīng-ün sung ju si-'in qoitu bei-e dü baiqu*

Tibetan script: *Pe-č'ii zuñ ju se-nu hos-t'as pas-hu*

man-u ene nom-un pusin-dur yeke kölge ba, ündüsü,

t'en č'ii ho'u he-me-hu no-mun p'u-se-tur ye-he hul-ge 'un-du-su

mör, namtar basa blam-a-nar-un jokiyal suryal-un qamiyatai

mur rnam-t'ar ba-sa bla-ma-nar-run čo-hi-yag-san zur-gal-lun ha-ma-t'as

sudur-un keb bürin-e bui.

üsüg todorqai, čayasu sain,

su-dar-run heb č'um bu-rin pos.

'u-sug t'o-tor-has č'a-su sas-'n

ün-e kilbar-i sanayulbai.

'une hil-bar-ri 'o-lun-du sa-nul-mos.

»In our shop of sacred books [Tib.: In the shop of sacred books called t'ien č'ing hao] situated in the north [Mong. adds: quarter] of the Sung Chu Ssu in Peking are all the printing-blocks for books pertaining to Mahāyāna, Tantra, Lam-rim, biography and furthermore didactic works composed by lamas. We call the attention [Tib. adds: of the public] to the fact that the type is clear, the paper good and the price reasonable.»

The two texts vary in many details, among which *č'ohiyagsan* (= *jokiyagsan*) and *sanulmos* (= *sanayulmu*) of the Tibetan version appear to be real improvements on the probably faulty *jokiyal* and *sanayulbai* of the Mongolian column.

The Tibetan texts are interesting in that they do not aim at mechanically transliterating the Mongolian orthography, but rather reflect the traditional pronunciation of literary Mongolian with its mixture of literary and colloquial forms. The representation of *q*

and *k* by *h* has already been pointed out. There is a characteristic uncertainty in the rendering of short vowels outside of the first syllable, mostly, though not necessarily, favouring labial attraction: 'olun for *olan*, *yagama* for *yayuma*; *sudar* for *sudur*. The long vowels of modern Mongolian, which in the written language correspond to two vowels with an intermediate *g*, *γ*, *b* or *m*, are mostly noted as simple vowels: *sanul-* (i.e. *sanūl-*) *sanayul-*, *ĕasu* (i.e. *ĕās*) *ĕayasu*, *hamat'as* (i.e. *ĥamātĕ*) *qamiyatai*. Similarly *putulug* is a faithful rendering of modern *būdūlg*, for which the Mongolian text had already paved the way through its faulty *būdūluge* instead of the correct *būdügülig*. Among other points of interest the following may be noted. *host'as* reveals the pronunciation *ĥoitĕ*, *ĥoitō*. *hipesen* is a better representation of Chakhar *ĥĕwəsən* than *kebesen*, which is in itself a compromise between the latter form and the literary *kebis*. Another compromise is the genitive *zun ĵu se-nu*, which is a half-hearted approximation to the colloquial genitive in *-nĕ*.

The two unpretentious inscriptions edited above represent only a modest by-way of Mongolian literature and one which will probably always remain a blind alley. Still there is little doubt that the Tibetan collections of Europe and America will be found to contain further specimens among unidentified or defective manuscript-leaves. We shall be grateful to our colleagues in the Tibetan field for making such finds public.