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Turkic or Proto-Mongolian?
A Note on the Tuoba Language

By

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(Ottawa)

To the memory of Baron Peter Alexis Boodberg, author of *Hu T'ien Han Yüeh Fang Chu* and "The Language of the T'o-Pa Wei".

Introduction

The Tuoba 拓跋 or Tabγach as recorded in the Orkhon inscriptions, played a critical role in the history of China, not only for founding the Northern (or Late) Wei dynasty (386-534), but perhaps more importantly also for having procreated two political and biological heirs, namely the Sui (581-618) and the Tang (618-907). A fresh example of the Tuoba's long-lasting influence is the legend on which the recent Disney cartoon *Mulan* is based. This fascinating story is but a typical Tuoba legacy, with the very name Mulan coming from the Tuoba Xianbei 鮮卑 onomasticon.[1]

The linguistic affinity of this important group, however, has remained to this day an enigma. Most scholars agree that the Tuoba language belonged to the Altaic family.[2] But controversy and contention arise with the simple question: Were the Tuoba Turkic or Proto-Mongolian?

There are prominent names among the proponents of either of the two rival claims. For proponents of the Turkic theory, one can cite Paul Pelliot,[3] Peter Boodberg (1936:185), Sir Gerad Clauson (1962: 37, 39-

1 Mulan 木蘭 (Middle Chinese pronunciation *muk-lân*) is almost certainly a variant of the Tuoba tribe name Pulan 僕蘭 (*b'uk-lân* or *b'uok-lân*). Both were attested as (male) personal names too. See Chen (1999).
2 Read, for example, Denis Sinor (1963: 224).
3 Pelliot's opinion on this was most forcefully conveyed in Barthold (1935: 25) (French translation pp.18-19).

40), among others.[4] The list of proponents of the opposite Proto-Mongolian theory includes Louis Ligeti (1970) and Karl Menges (1968: 17).[5] Perhaps encouraged by the archaeological discovery in 1980 in the Xing'an 興安 Mountains of a cavern once occupied by the Tuoba's ancestors,[6] the Mongolian theory seem to have been gaining momentum lately.[7]

The primary reason for this controversy is the scarcity of relevant linguistic data. The secondary reasons are twofold. First there was evidence for both Turkic and proto-Mongolian elements in the Tuoba federation, as can be expected of most steppe empires. The other factor is that the Tuoba is usually regarded as having formed part of the Xianbei complex or conglomerate, which was generally considered, with good evidence, as largely Proto-Mongolian.[8] Ligeti's quoted study, for instance, suffers from a failure to carefully differentiate the Tuoba data from that of the Xianbei in general.[9]

Given time and luck, some future archeological breakthrough, or another chance find like the Dunhuang 敦煌 hoard stumbled upon in the early twentieth century, may finally solve this mystery. But before this takes place, if it ever does, one may still uncover new linguistic evidence pertinent to this issue, by taking some novel and perhaps unconventional perspective from the same known historical data. This study is but a tentative step in this direction.

The Tuoba's Sinification Drive

In the last decade of the fifth century, the Tuoba Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (Yuan Hong 元宏 467-471-499) launched his famous sinification drive, moved his court from Pingcheng 平城 to the old Chinese capital Luoyang 洛陽, and formally proscribed the Xianbei language, customs, clothing, and names. This move was no doubt driven by the young emperor's ambition to put a final end to the north-south division

4 Wolfram Eberhard (1949: 328) was also of the opinion that the Tuoba had a Turkic majority.
5 An opinion he apparently did not think needing any revision in the second edition of the same title.
6 Mi, Wenping (1981).
7 For instance, see Róna-Tas (1982: 139), Pearce (1991: 89) and Hess (1993: 417).
8 Read for example Viatkin (1992).
9 See Chen (1996a) for other criticisms of Ligeti's study.

of China.[10] What this note will discuss is the conversion of almost all "Barbarian" family (read tribe) names, including the very royal clan name Tuoba, to Chinese or Chinese-sounding surnames.[11]

One should first mention the strong "nationalistic" resistance to this wholesale abandonment of the Tuoba's cultural heritage, something that Emperor Xiaowen was fully aware of and indeed anticipated. Still, the opposition proved so strong that even Emperor Xiaowen's eldest son and heir-designate Yuan Xun 元恂 became entangled in the "resistance movement" that eventually cost the young crown prince his life.[12] It was also amply attested in a "Xianbei revival movement" after the collapse of the Wei in the wake of the Six-Garrison Rebellion started by frontier garrisons disillusioned with the sinified Tuoba court in Luoyang.[13] All these reactions indicated that Emperor Xiaowen must have proceeded discretely and skillfully to alleviate the resentment and opposition of his tribal comrades apparently still very much attached to their steppe heritage. His careful and tactful approach was evidenced by the provisions and exceptions the emperor had granted to the "older folks,"[14] as well as the so-called "wild-goose courtiers (*yanchen* 雁臣)" who migrated between the Tuoba's new capital and their tribes like wild geese.[15]

It is therefore natural to deduce that the same discretion and care had been taken in replacing the "Barbarian" tribe names with "Chinese" family names, in order not to exacerbate the hostility felt by the name bearers. In fact, a royal commission was formed by an imperial edict in 495 to deliberate this matter[16] before the announcement of the name-change decree in the spring of 496.[17] *All* four named members of the royal commission were Tuoba Xianbei nobles. In other words, the name-change must have accorded sufficient respect for fellow tribepeople's ethnic pride and culture, as shown by some literal translations of the Altaic names into Chinese (see below).

10 An interesting historical parallel was the Jurchen emperor Wanyan Liang 完顏亮 (1122-1150-1161). See Chen (1996b).
11 Sima Guang 司馬光 et al. *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (hereafter *ZZhTJ*) 140.4393.
12 Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 (hereafter *WSh*) 7b.180, 22.588 and 40.913.
13 See Chen (1996a).
14 *WSh* 21a.536 and 14.360; *ZZhTJ* 140.4386 and 141.4408.
15 *ZZhTJ* 141.4410. Read also *WSh* 15.378.
16 *WSh* 113.3014-15.
17 *ZZhTJ* 140.4393.

Let us make a short digression to the history of the Tuoba's tribal followings. *Wei shu* narrated that, dating back to a semi-legendary kaghan Mao, fortuitously a namesake of the twentieth-century Great Helmsman, the Tuoba started with 36 "states" containing 99 "big tribes (*daxing* 大 姓)" that apparently formed the core of the Tuoba polity.[18] By the time Wei Shou (506-572) compiled *Wei shu*, he could no longer provide a full account of all these clans. Nonetheless he listed all those clans he could still identify who had followed another partly legendary Tuoba kaghan Liwei, allegedly born to a goddess, and "migrated inward (*neiru* 內 入, read southwestward)" in the third century to the southern part of the Mongolian Plateau and rose as a major military and political power soon afterwards. In Chapter 113 of *Wei shu*, these and the Tuoba royal clans were clearly differentiated from the so-called "four-corner (*sifang* 四方)" tribes conquered or otherwise subjugated by the Tuoba, resulting in two distinct groups of clan names.[19] The clear division of Tuoba subjects into "inner" and "outer" tribes is so typical of nomadic rule that Eberhard (1965: 116-118) has termed it "Turkish type of organization." This division will serve as a key to this study.

Change of Tribe and Clan Names

As listed in Chapter 113 of *Wei shu*, with the exception of those names which remained unchanged and a handful of unclear cases, there are three main patterns or categories in replacing a "Barbarian" clan name with a Chinese one.

1) Literary translation of an Altaic word into Chinese. Examples are Chinu 叱 奴 to Lang 狼 "wolf", Youlian 宥 連 to Yun 雲 "cloud"[20] and Ruogan 若 干 to Gou 苟 , a euphemistic homonym of *gou* 狗 "dog".[21] The change of the royal name Tuoba to Yuan 元 presumably also belongs to the same category, though a satisfactory etymology is yet to be identified.

18 *WSh* 1.1.
19 In his superb study of "Barbarian" surnames in the Northern dynasties, Yao Weiyuan (1958) has also made this explicit distinction.
20 Boodberg (1936) was the first to make these two identifications, which Louis Bazin (1951) followed.
21 Read Chen and Kwok (1996: 88; note 24), for a brief discussion of this "dog" name.

2) Linking of a steppe clan name to a common Chinese surname based on some politico-cultural traditions which may no long seem clear today.[22]
3) A great majority, or 93 out of the 121 names listed, represents a shortening of an original two- or three-character "Barbarian" name to a single character that is either one of the original characters or its phonetic variant or derivative.

The third category is what I will examine for the remainder of this essay. This category clearly represents a multi-syllabic clan name being shortened to a single character representing or deriving from one of the original sound elements. This original sound element in most cases should represent a full syllable. The reasons for the last claim are: a) the due respect for the original name as previously argued, b) the single character likely representing what the name changers believed should be articulated, c) the well-known aversion to consonant clusters of the Altaic family,[23] and d) only a small minority or 17 of the new names being of the "entering tone (*rusheng* 入 聲)" which according to Pulleyblank may be more likely than other characters to represent just a foreign consonant in a Chinese transliteration.[24]

Another issue is whether the original two- and three-character names may already represent an "abridged" form. The large corpus of Old Turkic (including Uighur), Sogdian, Tibetan and other non-Chinese records attest to the popularity of two-syllable, followed by single- and three-syllable, proper names which together represented the absolute majority of tribal and clan designations on the steppe. There are also many names in Chinese transcription, including the above "Category 1", that have been successfully identified with their foreign originals. These facts plus the dominance and ethnic pride of the Xianbei on the upper echelons of the Tuoba hierarchy prior to the sinification reform lead me to submit that a great majority of the Tuoba names recorded in Chapter 113 of *Wei shu* (with the extensive editorial corrections by later scholars

22 Read Yao Weiyuan (1983) for an elegant exposition of a Dugu 獨 孤 = Liu 劉 equation. Read also Eberhard (1942).
23 Menges (1995: 74).
24 Pulleyblank (1965). It should be pointed out that many if not most "entering-tone" characters still transcribe a full syllable. Examples abound and include ancient Chinese names for both Turks and Uighurs.

based on other sources) represented a largely faithful and full transcription of the original form.

This author has long noted that among the core Tuoba clans, there appears a strong preference for "Category 3" name-changes to derive the single-character Chinese name from the final character of the original name, whereas among the "four-corner" tribes, it seems the exact opposite, namely a propensity to use the first character or its phonetic variant as the Chinese name. Prompted by some readings regarding accentuation in Altaic linguistics, I decide to examine this interesting contrast in detail. Table 1 summarizes the 93 "Category 3" names in this regard.

Table 1. Single-Character Constructs of New Clan Names (*Wei shu* Chapter 113)

Original character position		First	Medial	Final
Core clans	2-char. names	17	–	28
	3-char. names	5	7	8
"Four-corner"	2-char. names	12	–	4
	3-char. names	4	2	5

In order to combine the evidence from two- and three-character names without resorting to complex probabilistic modeling, and also because the medial character is of no interest to this study, I further restrict the analysis to a subset of cases for which the name transformation is based on either the first or final character,[25] and thus obtain our second table.

Table 2. Single-Character Constructs of New Clan Names: First-Character Derivation versus Final-Character Derivation

Original char. position	First	Final	Subtotal
Core clans	22 (37.9%)	36 (62.1%)	58 (100%)
"Four-corner"	16 (64.0%)	9 (36.0%)	25 (100%)

The striking difference between the core Tuoba clans and the "four-corner" tribes now becomes apparent, as the relative percentages of using

25 Mathematically, this follows what is called conditional inference in statistics. See for examples Berger and Wolpert (1984), or Casella and Berger (1990).

the first and the final character are almost in perfect opposite pattern between the two groups.

However, one may also argue that all these numbers could be attributed to coincidence, and the name transform might well have been conducted in an arbitrary and haphazard fashion. If we indeed go to this rather extreme end and assume that our data had occurred simply by chance and everything were in fact largely random to start with, we can formulate three hypotheses in accordance with classical hypothesis testing theory in statistics:

Hypothesis A: There was no actual difference between the core clans and "four-corner" tribes in the likelihood of using either the first or the final character for the new Chinese name.

Hypothesis B: Among the core clans, the likelihood of deriving the new name from the first or the final character was the same.

Hypothesis C: Among the "four-corner" tribes, the likelihood of deriving the new name from the first or the final character was the same.

We can then apply standard statistical methods and calculate the so-called observed significance level, also known as p-value, under each hypothesis, which is in essence the probability of the actual data happening purely by chance under the respective hypothesis. They turn out to be[26]

1) For Hypothesis A, p=0.034 based on Fisher's Exact Test, and p=0.029 based on the Chi-square test;
2) For Hypothesis B, p=0.044 based on exact binomial distribution;
3) For Hypothesis C, p=0.115 based on exact binomial distribution;

Therefore, at the conventional critical significance level (α-value) of 0.05, both Hypotheses A and B are rejected for being too unlikely to be true. The p-value for Hypothesis C is not as small, even though the first-versus-last-character "imbalance" is more severe than that for the core clans. This is largely due to the insufficient number of cases, but the p-value is nonetheless "marginally significant" as well.

Naturally, this kind of probabilistic analysis requires a few mathematical assumptions that may or may not rigorously hold true in reality. There may also be other factors at work in the name-change process. Nevertheless, the above statistical analysis does provide a quantitative assessment of the strength of the collective evidence reflected in Tuoba

26 Statistical significance was calculated using two statistical packages: SPSS for Windows, Version 7.5 (Chi-square and Fisher's Exact tests) and Statxact Version 2.0 (CYTEL Software Corp., Cambridge, Mass., for binomial distribution calculation).

name-change data. It also demonstrates the very small likelihood that the observed patterns could have happened purely as random phenomena.[27]

All in all, albeit perhaps still far from being ironclad or beyond any doubt, given the earlier observation that the character chosen for deriving the Chinese surname very likely represents a syllable in the original name, the evidence uncovered by my analysis does suggest the following: the core Tuoba clans were more likely to articulate the final syllable of their name than the first, whereas the "four-corner" tribes within the Tuoba federation tended to stress the first syllable of their name rather than the last. One may naturally infer that this pattern of articulation or stress can be extended to other words in their respective languages.

Accentuation in Altaic Languages

It has been theorized that, due to its agglutinative nature and sound harmony, the Proto-Altaic language, if there ever existed such an entity, had prima accentuation, in that the root syllable always retained the stress.[28] The same is also claimed of the Proto-Uralic and Proto-Finno-Ugric languages, as is still maintained by major members of the Uralic family: Finnic, Hungarian, Yenisei, etc.[29]

According to Karl Menges, Mongolian languages to this day have retained prima accentuation. This is supported by Gombojab Hangin (1968: 22), a native speaker who claims that "[the stress in Mongolian] automatically falls on the first syllable."[30] Nonetheless, other experts mention a tendency in Modern Mongolian to shift the stress to non-initial

27 I may also mention that the use of statistical analysis in historical linguistics is nothing new. More than half a century year ago Björn Collinder already used probability calculation to demonstrate that concordances between the Altaic and Uralic languages cannot be attributed to chance. See Sinor (1963: 186). (The original essay, published in an Uppsala University periodical, is inaccessible to me.) There have been many other probabilistic and statistical models, most much more complex than mine, and even a full text devoted to this subject (Sheila M. Embleton (1986). This text is itself part of a general series *Quantitative Linguistics*. There is another series *Travaux de linguistique quantitative*, published by Slatkine in Geneva). The methodology William Baxter used in his study of the Old Chinese rhyme classes (1992: 87-137) is the closest to mine.

28 Menges (1995: 74).

29 Collinder (1960: 208).

30 James Bosson (1964: 21) also states: "Stress in Mongolian is expiratory and falls on the first syllable, whether its vowel is short or long".

long vowels and diphthongs.[31] However, regular long vowels and diphthongs in Mongolian languages developed from earlier multi-syllabic constructs and only appeared in Modern Mongolian which began in the sixteenth century.[32] Our period of concern belongs to what Nicholas Poppe (1955: 15) has termed Ancient Mongolian, which ended around the twelfth century and "was almost identical with Common Mongolian." Therefore, for that period it is safe to concur, at the very least, with Isaac Schmidt who conducted what has been called "the beginning of linguistic work on Mongolian on a high level."[33] In a grammar published some 170 years ago on Written Mongolian, which, incidentally, "reflects the Ancient Mongolian well from the point of view of its phonetic and morphologic development,"[34] Schmidt (1831: 14) stated unmistakably:

> Bei weitem die meisten zwei- und dreisylbigen Mongolischen Wörter haben den Accent auf der *ersten* Sylbe. (italic original!)

Turkic languages, on the other hand, are a different matter in this regard. In fact, the Turkic group has supposedly undergone the historical process of developing an originally secondary accent on the last syllable, such that it today has an ultima accentuation "slightly reminiscent of French," with a few exceptions easily explained by their non-suffixal, enclitic nature.[35] The question is when this process was completed. The presence of alliteration in some Turkic folk poetry has led to the speculation that prima accentuation might have survived down to historical times.[36] But no hard evidence exists. On the contrary, there are solid data indicating the opposite:

(i) The phonetic data of the Orkhon inscriptions, the earliest existent Turkic texts, has led Telat Tekin (1968: 102) to infer that in Orkhon Turkic the accent fell upon the last syllable in general.

(ii) Several Uralic languages' accentuation of the final syllable has been attributed to the influence of neighboring Turkic idioms, attesting to the long history of ultima accentuation of Turkic.[37]

31 Read, e.g., Poppe (1970: 47).

32 Poppe, (1955: 16, 59-60, 76).

33 Poppe (1965: 79).

34 Poppe (1955: 15).

35 Menges (1995: 74). See also Bazin (1959: 14), and Johanson (1995: 112-113). Johanson points out, in particular, that such exceptions tend to be relatively recent development.

36 von Gabain (1974: 42); Menges (1995: 74).

37 Collinder (1960: 206-207).

(iii) As Otto Böhtlingk stated in his famous 1851 grammar, Yakut, a Turkic tongue that has been separated from all other Turkic languages for many centuries,[38] and has been under the strong influence from the prima-accentual Mongolian,[39] has nevertheless had the stress on the final syllable.[40]

(iv) Chuvash, the only surviving member of the so-called *l/r*-Turkic, also has ultima accentuation.[41] Many scholars contend that Chuvash should be separated from Turkic, with a "Pre-Turkic" or Proto-Turco-Chuvash as their common ancestor.[42] At the very least, the presumed Chuvash-Turkic unity ended long before the Tuoba era.[43] Incidentally, Clauson (1972, Preface, paragraph 2), a major proponent for the Turkic affinity of the Tuoba, classifies the Tuoba idiom as an *l/r* language, belonging to the Chuvash sub-family.

To summarize, in addition to the celebrated temporal and spatial stability of Turkic in recorded history, it seems safe and justified to contend that for the historical era under study, namely the Tuoba Wei period, Turkic languages were already largely ultima-accentual, in sharp contrast to the contemporary Proto-Mongolian.

Conclusion

The conclusion follows naturally from the combination of the Tuoba name-change data and the opposite accentuation rules of the Turkic and (Proto-) Mongolian languages. However, before drawing the conclusion, we also have to face the fact that no nomadic or nomadic-origin power

38 The migration of Turkic tribes from the Baikal region to Yakutia started as early as the sixth century. See for instance A. I. Gogolev (1992: 65). Using the sometimes controversial glottochronological method, S. E. Iakhontov has even calculated that the Yakut language separated from the Common Turkic roughly 1500-1600 years ago, as quoted in Gogolev (1992: 67).

39 Mongolian, not Russian, heads Menges's list (1995: 66) of languages that had influences on Yakut lexicon. Gogolev (1992: 67) states categorically that "the Mongolian languages played a special role in the formation of the Yakut language." One may also read Kaluzynski (1961) for a special study of this issue.

40 Böhtlingk (1851: 151), claimed it being always (*immer*) the case. According to John Krueger (1962: 70), there are a few exceptions to this rule.

41 Johannes Benzing (1959: 713). See also Krueger (1961: 86).

42 Poppe (1965: 33); Krueger (1961: 56).

43 Proto-Bulgarian was as old as the Tuoba, and has been universally considered an *l/r*-language, if not the direct ancestor of modern Chuvash. See for instance Poppe (1965: 58).

was ever ethically or linguistically homogeneous. Even the ruling hard-core of a steppe polity may not always be "pure-blood" either. For example, the "imperial maternal uncles," namely the Xiao 蕭 clan of the proto-Mongolian Qidan/Kitan regime, was believed by many to have been Turkic.[44] Nevertheless, given the new evidence uncovered from the Tuoba's onomastic data, and the diametrically opposite accentuation rules in Turkic and Mongolian languages, the core Tuoba clans now would seem more likely to have spoken a Turkic (or an ultima-accentual) language, or to have contained stronger Turkic elements, than the "four-corner" tribes. The latter represented more or less other Xianbei groups within the Tuoba federation, and may have included more Proto-Mongolian constituents than Turkic ones. This conclusion is not entirely new, if we believe, *inter alia*, the eleventh-century claim by al-Kāšγarī that the name Tawγāč came from a group of Turks who had settled in China.[45]

Naturally, one may choose not to accept my interpretation of the Tuoba name-change data. The question then is to find an alternative and *more probable* explanation for the striking contrast between the core Tuoba and the "Four-corner" clans vis-à-vis the name-change patterns, a daunting task in my view. Quoting almost verbatim from David Keightley (1978: 425), "I make no apologies for the 'probable'; we are dealing with the probabilities that sound historiographical practice requires us to assess."

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44 Read, for example, Menges (1995: 17).

45 Dankoff's Translation, vol. 1, p. 341.

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On Some Articles in the Recent Issues (Nos. V, VI, VII) of the *Нумизматика Центральной Азии* (Numismatics of Central Asia)

By

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(Ilmenau)

Originally I planned to write three separate reviews of *НЦА (NCA)* V-VII in order to: 1) give the reader who do not know Russian the full picture of the recent developments in the Numismatics of Central Asia, 2) to provide the readers with the gist of all articles published and herewith to let them use such articles in their studies if need. But I was advised to reduce and to unify them into one „review-article". In order to carry out this task I discuss here only three categories of articles published in the *NCA* V-VII: a) controversial, b) having blatant mistakes which are necessary to correct, b) containing information which allowed me to make new important conclusions on some problems of the numismatics of Central Asia.

NCA V. In his article „Coin of Tiurkesh-Ruler of Chach" E. V. Rtveladze (pp. 43-47) returned to a coin on which he (Baratova and Rtveladze 1995, 20-22) read the Sogdian legend **č'čnk γwβw twrk** (?). Now he reads it as **twrkš č'čnyn MR'YW**, i.e. *Tiurkesh Chachanian ruler*. "In the first word there are five letters, – he wrote, – the first four letters are **twrk**, the last letter is less discernible but judging by some peculiarities *one may assume* (my Italics - M. F.) that it was the letter **š**". Then, "one may assume" disappeared and Rtveladze (p. 45) wrote: "It is obvious that on the Chachian coin the word **twrkš** is a name of a ruler". He wrote that on coins minted in Semirechie there was the Sogdian legend **βγy twrkš γ'γ'n pny**, *coin (of) Lord Tiurgesh Kagan*, and that scholars saw in the word *Tiurgesh* the name of a Turk tribe (who created the Tiurgesh Kaganate). In his opinion the word **twrkš** (which reading is dubious for he wrote that the last letter is less discernible and *one may assume* it is **š**) on the Chachian coin was the name of a king and not an