CHAPTER 2

Middle Turkic Dialects as Seen in Chinese Transcriptions from the Mongol Yuan Era*

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The records of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1206–1368) preserve thousands of transcriptions of Mongolian and Turkic names. Although Chinese transcriptions have frequently been criticized for their inaccuracy, in reality they offer extremely valuable information for understanding the phonetic diversity and evolution of both languages. By chance, Chinese characters frequently make distinctions that supplement those found in the Perso-Arabic or Uyghur scripts used by Altaic peoples. Thus while the Uyghur script distinguishes the usual four rounded vowels (/o/, /u/, /ö/, and /ü/) at best only into front and back, Chinese transcriptions distinguish only closed and open. By combining data from both sources one can often get a more or less exact phonemic representation to the word in question.

Yet anyone dealing with Chinese transcriptions from the Yuan knows that alongside the majority of cases where these transcriptions either record the names as we already know them to be from outside attestation or help us clearly define previously unattested names, there are many other cases where the transcription seems to be clearly wrong. The name is known, but in place of the expected *t*-, the Chinese transcriptions begin with *d*-,[1] or in place of an expected *o*, we find instead a *u*. Even after account for the limitations of Chinese syllabic structure (such as the presence of *ding* and absence of *din* in Chinese) and the differences of aspiration and voicing, many such variants remain. In the face of such variant cases in transcription, Pelliot preferred to explain them by a lack of a living tradition on the pronunciation of the name (e.g. Pelliot and Hambis 1951: 203 n. 8, 225 n. 1). Such an explanation is plausible where the word is an

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1 Here and throughout, I use /t/, /k/, /d/, /g/, etc. in a conventional sense to mark the strong and weak members of both the aspirate-non-aspirate distinction prevalent in East Asia and the unvoiced-voiced distinction prevalent in western Eurasia. While there were cases of confusion between the two, generally scribes treated the two strong-weak distinctions as equivalent.

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obscure toponym, obsolete title, or unusual anthroponym in a written source. But it is less plausible where the name is that of a major military or political figure, or where it is found elsewhere scores of times in correct transcription. In those cases, one must suspect a real variability in the pronunciation (e.g. Pelliot and Hambis 1951: 200 n. 4). And the most likely reason for that difference is likely to be dialectal pronunciations. In this small study, presented in grateful homage to my great mentor in philology, Professor Dr. György Kara, I will offer two preliminary case studies of how different dialects of Mongol-era Turkic might be defined by using Chinese transcriptions of Turkic names made during the Mongol Yuan dynasty.

Methodology

The two case studies begin with known ethnic groups or regions and then attempt to define their dialectal peculiarities. (The opposite approach would be to begin with what seem to be dialectal peculiarities and then work to define what communities they might belong to.) The sources from which they are derived are all historical, but these transcriptions were made in two broadly different ways.

1. In some cases, the names appear in Mongolian-language histories, which were then transcribed by bilingual scribes into Chinese characters, as a rule long after the historical character's death, and in any case without any input from that character.
2. In other cases, the transcription became fixed in the life of the historical figure himself (or occasionally herself). In many cases, the historical figure probably did not know Chinese and the transcription became fixed as part of personal interaction with Chinese-speaking staff in government agencies who wrote the name as they heard it. In a few cases the figure, if literate in Chinese, might have chosen the transcription him or herself.

It is in the second type of case that we may expect to see dialectal peculiarities deriving from the historical figure's own speech. Since these historical figures often have a known ethnic or regional background, these peculiarities can then be linked to the figure's ethnic or regional background to define that ethnic or regional group's dialectal peculiarities.

Although the fact that the written language of the governmental and historical materials being used as sources was, where not Chinese, Mongolian rather

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than Turkic, this is less problematic for the study of Turkic phonetics than one might think. Mongolian was written in the Uyghur-Mongolian script, that is, a script originally designed for Uyghur Turkic and used widely by both Turkic and Mongolian scribes throughout the Mongol empire. The Mongolian version of this script was extremely conservative, taking over a number of idiomatic Uyghur spellings without change, and even accepting ambiguity rather than overturn certain Uyghur-based phonotactic regularities. Thus Turkic names were generally written in Mongolian exactly as they were written in Uyghur Turkic, and often the Mongolian scribe using the script were actually native speakers of Uyghur or (as we will show) another Turkic language.

As the basis of this research, Chinese transcriptions of anthroponyms of persons from the Mongol Yuan dynasty, affiliated with known Turkic-speaking regional or ethnic groups, were gathered. The Chinese transcriptions were converted to into phonetic transcriptions in accordance with the known principles of Mongol-era transcriptions of Turco-Mongolian languages into China. These principles were first studied systematically by Paul Pelliot in his many works, and have been further refined by me in the course of my forthcoming critical edition and commentary on a Mongolian historical work, the *Campaigns of Chinggis Khan*, preserved only in Chinese translation and Persian paraphrase. The transcriptions were then compared with what may be taken as the standard or unmarked Middle Turkic pronunciations, as seen in standard reference works, such as the *Drevnetiurkskii slovar'* and the *Onomasticon Turcicum*. Consistency of the anthroponym's pronunciation with such standard sources was coded as null data, but inconsistency with the standard Middle Turkic forms in a given anthroponym's pronunciation was coded as potentially indicating the dialectal pronunciation of the ethnic or regional group to which the person belongs. Where a significant number of anthroponyms affiliated with the same ethnic or regional group exhibited the same deviation from the standard pronunciation, then a dialectal peculiarity of this group was treated as being confirmed.

In assessing the significance of particular transcriptions, additional considerations derive from the fact that well-known persons often have more than one attested transcription. Some of the variation is irrelevant to the pronunciation (substitution of one homonymous Chinese character for another, for example, or transcriptions with or without vowels in the Perso-Arabic script). Other variations, however, have clear phonetic significance, giving, for example, one version of the name that is more consistent with the standard forms, and another version that appears to be dialectal. In these cases, the presumption is that the dialectal version is more likely to be the speaker's own dialect. It is particularly significant when a single transcription 'bundles' several dif-

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ferent dialectal features together, especially ones that are themselves known from Turkic linguistics and general phonetic principles to be correlated with each other.

In the reconstructions from Chinese, there are certain ambiguities which had to be resolved, based on the assumed etymology of the word. Theoretically speaking such ambiguities could be resolved in some cases differently, by taking one or another Turkic anthroponym as the intended target word of the transcription. One could theoretically then cherry-pick the target anthroponyms to suit potential theories about the dialectal situation. In practice, however, I have not found cases where such exploitation of ambiguity has been possible. Data from languages with alphabetic scripts (Perso-Arabic, Mongolian, etc.) is particularly helpful in making sure that ambiguities in the Chinese have been correctly resolved. Another issue is the occasional corruption of texts, which would seem to need emendation. Since such emendation is governed in part by pre-existing senses of the pronunciation of target words, to rely on emended words as evidence of dialectal peculiarities would be potentially circular. Thus to avoid contamination of the sample by our conclusions, any name for which textual emendation has to be proposed has been excluded.

Data

In these tables I have arranged the data from Chinese transcriptions in parallel with those from alphabetic scripts (Persian or Mongolian). The Chinese transcription values represent the conventional value given to characters when transcribing Turco-Mongolian names. In cases of where the Chinese is ambiguous, I have used capitals (R: r or l; N: n, r, or l; A: a or e). It should also be understood that *x* may transcribe *q, ġ*, or initial *h*. Some characters are conventionally used only in syllable-final positions; these are represented by a single letter. Others are sometimes used in that position; for them the vowels are placed in parantheses. Non-nasal plosives in the syllable final position were often omitted in Chinese transcription. Where the alphabetic transcriptions and/or etymologies indicate that such a syllable-final plosive must be posited, this has been marked in brackets [ ].[2] Abbreviations for languages are as follows: C = Chinese, I = Italian, K = Kitan, M = Mongolian, P = Persian, S = Syriac, T = Turkic.

2 Note that these *t*'s and *k*'s have nothing to do with any survival of the "entering tone" in Yuan Chinese

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TABLE 2.1 *Anthroponyms of the Öng'üt* (*central Inner Mongolia*)

Chinese transcription	**Chinese transcription values**	**Attested alphabetic transliteration**	**Etymology**	**Demonstrated sound changes**
阿剌兀思 阿剌·忽思	a-Ra-u-s a-Ra-xu-s	ĀLAQWŠ (P)	Ala-Quš 'Mottled Bird' (T)	/ʃ/ > /s/ (final)
剔吉·忽里 的乞·火力	ti-gi[t]-xu-R(i) di-ki[t]-xo-Ri	TYKYN-QWRY (P)	Tegit 'Prince+plural' (T) Quri 'Official' (K)	/e/ > /i/ /t/ > /d/ /u/ > /o/
阿里黑	a-Ri-x(i)		Arïg 'pure' (T)	None
朶兒必·塔失 禿里必·荅思	do-r-bi-ta-š(i) tu-R(i)-bi-da-s	TWRBYDAŠ (P)	Törpä-Taš 'Gift Stone' (T)	/t/ > /d/ /ʃ/ > /s/ (final) /ö/ > /ü/ /æ/ > /i/ (final)
阿昔思	a[t]-si-s		At + sïz 'Without horses' (T)	/z/ > /s/ (final)
聶古台	ne-gu-tAi		Negütei~Negüdei 'Negüs Man' (M)	None
君·不花	gun-bu-xa		Kün + Buqa 'Sun Bull' (T)	/k/ > /g/
愛·不花	ai-bu-xa	ĀYBWQA (P)	Ay + Buqa 'Moon Bull' (T)	None
拙里·不花	ǰo-R(i)-bu-xa		Yol + Buqa 'Way Bull' (T)	/j/ > /ʤ/
脫歡	to-xaN		Toġan 'Sated' (T) or 'Falcon' (T)	None
月忽難	yo-xu-naN		Yuḥanon 'John' (S)	/u/ > /o/
朮忽難	ǰu-xu-naN		Yuḥanon 'John' (S)	/j/ > /ʤ/
月合乃	yo-xa-nai		Yuḥanon 'John' (S)	/u/ > /o/
錫里吉思	si-r-gi-s		Särgis 'Sergius' (S)	None
闊里吉思	ko-R(i)-gi-s		Giwargis 'George' (S)	/g/ > /k/
朮安	ǰu-aN		Giovanni 'John' (I)	/o/ > /u/
鎮國	ǰin-gui	ŠNKWY (P) CINKKUI (M)	Čin-gui (T) < 鎮國 'Defends the Kingdom' (C)	/ʧ/ > /ʃ/ (initial)
按竺邇	aN-ǰu-r		Alčur (?)	n.a.
孛要合	bo-yau-xa		?Boyaw (T) + qa (K) ■add space?	
白斯波 白廝波 白廝卜 白四部 白廝馬	bai-s-bo bai-s-bu bai-s-ma		?Bayïš (T) + bu (K) ■add space?	

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TABLE 2.2 *Anthroponyms of the Naiman* (*western Mongolia*)

Chinese transcription	**Chinese transcription values**	**Attested alphabetic transliteration**	**Etymology**	**Documented sound changes**
亦難赤 亦年赤	i-naN-či i-neN-či	AYNANJ (P)	Ïnanč 'belief, trust' (T)	None
曲薛吾·撒八剌	ku[k]-se-u-sa-b(a)-Ra[q]	KWKSAKW SBRAQ (P)	Köksäü 'consumptive' + ?Sabra (title?) (T)	/ö/ > /ü
盃禄	bui-Ru[q]	BWYRWQ (P)	Buyruq 'commander' (T)	None
泰陽 太陽	tai-yang	TAYANK (P)	Tayang (T) < 大王 'great prince' (C)	
火里·速八赤, 火力·速八赤	xo-R(i)-su-bA-či xo-Ri-su-bA-či	QWRY SWBAJU *QWRW SWBAJU (P)	Quri 'official' (K) Sübeči 'warden of the pass' (M)	/ü/ > /i/
帖迪·沙	te-di[k]-ša[l]	TATYK-ŠAL	Tetik 'clever' (T) + *Ša'al* (title)	
不蘭伯	bu-RaN-bai bu-RaN-*beg*		Buran (T) 'snow-storm' + Bay 'rich man' or Beg 'commander'	
曲出律, 屈出律 曲書律	ku-ču-Ru[k] ku-šu-Ru	KWŠLWK, KWŠLW (P)	Küč(ü)lü(g) 'strong' (T)	/ʧ/ > /ʃ/ /-g/ > ∅
合折兒 < *合析兒	xa-si-r		?Qačïr 'Flight' (T) ■add space?	/ʧ/ > /ʃ/
敞溫	čang-un			
麻察	ma-ča[q]		Mačaġ < Bačaġ 'Fasting' (T, M)	
伯不花	bai-bu-xa *beg*-bu-xa		Bay Buqa 'Rich Bull' or Beg Buqa 'Commanding Bull' (T)	None
抄思	čau-s		Čawuš 'commander' (T)	/ʃ/ > /s/ (final)
囊加歹	nang-gia-dAi		Nanggiyadai 'S. Chinese' (M)	
海速	xai-su[q]			
別的因	be-di-(y)in		Betekin (M)	/k/ > ∅
鐵連	te-len		Tilän 'Wish!' (T)	/ı/ > e
兀魯·不花	u-lu[ġ]-bu-xa		Ulu(ġ) Buqa 'Big Bull' (T)	
和尚	xo-šang		Qošang 'monk' (M)	
不花	bu-xa		Buqa 'bull' (T, M)	

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Discussion: The Öng'üt Dialect

The Öng'üt people inhabited two discontinuous areas within the territory of the Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234), one north of present-day Höhhot, and the other in southern Gansu. The former were vastly more important in Mongol Yuan history, and all but two of the names (Alchur and Sirgis) found in the corpus of names stem from the Inner Mongolian Öng'üt. The description of the Öng'üt dialect is thus one specifically of the Inner Mongolian Öng'üt.[3]

The Öng'üt formed a politically unified vassal kingdom of the Jin dynasty with a distinct sense of identity. The origin of the Öng'üt is rather obscure, but Öng'üt and Chinese scholars in the Yuan dynasty connected them with the Shatuo 沙陀 Turks and/or the Uyghur qaghanate of eighth to tenth centuries. The Shatuo Turks were themselves of mixed Turkic and Sogdian ancestry, and formed four of the five minor dynasties in North China during the so-called 'Five Dynasties' period (907–960). In the middle of the eleventh century, the Öng'üt converted *en masse* to East Syriac Christianity, and this conversion is reflected in the prevalence of Syriac Christian names in their onomasticon. Their surrender to the rising Mongols under Chinggis ('Genghis') Khan was a wrenching change for Öng'üt elite who cherished an image of themselves as the Jin dynasty's loyal border wardens, but once accomplished the shift in allegiances brought many opportunities for power and profit to Öng'üt elites in the new empire. Among the new opportunities was that of exposure to other forms of Christianity, and the Öng'üt prince Körgis ('George') briefly converted to Catholicism and named his son Ju'an (from Giovanni). After his death, his brother returned the Öng'üt to the East Syriac fold again. (On Öng'üt and Shatuo history, see Atwood 2010, 2014.)

As one of the, if not *the* easternmost body of Turkic speakers in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the Öng'üt dialect might be expected to be quite distinctive, and indeed it was. Öng'üt onomasticon reflects a coherent set of sound changes that defined a clearly distinct dialect. Those sound changes attested more than once include the following:

1) A weakening of initial strong consonants, e.g. /t/ > /d/ and /k/ > /g/
■ change parentheses to periods, as in previous enumeration?
2) Linked changes in the affricates and fricatives, thus /ʧ/ > /ʃ/ and /ʃ/ > /s/
3) Linked changes in the rounded vowels by which the close and mid rounded vowels change places, e.g. /u/ > /o/, /o/ > /u/, and /ö/ > /ü/

3 Comparison of Mongolian transcriptions with Jin-era Jurchen transcriptions of Öng'üt names would be important, but unfortunately to my knowledge no such data exist.

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4) Öng'üt is probably also one of the Turkic dialects in which /j/ > /ʤ/. However, it is conceivable that this is a reflection not of Öng'üt dialect pronunciation, but of Mongolian scribal reading.[4]

Together these sound changes define a dialect that is not identical to any extant Turkic language. No. 1 is characteristic of the Oghuz dialects to the southeast (Golden 1992: 21–22),[5] but nos. 2–4 are characteristic of the Qïpchaq-type Turkic languages today, notably Kazakh and Tatar, although no one Qïpchaq language has the full panoply of such changes seen in Öng'üt (Golden 1992: 22–23).[6] Moreover, Öng'üt shows no trace of the sound changes /-g/ > /-y/ and /ɢ/ > /-w/, which form one of the most consistent and characteristic Qïpchaq isoglosses.

The numerical and social prominence of Öng'üt Turks in the new Mongol empire gave a distinctly 'Öng'üt' cast to the dominant dialect of the Turkic scribes operating in the post-1260 Mongol Yuan capital of Daidu 大都 (modern Beijing).[7] Yet as is documented by the Persian transcriptions of Mongol-era terms collected by Gerhard Doerfer (1963–1967), the language of the Uyghurs who were so prominent in the Mongolian scribal class did not share these dialectal features. Thus the working pronunciation of Turkic scribes in the Yuan dynasty appears to have been a mix of Öng'üt and Uyghur features. This mixing can be seen in Chinese transcriptions of the common Turkic personal name *Tash* 'stone,' in which forms based on the pure Uyghur *Tash* (e.g. Yao Jing'an 1982: 277a–278b) and pure Öng'üt *Das* (Yao Jing'an 1982: 503c) coexisted with the mixed forms *Dash* (Yao Jing'an 1982: 213a–b, 510b–502a) and *Tas* (Yao Jing'an 1982: 281b–c). Öng'üt influence is also visible in the 'dental confusion' (i.e. writing *d* for standard *t*) which is a characteristic feature of

4 Mongolian had received centuries earlier a large number of loan words from Turkic languages which showed this characteristic change. Uyghur Turkic, however, retained the primitive initial /j/ in these words. As a result, Uyghur and Mongolian scribes in the Mongol Yuan period tended to treat initial /j/ and /ʤ/ (conventionally transcribed as *y-* and *-j*) as the "Uyghur" and "Mongolian" reading, respectively, of any given name.

5 Such initial lenition is also found among the Qïpchaq-type Turkic languages only in the Qumïq language of Dagestan (Alexander Vovin, personal communication, e-mail, June 19, 2016).

6 The linked changes in affricates and fricatives (/ʧ/ > /ʃ/ and /ʃ/ > /s/) are found most consistently in Kazakh, but the changes in rounded vowels are found most consistently today in Tatar. (This may be seen in the abundant data in Csáki 2006).

7 I use here the Yuan-era Persian and Mongolian pronunciation which is still used in Mongolian today when referring to the Yuan capital.

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Yuan-era 'Uyghur' (i.e. Uyghur-script Turkic) manuscripts, many of which were undoubtedly copied by Öng'üt scribes in Daidu and elsewhere (see e.g. Zhang and Zieme 2011). On the other hand, as the case of Chingüi/Shingüi shows, it appears that Turkic scribes in the Mongol Yuan empire continued to write standard *č* as *č*, even as it was routinely being pronounced by Öng'üt scribes as *š*. The resulting confusion of *č* and *š* can be seen even in Marco Polo, who evidently learned Turkic in the Uyghur script, when he writes Shangdu 上都 as Ciandu (i.e. Čaŋdu) and Shulistan as 'Cielstan' (Pelliot 1959, s.vv. §146 'Ciandu' and §154 'Cielstan').[8]

Naiman Dialect

By contrast, the data for the Naiman dialect, spoken in the Altai region where Mongolia, Xinjiang, Russia, and Kazakhstan meet today, is much less satisfactory in discerning dialectal patterns. Virtually all the transcriptions appear to follow standard Turkic forms. The only exception is the clear /ʧ/ > /ʃ/ sound change found in the name Küchülüg/Küshlü and the equally clear change of /ʃ/ > /s/ found in Chawus. However, there are many cases where č is found without change into š, including that of Chawus, despite the fact that the /ʧ/ > /ʃ/ and /ʃ/ > /s/ sound changes are generally linked, e.g. in Kazakh and Karakalpak (Golden 1992: 23).[9] Given the principles stated in the Methodology section, the positive existence of such deviations from standard Turkic is more important than the absence of such evidence in other cases. One can thus preliminarily assume that Naiman Turkic also had both of the linked sound changes found among the Öng'üt.

But why the lack of consistency and lack of positive data? The reason for this lack of data goes back to the differing position of the Naiman and the Öng'üt within Mongol Yuan history. First of all many of the transcriptions were created after the person's death, in the transcription of historical sources. In these cases, which cover the first six cases, one cannot expect any direct reflection of the Naiman persons' own dialect, only that of the scribes transcribing and translating the history, some of whom were Uyghurs, others Öng'üt, and others from other, more obscure branches of the Turkic family. Secondly the Naiman

8 On this question, see Atwood 2015.

9 Bashkort shows a different set of linked changes (Golden 1992: 23). However, such linkage is not always found. Alexander Vovin notes, for example, that in Tatar /ʧ/ > /ʃ/, but /ʃ/ does not go to /s/, thus resulting in the convergence of two phonemes (email, June 19, 2016).

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were, before the Mongol empire, far from the Chinese border without any common contact. The Öng'üt, however, were enrolled in the defenses of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234); their leaders would thus have Chinese transcriptions of their name made during their lives, as part of their involvement in the Jin system. Thus even the pre-Mongol empire historical figures of the Öng'üt would have transcriptions reflecting their own pronunciation. Moreover, the Naiman Turks were not prominent in the scribal world, unlike the Öng'üt. Most of the names found are of commanders holding hereditary positions in the Mongol military hierarchy in China proper. It is not unlikely that they soon began losing their own dialect. Finally, the Naiman kingdom was known to have had literacy before the Mongol unification of Mongolia, but the one scribe at the Naiman court we know of was a Uyghur, who set the mark for standard Turkic in the Mongol Yuan dynasty. If we assume as a likely scenario that the Naiman commanders who took service with the Mongol empire after their defeat continued to nurture patronage links with Uyghur scribes, then their names would be transcribed into Chinese by scribes with a strong sense of standard Turkic.

Conclusion

The data presented here makes it clear that under the right socio-linguistic conditions Chinese transcriptions may be expected to reflect dialect pronunciations in ways that are recoverable today. As such they are a potentially very important tool for understanding the history of Turkic languages. One might assume that this data would pertain only to eastern dialects. But dialects from quite far west can also be investigated by this method, since many Turkic peoples from the West were deported as communities to East Asia. Thus, one may take the anthroponyms of two well-known officials and commanders, Buqum and Tuqtugh (Table 2.3). Buqum was a Qanglï and Tuqtugh one of the Ölberi Qïpchaqs in what is now far western Kazakhstan. In both cases, we can see the /o/ > /u/ sound change already noted for Öng'üt dialect and which is also a prominent feature of modern Tatar. In the case of Buqum, we also find *-quim* in the second syllable, a possible intermediate between the *-qum* and *-qïm* attested in Kazakh today.

adjusted, ok?

Further research can undoubtedly push this approach much further. Toponyms, for example, can be investigated on the plausible assumption that where the pronunciation of a toponym differs from what might be expected that this difference would be reflecting the local pronunciation. The essential basis for large-scale investigation, however, would be a full corpus of words

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TABLE 2.3 ■ add caption?

Chinese transcription	Chinese transcription values	Attested alphabetic transliteration	Etymology	Demonstrated sound changes
不忽木 卜忽木 不灰木	bu-xu-m(u) bu-xui-m(u)		Boqum~Boqïm 'My dung' (T)	/o/ > /u/ /u/ > /uy/
土土哈 禿禿哈 禿禿合 吐土哈	tu[q]-tu-xa	TWQTAQ (P)	Toqtaq 'Stabilized' (T)	/o/ > /u/ /a/ > /u/

(anthroponyms, toponyms, and so on), divided by assumed regional origin or else, where such information is not available, by distinctive divergences from expected standard Turkic pronunciation. Even if the provenance of the word is unknown, it can supply information about the linkage or non-linkage of particular features into specific scribal dialects. Eventually, one might even be able to define different scribal dialects based what pronunciation were used in transcribing particular documents with large numbers of Turkic names. The same methodologies should also be applicable, of course, to Mongolian in the Yuan. Thus Chinese transcriptions of Altaic words are far from being the inaccurate and confusing mess they are often taken to be, are actually vital sources of information for the dialectal development of Turkic and Mongolian languages.

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