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A Preliminary Note on the Manchu Versions of Qianlong’s Poetical Collection Quanyun shi

The collection of historical poems entitled Yuzhi Quanyun shi 御制全韻時, is a well-known literary work composed by emperor Qianlong in 1778. It contains 106 poems which are based — as the title itself reveals — on the “complete rhyme-cycle”, i.e. the 106 rhyme-classes of the so-called “Pingshui system” 平水韻. The whole work is subdivided into five volumes. The first two are devoted to the foundation of the Manchu empire and its development till the Yongzheng era, whereas the following three volumes concern Chinese history from the very beginning till the Ming dynasty. Every poem is accompanied by long comments and explanations, mostly taken from the Chinese classics and indispensable for the comprehension and interpretation of the compositions.

Its Manchu version (Han-i araha Yongkiyan mudan-i irgebun), on the contrary, is one of the less-known and studied chapters of Manchu literature, which is probably due to the fact that it was never printed and was circulated in a few handwritten copies only. Actually, 11 manuscripts are known to exist, one of them being kept in the Manuscript Department of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg under the call number A 60. It has been described by M.P. Volkova as follows: «Стихотворения, написанные императором по всем правилам просодии. В сочинении в стихотворном изложении описываются исторические события, происшедшие в Китае с древних времен до дней императора Цянь-люна. Копия. Автор — император Цянь-люн. Дата переписки — 1822 (т. V, л. 32)». As Martin Gimm wrote: “Till nowadays no source has been found which informs about the significance or appreciation of the anthology in its Manchu version. There is also missing any indication of the circumstances according to which Qianlong himself was involved in the realisation of the Manchu version.”

In order to shed some light on this chapter, a comparison of all existing copies is therefore needed. The following comparison — limited to the copy kept at the Tōyō Bunko in Tōkyō, the already mentioned ms. of the IVR, and a brief quotation found in the Manjusai da sekiyen kimcin bithe (i.e. the Manzhou yuanliu kao 滿洲原流考 [1783]) — should be considered

1 The “Pingshui system” — named according to a place-name in Shandong — was established in 1223 and classifies 106 rhyme-syllables of Chinese poetry.

2 The whole work has been recently analyzed by M. Gimm. Kaiser Qianlong (1711–1799) als Poet. Stuttgart, 1993.

3 Gimm M. Kaiser Qianlong. P. 83.

4 Volkova M.P. Описание маньчжурских рукописей Института народов Азии и Африки АН СССР. M., 1965. C. 71, № 134. The exact date of this copy, however, is 13.VII.1821 (Doro Eldengge-i sucungga aniya ningguan biyai toleron de).

5 Original in German in: Gimm M. Kaiser Qianlong. P. 86.

a preliminary step in this direction. Limiting our analysis to the very beginning of the collection of poems, the well-known myth of the dynasty’s heavenly origin, we find to our surprise that, in the last mentioned source, the Manchu text is a verse-composition according to the usual Manchu verse-technique based on alliteration (every line of a stanza begins with the same vowel or consonant) and different rhyme-schemes. In the second stanza, the rhyme-scheme follows the structure a-a-b-a, in the following central stanza (exceptionally composed of six instead of the usual four lines) the scheme is a-a-b-a-b-a. The fourth and fifth stanzas are based on the a-b-a-b scheme, and the last again on the a-a-b-a scheme. The first stanza is based on the unusual scheme a-b-c-b.

Both Manchu manuscripts are sometimes free and sometimes word-by-word translations of the Chinese text. See, for example, the last stanza: in the Tôyô Bunko ms. only the Zhou dynasty appears — but in the manuscript at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts we also find emperor “Di U” (= Di Wu 蒲武), mentioned in the Chinese text. When speaking of how the first ancestor was brought to the village, the Tôyô Bunko ms. says (like the Chinese text) that he was placed on two mens’ joined hands, whereas the manuscript at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts specifies that by “joining hands” a kind of chair was made. Furthermore, the manuscript at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts “transforms” the black bird (viacin gasha, in Chinese simply niao 鳥) of the Shang dynasty’s origin myth into a swallow (cibin). Noteworthy is also the different version of the last line in the penultimate stanza, where the text of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts refers verbatim to the “first ancestors” (zhaozong 載宗) of the Chinese text, transcribing the term simply as joozung. In the Tôyô Bunko text this term is given as uksun, i.e. “[imperial] clan”.

As can be seen from this preliminary note, many problems connected with the various Manchu versions of Qianlong’s compositions still call for answer: in any further research, nonetheless, the text kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts should deserve special attention for its elegant style and the way it translates — or explains — specific Chinese terms.

Versified parallel text of the Manjusai da sekiyen-i kimcin bithe (1783), I, 8b–12°:

Heaven let the Great Daicing dynasty become prosperous, great good fortune began rising from the East.
The mountain is the Long White Mountain, the name of the great river is Hûntung River.

On the supreme top [the dynasty started] embracing everything.
Gathering special luck, it [made] wonders grow.
On the excellent mountain there is a pool, which became particularly famous with the name Tamun Pool.

天造皇清 abka amba daicing gurun be badarambufi
發祥大東 ambarame hûturi deribume dergi ergici mukdembuhe.
山曰長白 alin seci golmin şanyan alin inu
江曰混同 amba ulai gebu hûntung ula sehe

On the supreme top [the dynasty started] embracing everything.
Gathering special luck, it [made] wonders grow.
On the excellent mountain there is a pool, which became particularly famous with the name Tamun Pool.

三女天者 abkai sargan jui ilan enduri gege.
降而浴躬 abka ci wasinjifi omu de ebishe.
神鹊含果 aifinici enduri saksaha ašuha tubihe be sindafi.
Three heavenly maiden-goddesses came down from Heaven and took a bath.
When a magpie-god brought a fruit and put it down
[one maiden] swallowed it and became pregnant.
After having revealed orally [to her son his] name and clan,
the mother ascended to Heaven.

A man taking water saw [the child] and, having
looked at him in astonishment, told it to the people.
Joining their hands, they let him sit down and brought him back.
They proclaimed him lord and entrusted him with [the government of] the country.

He pacified the disarray of the three clans,
later [his descendants] went to reside in the city called Odoli.
The [just] founded dynasty was praised with the name Manju.
Reaching a new height, the way to the [dynasty's] foundation was opened.

In the same way, in the Shang dynasty a propitious omen appeared
from the egg of a black bird,
and footprints as a good omen appeared in the Zhou dynasty.
These are really marvels in the supreme divine [plans].
Even if the events were different, the way was the same.
On the top [the dynasty] embraced everything. Concentrating fortune, it gathered wonders. The pool on the mountain became famous with the name Tamun.

When three maidens of Heaven descended and took a bath, [one of them] swallowed a fruit brought by a magpie-god and became pregnant. After having revealed [his] name and clan, the mother ascended to Heaven.

A man taking water saw [the child] and wondered, astonishingly surprised. [The people] brought him back respectfully joining their hands and honoured him as lord of the country.

He pacified the disarray of the three clans, [his descendants] resided in the city of Odoli. Having established the name Manju the Imperial clan prospered laying the [dynasty’s] foundation.

Cibin-i ferguwecun chang gurun di u jeo-i hargacan enduringge urunka deribuhangge bi. tulbin encu bicibe tacin adali.
A black bird as a good omen for the Shang, great footprints at the beginning of the Zhou: The miracle of a swallow of the Shang dynasty, the court of emperor Wu of the Zhou: The origin is always found in divine plans. Even if the reasons were different, the way was one only. was like a constant practice.

Стары Джованни
Несколько слов о маньчжурской версии собрания стихов Цяньлуна «Цюанььонь ши»

В истории китайской литературы император Цяньлун известен как выдающийся поэт, антологий его стихов много раз переиздавались. Однако мало кто знает о стихах Цяньлуна, написанных на маньчжурском языке. В статье публикуется отрывок на тему мифа о возникновении императорского рода из «Собрания рифмованных стихов, составленного по указу императора» (Yuzhi Quanyun shi). Этот поэтический текст опубликован в китайско-маньчжурском издании «Собрания», в котором китайский текст состоит из рифмованных по китайской просодии строк по четыре иероглифа, а маньчжурский текст написан по правилам маньчжурского стихосложения. Однако имеются прозаические варианты этого маньчжурского текста, которые никогда не издавались. В статье публикуются соответствующие прозаические отрывки из рукописей, хранящихся в библиотеке Тоё бунко (Токио) и Рукописном отделе Института восточных рукописей РАН. Маньчжурский текст обеих рукописей имеет некоторые различия, поэтому в статье они помещены параллельно и сопровождены дословным переводом. Эта публикация является первым шагом в изучении различных списков, редакций и вариантов стихотворений Цяньлуна.