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**II БОТЬ
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ТУЛГАМДСАН АСУУДЛУУД**

**VOLUME II
MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND
THEIR URGENT PROBLEMS**

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**II САЛБАР:
МОНГОЛ ХЭЛ, СОЁЛЫН
ТУЛГАМДСАН АСУУДЛУУД**

***SECTION II:
MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND
THEIR URGENT PROBLEMS***

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SOME TEXTS CLAIMING TO BE FROM “THE SUTRA OF GOLDEN LIGHT”¹

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The famous *Altan gereltü sudur* “The Sutra of Golden Light” (in Sanskrit *Suvarṇāprabhasottamasūtra*) is one of the basic works of Mahayana Buddhism which was originally written in Sanskrit and later on translated into many languages (Chinese, Uigur, Tibetan, Japanese, Mongolian, Oirat, etc.).

In Tibetan and Mongolian there are three versions of the Sutra: a short one (21 chapters), a medium one (29 chapters) and a long one (31 chapters). All the three versions are included into the Buddhist Canon: Tibetan Kagyur and Mongolian Ganjur².

Separate editions (blockprints) and manuscripts of the Mongolian translation of the Sutra were widespread in Mongolia. But it was mostly the medium version that existed by its own (i.e. not only in the Ganjur). On the contrary only the short version was translated into the Oirat language written in the so-called “clear script”. Its translation into Oirat was carried out by a prominent religious figure and a scholar Zaya Pandita [1599-1662].

Numerous copies of the Sutra text are the best evidence of its popularity. On the other hand, such popularity caused another phenomenon – some other texts written in Tibetan, Mongolian and Oirat claimed to be its abridged or essential parts including the two key words “Golden light” (mong. *altan gerel*, tib. *gser* “od) in their titles. Among such texts in the collection of the Mongolian manuscripts and blockprints kept at the Institute of Oriental manuscripts RAS and at the Library of Oriental Faculty of the St.Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russia) are the following.

1. A short text (4 folia) written in the “clear script”³. Its title on the cover is: *Xutuq-tu altan gereliyin zürken xurangyui oroşiboi* “The Dharani of Golden Light”.

At the beginning of the text there is its Sanskrit title, which is typical to any *sutra* text pattern. It is written in Oirat and appears to be just the full title of *Suvarṇāprabhāsa* (a bit corrupted but clearly recognizable: *Arya-suvarṇāprabhāsa-uttama-sūtra-indra-rāja-nāma-māhāyana-sūtra*). There is no word *dharani* in this title. There is no its Tibetan title either. Another Oirat name of the text is given instead: *Xutuq-tu dēdū altan gerel suduriyin ayimagiyin erketü xān kemēküyin zürken* “The Dharani from the [sutra] called “The holy supreme [Sutra] of Golden Light – a mighty khan among sutras”. The title at the end of the text is slightly different. It is *dēdū altan gerel suduriyin ayimagiyin erketü xān-ēce altan kemēkü toqtöl* “The Golden Dharani from the supreme [Sutra] of Golden Light – a mighty khan among sutras”. So this last name states precisely that the text of the Dharani is from “The Sutra of Golden Light”. The name of the Dharani is identical to the title of the eighth chapter of the medium (NB!) version of the Sutra which is called *Altatu neretü tarni* “The Golden Dharani”. The only difference is the use of the word *toqtöl* in the Oirat title and the word *tarni* in the Mongolian one for the translation of the Tibetan word *gzungs*. I’d like to stress that, though the text (*altan kemēkü toqtöl*) is written in Oirat, it corresponds to the 8th chapter from the medium but not the short version of the Sutra while it was the short one that was translated into Oirat. The short version of the Sutra does not have such chapter at all. The “The Golden Dharani” manuscript is two times shorter than the 8th chapter, so it’s only a part of it. The text was made shorter without much care: one sentence was even cut in the middle and as the result the name of a bodhisattva who comes to Buddha to ask him a question became twice shorter. In the eighth chapter the Bhagavan explains to the bodhisattva how to create a mandala to gain different benefits, both spiritual and material. In the Oirat text the long tiring procedure described in the 8th Chapter was cut away and everything became much shorter and easier but all the benefits including even a promise to gain “whatever you want” were preserved. The very last phrase of the Oirat text added at the end (lacking in the 8th chapter of the Sutra) states that reciting of this text is equal to reading the Sutra. So, the Oirat text, on the one hand, is from “The Sutra of Golden Light” but, on the other hand, it is not identical to it.

In addition I’d like to mention that separate printed pages with a short prayer or *dharani* from “The Golden Dharani” are known in Tibetan. They are the same as in the 8th chapter of the Sutra and in the Oirat manuscript, namely: *na mo ra tna tra yā ya| ta tya thā| ku ci ku ci ni i mi ri to| ko sha ṇi| i mi ri ni| i rī svā hā| dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi yum zhes bya ba bzhugs so*. The beginning is “Homage to three treasures”, at the end “[These are] Dharani called “Mother of all the Buddhas of three times”.

2. In connection to the Oirat text a Mongolian one is worth mentioning for it has almost the same title “The Golden Dharani”. It was translated from Tibetan. The Mongolian text has two titles. Under the first title *Qutuy-tu altatu neretü tarni* this text is known in the Kanjur⁴, under the second *Qutuy-tu altan-tu kemegdekü-yin toyṭayal* – in the *Sundays* (tib. *gzungs* – “*dus*”)⁵ – collections of works for recitation. This text is a short one as well. Its structure is typical for sutras, i.e. the title is given in three languages⁶, followed by homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas and the phrase “I heard [the following]. Once the Buddha was dwelling ...”. The text tells how the Buddha was attended by Khormusta, who asks for sacred *dharani* to be used in his fight against *asuras*, such *dharani* that can overcome those of the *asuras*. The proper *dharani* (rather complicated ones) are granted and Khormusta retreats respectfully. In spite of its title the

text *Qutuy-tu altatu neretü tarni* has nothing to do with “The Sutra of Golden Light”.

3. The third text is in Mongolian and it was evidently translated from Tibetan. There is a separate manuscript⁷ and this text is included in the *Sunduy*⁸. The title of the Mongolian text is written at the very beginning of the manuscript. It is *Altan gerel-tü ed-ün tengri orosiba* “Tengri of wealth with Golden Light”. This text has several other titles. A title which follows the words *mongyol keleber*⁹ at the beginning of the text is much longer *Qutuy-tu degedü altan gerel-tü erketü sudur-nuyud-un qayan-ača: ed kiged adayusun-i sakın nemegülügči neretü tarni* “Dharani called “Protecting and increasing one’s property and cattle” from the holy [sutra] of Golden Light – khan of sutras”. This title refers to “The Sutra of Golden Light” as the source where the text comes from. At the end still one more name is written: *Qutuy-tu degedü altan gereltü erketü sudur-nuyud-un qayan-ača: töröl tutum-dur qamuy keregten-i qotala tegüskekü arban doloduyar jüil tegüsbe::* “The 17th chapter from the holy [sutra] of Golden Light – khan of sutras [called] “Giving everything required in all births”¹⁰. This last title specifies the number of the chapter in the Sutra.

The text *Altan gerel-tü ed-ün tengri orosiba* is organized as a separate text according to a sutra text pattern but not as a chapter within another text. It has three “*namoes*” in the very beginning, names of the text in three languages, the words “I heard [the following]. Once the Buddha was dwelling ...” and the praising of the Buddha by *tengris*, humans, *asuras* and others at the end of the text.

The contents of the text, however, is totally different from the 17th chapter of the medium version of “The Sutra of Golden Light”. Its title is different, as well: *Degedü altan gerel-tü erketü sudur-nuyud qayan-ača yeke ökin tngri sirigini ed-i sayitur nemegülkü neretü arban doloduyar bölüg* “The 17th chapter called “The Great Goddess Shri who increases the property” from the holy [sutra] of Golden Light – khan of sutras”. If put in short, in the 17th chapter it is said how goddess Shri approaches the Buddha and tells him what should be done to gain prosperity from her. The procedure includes cleaning oneself and the house, offerings to buddhas, uttering the name of “The Sutra of Golden Light”, paying homage to 11 buddhas and 7 bodhisattvas, saying the magic spells, repeating it for 7 years, creating a mandala. Immediately after that the goddess Shri will dwell in the house and provide prosperity to its owner. While in the text it is goddess Dridha-Earth (NB!) who approaches the Buddha and asks him what should be done to eliminate sufferings and gain prosperity for people. Buddha approves her intentions and tells her the procedure which is similar to the *saddhana* practice when deities are visualized. The deities to visualize are *Vaishravana* and *Jambhala* (their description is given) and 8 deities of wealth (their description is given). After that one should create a mandala, say the magic spells (different from those in the 17th chapter), repeat the names of the deities and wealth will fall upon the one’s house. Then goddess Dridha asks another question how one should pay homage to these deities. The Buddha advises to make a mandala and visualize the above mentioned deities. And one should read “The Sutra of Golden Light”! Only if one reads the Sutra, all the deities will give wealth, good births, elimination of sins, etc. At this point the goddess Dridha is substituted unexpectedly by goddess Shri and the text continues as if it were she at the beginning of the text. She stands up from her seat and asks the Buddha to clarify the signs which show that reciting of the Sutra brings benefits. The sign, as the Buddha explains, is the shower of riches.

The only common items in both the text and the 17th chapter are the idea of increasing the property declared in the title, the fact that goddess Shri is mentioned in both texts and recommendation to read “The Sutra of Golden Light” in order to reach the desirable. The text is almost three times longer than the chapter and the promised shower of riches is more substantial in the text than in the Sutra. In the latter moral values are promised as well. *Dharani* to recite and deities to praise are different. Two parts are distinguished in the text *Altan gerel-tü ed-ün tengri orosiba*. The smaller one at the end of the text resembles the Sutra and it may be a part of it (but not from the 17th chapter), while the beginning (after the introductory phrases) has nothing to do with “The Sutra of Golden Light”.

4. One more Mongolian text follows the previous one in the same manuscript (call number E 75¹¹) and in the *Sunduy*¹². It has two titles: a short one at the very beginning: *Altan gerel-tü ibegegči egesig-tü orosiba* “Golden light protecting melody” and the longer one after the words *mongyol keleber*¹³ at the beginning of the text: *Qutuy-tu degedü altan gerel-tü erketü sudur-nuyud-un qayan-ača kesig-i öggügči neretü yeke kölgen sudur*. “Mahāyāna sutra called “Giving luck” from the Holy Sutra of Golden Light”. In this case no number of the chapter is specified in the title of the text. The text is assembled as a separate sutra according to the same pattern as was described above in connection with the previous text. Two parts can be clearly distinguished in this text. Only the first part (a shorter one) has connection to “The Sutra of Golden Light”. It is the first chapter of the medium version of the Sutra but given in brief. The second part is invocations to different deities in search of *hesig* “good fortune, good luck” and it has no connection to the Sutra. The first chapter of “The Sutra of Golden Light” in its turn consists of two parts: the first part enumerates all those who have come to pay tribute to Buddha and listen to the Sutra and the second part which was originally written in verse tells about the benefits of reading the Sutra¹⁴. In the *Altan gerel-tü ibegegči egesig-tü orosiba* text the second part (about the benefits) is preserved in full, while the first (enumeration) is abridged. Actually, all the personal names from the first chapter are omitted. For example, it is said that among those who came to listen to the Buddha were innumerable bodhisattvas and about fifty personal names of bodhisattvas are mentioned. There were 42 thousand *tngri-ün köbegüd*

“sons of *tengris*” and eight personal names are given and so on. In the text only the total numbers of listeners are repeated following the Sutra while nobody’s names are included.

5. The last text is a Mongolian manuscript¹⁵ *Altan gerel-ün quriyangyui orosibai* “The summary of the Sutra of Golden Light” which appears to be just the full text of the 27th chapter of the Sutra. The name of the chapter is different: *degedü altan gerel-tü erketü sudur-nuyud-un qayan-ača qamuy bḥdhi satḥ-nar-un maytaysan neretü qorin doloduyar bölg*: “The 27th chapter called “Praise to all bodhisattvas” from the supreme [Sutra] of Golden Light – a mighty khan among sutras”. The author just copied the chapter (including its title on the last page) but added his own title one on the cover of the manuscript.

To sum up I’d like to stress two points: the *Altan gereltü sudur* was extremely popular in Mongolia and Tibet and it was the source of inspiration and borrowings for the following authors. The five texts from St. Petersburg collections show that there are some texts whose titles state that they are from the Sutra while they only have something to do with it at the best.

Notes

- ¹ The paper is prepared within the research project (2.38.49.2011) supported by St. Petersburg State University.
- ² Ligeti L. Catalogue de Kandjur mongol imprimé. Budapest. 1942. № 176, 177, 178; The Tibetan Tripitaka. Peking Edition. Ed. by Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki. Catalogue and Index. Tokio. Suzuki Research Foundation. 1962. № 174, 175, 176.
- ³ Call number B 35. See А.Г.Сазыкин. Каталог монгольских рукописей и ксилографов Института Востоковедения Академии Наук СССР. Т. 1-3. М. Издательская фирма “Восточная литература РАН”. 1988-2003. Т. 2, с. 207, № 3297.
- ⁴ In the Kanjur there are two almost identical texts of the *dharani*: Ligeti L. Catalogue... № 319, 565; The Tibetan Tripitaka.... № 314, 549.
- ⁵ Catalogue of the Mongolian Manuscripts and Xylographs in the St. Petersburg State University Library. Compiled by Vladimir L. Uspensky with assistance from Osamu Inoue. Edited and Foreword by Tatsuo Nakami. Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa. Tokyo. 1999. P. 177, № 147 (53).
- ⁶ Its Tibetan name is *'phags pa gser can zhes bya ba'i gzungs* (the same as in Tibetan texts from *Sunduy* and *Kagyur*). Its Sanskrit name as reconstructed from Tibetan is *ārya kṇakavati nāma dhāraṇī*.
- ⁷ Call number E 75. See А.Г.Сазыкин. Каталог монгольских рукописей и ксилографов Института Востоковедения Академии Наук СССР. Т. 1-3. М. Издательская фирма “Восточная литература РАН”. 1988-2003. Т. 2, № 3275.
- ⁸ Catalogue ... P. 159, № 146.1 (89). The Tibetan blockprint Gzung “dus is kept in the Tibetan collection in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS, call number B 11661.
- ⁹ After the words *enedheg-ün keleber* the Sanskrit title written in Mongolian is given which should be *ārya suvarṇa dhāraṇī* in Sanskrit. After the words *töbed-ün keleber* the Tibetan title written in Mongolian is given which should be *'phags pa gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i rgyal po las nor phyogs skyong zhing spel ba zhes bya ba'i gzungs* in Tibetan.
- ¹⁰ The Sanskrit, Tibetan and three Mongolian titles in the Mongolian *Sunduy* are the same as in the manuscript.
- ¹¹ А.Г.Сазыкин.... Т. 2, № 3275. Another manuscript is in the Library of the Oriental Faculty call number D 185. Catalogue... P. 16, № 018 [с. 16]. The title in Mongolian is *Altan gerel-tü ibegegči egesig-tü*, in Tibetan *gser 'od g.yang skyabs dam pa mdo bzugs so*
- ¹² Catalogue ... P. 159, № 146.1 (89). The Sanskrit, Tibetan and three Mongolian titles here are the same as in the manuscript. The Tibetan original of this text follows the previous one in Tibetan Gzung “dus (call number B 11661).
- ¹³ After the words *enedheg-ün keleber* the Sanskrit title written in Mongolian is given which should be *suvarṇa sata nāma mahāyāna sūtra* in Sanskrit. After the words *töbed-ün keleber* the Tibetan title written in Mongolian is given which should be *'phags pa gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i dbang po rgyal po las g.yang skyabs zhes bya ba*. The same names are in the *Sundui*.
- ¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that in the first chapter from the short version of the Sutra only consists of this second part.
- ¹⁵ Call number B 336. See А.Г.Сазыкин.... Т. 2, № 3275.