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## Concept *törö* in the Mongolian political culture of 17th century

(Концепт *törö* в политической культуре монголов XVII в.)<sup>1</sup>

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Статья посвящена анализу использования термина *törö* на материале ранних памятников монгольской исторической литературы «*Erdeni tunumal nereti sudur*» и «*Sir-a turyji*». Результаты исследования основаны на сравнительном анализе использования термина в указанных памятниках, а также в «Сокровенном сказании» — первом памятнике монгольской литературы. Выбор источников позволяет рассмотреть использование *törö* в синхронном и диахронном аспектах и выявить отличия в значениях термина в зависимости от контекста и времени создания источников. *Törö* в них обозначает такой тип связи между участниками политической коммуникации, который считался подобающим в политической культуре. Его значение было отчасти сакрализовано в силу происхождения из времен существования Монгольской империи. Тем не менее конкретное значение термина определяется контекстом в зависимости от условий, времени и конкретных участников политических отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** политическая культура, Алтан-хан, Чингис-хан, терминология власти, верховный правитель.

Dealing with the facts of remote past, historian bases on «traces» of the studied culture only. First of all, these are written sources, in the researches of the Mongolian nomads of the 16th–17th centuries we are limited to a few chronicles that have survived to this day. The source problem is one of the centers for history. In the case of Mongolian studies, it includes the paucity of sources in Mongolian, as well as lack of regularity of distribution the texts in time. The number of these sources in different periods is not equal, and the absence of any extant monuments of three centuries (14–16) significantly complicates the interpretation of the continuity between «The Secret History of the Mongols» and the chronicles of the 17th century. The uniformity of all survived texts of the 17th century caused their similar structure, content, and language. Thus, the amount and nature of knowledge that we can extract from them is limited. On the other hand, this gives us grounds for conducting a comparative analysis of such monuments.

The nature of the sources of the 17th century gives rich material for the study, first of all, of the political culture of the Mongolian nomads of this period. Because

of the characteristics of the literary monuments of the medieval type, the form, and content of which were largely arise from the extraliterary functions of the text. In the case of Mongolian sources, these functions consisted of the apology of the power of one or another ruler or the whole clan. This paradigm is reflected in all levels of the text: linguistic, structural and content. Thus, the central characters of Mongolian chronicles are members of the ruling clan, the text was organized within the genealogical principle, based on the history of the Golden Clan of Chingis Khan, and the narrative conforms to strict literary etiquette. All these features made the Mongolian historical chronicles a reflection of the political culture of the nomads.

The process of understanding the text created far from the present day's epoch, the text of another culture is a complex process, conditioned by several factors. Among them, the most important and complex, it seems to me, are the language and the system of cultural categories and concepts reflected in the language. These two systems are closely related and together form certain structures of knowledge, within which each representative of ethnos acts. These structures exist at a subconscious level and are formed under the socio-economic development of society. Thus, we get a certain hermeneutic circle in which, for an adequate understanding of the text and the concepts used by its author, we must turn to an analysis of the social environment in which they originated. In turn, the study of socio-economic

<sup>1</sup> Статья подготовлена в рамках поддержанного РФФИ научного проекта № 18-09-00539 «„История Алтан-хана“ — уникальный источник по истории и культуре монголов второй половины XVI — начала XVII в.: комплексное текстологическое и историко-лингвистическое исследование».

processes requires us to understand the ways of thinking that contemporaries used to comprehend and reflect the surrounding world and the subsequent decision-making.

One of the most productive approaches to understanding a particular culture, in my opinion, is the history of concepts, that is, reflected in the language of representations, in which the underlying meanings for the society and the relationships between them are concentrated. Through these concepts, society self-reflexes: it identifies certain problems and tries to solve them. Analysis of the language expressions of this reflection can contribute to understanding what categories the representatives of the society perceived the surrounding reality and how this was reflected in real political practice and social interaction.

Materials to this report were two Mongolian chronicles of the 17th century: «The Yellow Chronicle» (*Sir-a tuyuji*) and the biography Tümed's Altan Khan «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» (*Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*). In the process of working with sources, I singled out several terms that played an important, in my opinion, role in the political discourse of the 17th-century Mongols. One of the most complex and contradictory of these is the term *törö*. In this report, I will try to analyze this concept from the standpoint of evolutionary, structural and functional approaches, which will allow the most complete reconstruction of its significance and place in the political picture of the world of nomads of the 17th century.

Etymologically, the word *törö* was borrowed by the Mongols from the ancient Türkic language, where it had the meaning 'order, law; custom; wedding feast'. «Also, it was used to translate the Sanskrit concept of „dharma“» [DTS, 1969. P. 581]. Modern Mongolian dictionaries define this concept, primarily as a «regime», «state» or «government» [BAMRS, 2001. P. 241].

The materials of the early historical monuments of the Mongols contain a somewhat different meaning of the term *törö*. In studies based on «The Secret History» and ritual texts, one can find the definition of *törö* as the Supreme Law that Heaven manifests through the ruler [Skrynnikova, 2013. S. 205; Elverskog, 2006. P. 18]. It should be noted that in «The Secret History», the *törö* occupies an independent position, independent of the khan or anyone else. In the text of the monument, the actions related to the *törö* do not have the character of impact or interaction, they only reflect the character's relation to the *törö*: they think of it (mong. *setkikü*) [Rachewilz, 1972. P. 119–120, 157], were zealous in performance (mong. *kiciyekü*) [Rachewilz, 1972. P. 174] or violate it (mong. *qaqacaqu*) [Rachewilz, 1972. P. 90]. The meaning of the word *törö* as a law is indicated by its repeated use in pairing with *yosun* («custom»), which has similar semantics [Rachewilz, 1972. P. 125, 157].

In the sources with which I worked, the use of the concept *törö* differs both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In the chronicle of «The Yellow Chronicle», it meets 12 times, and in the biography of Altan Khan — 44, while the monuments are approximately the same in

size<sup>2</sup>. In the text of «The Yellow Chronicle» the use of the concept is more homogeneous. Thus, we can draw a preliminary conclusion that the level of development of literary traditions and political culture as a whole in the nomadic region of the Ordos tumen was higher.

If we trace how the authors of the monuments imagined the emergence of what is designated as *törö* in texts, one can see quite distinct parallels: both authors introduce the term into the text just when describing the rule of Chinggis Khan. The author of «The Jewel Translucent Sutra»<sup>3</sup> at the same time specifies that the *törö* was «created» or «founded» (mong. *bayiyulqu*) by Chinggis Khan, that is, gives a starting point and points to its created nature: «Born by the fate of the highest god, Creating the supreme customs of *state* from its beginning, Causing all those of the world to enter his power, Temüjin became famous as the Genius Chinggis Khan»<sup>4</sup>.

On the contrary, in «The Yellow Chronicle» *törö*, as in «The Secret History», exists independently of the will of the khan, and the duties of protecting and protecting the *törö* are vested only in the subjects. Both monuments describe in the same details the Toghan-Temür's loss of *törö*, contrasting it with the previous 15 rulers of the Mongol empire by successfully «restraining» (mong. *bariqu*) *törö*: «Ukhaghatu Khan ascended on the throne at the age of 36. When he was 51 years old, in the year of the Monkey, when one hundred and eighty years passed from the reign of Genghis Khan, he lost the *törö*. From him <Genghis Khan> there were 15 supreme Mongolian khans, who held the *törö*»<sup>5</sup>. However, at this moment, the *törö* does not disappear from the narrative — both authors use it in the future, moreover, «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» emphasizes that before the *törö* was lost (mong. *aldaqu*): «They said, „Taking your *Great State*, which was lost long ago, let us become friendly with you, the Supreme Great Khan“»<sup>6</sup>. In my opinion, such dynamics reflect the prevailing idea in the East of the cyclical nature of time and phenomena in the

<sup>2</sup> «The Yellow Chronicle»: 230 pages with text, 11–15 lines each, in the line, on average, 4 words. «The Jewel Translucent Sutra»: 1586 lines, an average of eight words per line — in both monuments of about 12,000 words). It must also be said that in the use of the term *törö* in «The Jewel Translucent Sutra», a certain internal differentiation can be traced: one can distinguish groups of usage depending on the combinations in which the word is used and their semantics (*törö yosun*, *kitad-mongol törö*).

<sup>3</sup> The translations of the passages from «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» are given from the book of J. Elverskog [ETNS, 2003].

<sup>4</sup> *deger-e tngri-yin jayay-a-bar törögsen .. degedü törö yosun-i tuluyur-aca bayiyuluysan .. delekei yirtincü dakin-i erkedür-iyen oroγuluysan .. Temüjin suu-tu Cinggis Qayan kemen aldarsiysan* [ETNS, 2003: 219].

<sup>5</sup> *uqayatu qayan yucin jiryuyan jil qan orun sayuju : tabin nigen nasun-tayan becin jil-e : cinggis qayan . qan orun sayuy-san-aca inayši jayun nayan jil bolqui-tur törü- yi inü aldabai :: egün-ece degegsi mongyol-un arban tabun qayan törü bariysan bui* (ShT: 19). See also [ETNS, 2003: 220].

<sup>6</sup> *erten-ü aldaysan yeke törö-yi cinu abcu erkin yeke Qayan cim-a-luya nokocejü ögsü kemegsen-dür* [ETNS, 2003: 237].

world around us. In this context, an episode of the biography of Altan Khan is especially revealing, in which the author directly compares the *törö* with the «wheel of time» (mong. *caγ kürdün*): «He said, „Never think proudly because the eighty tümen Chinese are so numerous. You do not know how to rule the *Great State* like turning the Kalacakra. If you stabilize the unstabilized *state*, there will be happiness at home and abroad. If the decree of the Emperor releases and returns the child, there will be peace“»<sup>7</sup>. The reappearance in the text refers to both sources by the 16th century (the reign of Guden Khan and Dayan Khan in «The Yellow Chronicle» and «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» respectively). As we know, the end of the 15th and 16th centuries was a period of activation of the Mongolian tribes in the international political arena and the strengthening of tendencies towards centralization and consolidation of the polities.

Thus, it is possible to single out a common core of ideas about the evolution of the *törö* in both sources: it arose during the reign of Chingis Khan, was held by his fifteen successors, was lost by Togon-Temur and subsequently returned. It is important to note that the episodes in which the authors again use this term refer to the period of the strengthening and centralization of the Mongolian tribes. Among the significant differences in the use of the term *törö* between two monuments, it should be pointed out that, from this point of view, the chronicle of «The Yellow Chronicle» contains an archaic, that is close to «The Secret History», understanding of this concept: the *törö* is not created by the khan, or anyone else. In the text of «The Jewel Translucent Sutra», on the other hand, the *törö* «originally created» (mong. *tulyuraca bayiyuluᠤsan*) by Chingis Khan<sup>8</sup>, it can be installed (mong. *toytaqu*), unified (mong. *Neyilekü*), calmed (mong. *tübsidkekü*) and taken away (mong. *abaqu*): «In-finitely rejoicing, the Chinese nation offered him extraordinary tribute and titles. The Cakravartin pacified the Sino-Mongol *Great State*»<sup>9</sup>. Proceeding from the Khans mentioned by the authors, under which the *törö* was returned to the Mongols, it can be assumed that «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» was created in the possessions of the successors of Altan Khan (in the Tumet ulus), and «The Yellow Chronicle» — in the wanderings of the Great Khan, that is, in the territory of the Chahars or those tribes, who recognized their power.

In my opinion, the next two levels of consideration of the concept — structural and functional — are very difficult to separate without losing part of the meanings inherent in the concept since the structure and functions

directly condition each other. Because of this, I will not divide from sanctification in the text.

From the standpoint of the structural approach, it is necessary to define the essential characteristics of the term *törö* and the place that it occupies to other elements of the political culture of the Mongols. First of all, in both sources, attention is drawn to the spatial connotations inherent in the use of this term. They are expressed in particular in those verbs that authors use together with this word. The author «The Yellow Chronicle» uses the verb *qasilcaqu* in the sense of «protecting», as well as the derived from it *qasiyci* for the description of the title, which Altan Khan demanded from the Great Khan. Both these words are designated to cover or enclose something that has a spatial embodiment. Thus, Chingis Khan bequeathed his descendants to protect (mong. *qasiqu*) his *törö*, and Altan Khan is called the defender (mong. *qasiyci*) of the *törö*: «You became the Great Khan. Bestow me a title of „Siteu Khan“, the defender of the *törö*»<sup>10</sup>. Besides, when explaining the reasons for the aggressive policy of Ligdan Khan to neighboring rulers, the author of the chronicle points out the disobedience of the latter and formulates it as the fact that they «stepped aside from the *törö*» (mong. *törü-eče eteged üile yabudal oladaysan*). In my opinion, this episode shows the author's approval of the chronicle to the policy of the last Great Khan, which can serve as additional, if indirect, evidence that the chronicle was written either among the Chakharians themselves or with the tribes allied to them.

In «The Jewel Translucent Sutra», a few times, there is an indication that one or another ruler was holding *törö* steady. Concerning this feature, one can observe in the text the same dynamics that we saw in the evolution of the very concept of *törö*: Chingis Khan straightened the *törö*, after which 14 emperors held it sufficiently. Dayan Khan was the first who again was capable of this, according to the author of the biography. Then, in the narrative of the reign of Altan Khan, the author enters a significant episode, which reads as «the circumstances under which, at the behest of the sky, it was a beautiful time when an equal Chinese-Mongolian *törö* was established»<sup>11</sup>. The last episode represents an order to the descendants of Altan Khan, mourning the deceased ancestor. These rulers, in a sense, are opposed to those who could not hold the bull in the right position, the author emphasizing that this inability was due to the will of the sky and the lack of the requisite authority for the power: «He had no opportunity to hold the customs of state straight. Truly beyond control, by the fate of god, Thus it was in the Rabbit Year, that he returned to his supreme birth»<sup>12</sup>. This is the story of Sayin-Alag, who, having

<sup>7</sup> yoru-de nayan tümen Kitad olan kemen yekerkeju buu sana ..yeke törö caγ kürdün metü ergikü medege ügei bui ..yegüdkel ügei törö toytabasu γadan-a dotan-a jiryamu ..yeke Qayan-u jarliy-[iγar]+ köbegün-i inu γaryaju ög-gülbesü amur buyu [ETNS, 2003: 245].

<sup>8</sup> See note 2.

<sup>9</sup> caγ ügei bayascu Kitad ulus eng ügei sang ere γaryaysan-dur..cakrawarti Kitad Mongyol-un yeke törö-yi tübsidkeged [ETNS, 2003: 301]. See also [ETNS, 2003: 219, 245, 246, 248, 249, 278, 285, 301].

<sup>10</sup> či yeke qaγan bolbai : namai törü-yi qasiyci siteü qan čola öggün soyorq-a (ShT: 30).

<sup>11</sup> tegünü qoyin-a degere Tngri-yin jayaya-bar Kitad Mongyol qoyar-un ..tegsi törö jokicaju sayin caγ bolqu-yin siltayan inu kemebesü [ETNS, 2003: 243].

<sup>12</sup> tegün-ü qoyin-a Sayin Alay-i yucin nasun degere inu qan oron-dur sayulyabai tegsi törö yosun-i bariqu jabsar bolul ügei .. Tngri -yin jayayabar erke ügei mon böged [ETNS, 2003: 226].

pushed aside his young nephew, illegally occupied the throne after his elder brother. The absence of a legitimate and empowered ruler leads to an unstable state that is unfavorable for the society.

Thus, we can conclude that *törö* has great value in the consciousness of the bearers of culture and requires certain efforts to maintain it. Such efforts are necessary and build certain scenarios for the conduct of the ruler and subjects. The ruler must have the legitimacy of power, which is based primarily on his place in the clan hierarchy and is also linked to his political and military might. At the end of the 16th century, these factors are also joined by his attitude toward religion, which is built around the concept of the ideal Buddhist ruler, Chakravartin. The latter is visible in the image of Altan Khan in «The Jewel Translucent Sutra». The subjects, in turn, must protect the *törö* and give their strength to maintain it. In addition to the above examples from «The Yellow Chronicle», in this context, we should also mention an episode from the biography of Altan Khan, where the subjects «fortified the great *törö*» were granted sashes and titles: «He also bestowed on the lords who helped and strived for the State the title of Dudulikhu Janjung. He also presented titles to each of the lords and ministers who guarded the immaculate Great State»<sup>13</sup>. With this, there is an echo of the passage «The Yellow Chronicle», where the author describes the distribution of the titles to Chingis Khan to those who «gave their strength» (mong. *kücin-iyen öggügsed*): «Returning from a great campaign, [Chingis Khan] bestowed great mercies on everyone, starting from nine *orlugs*: to all those who gave their strength, he gave orderly great titles, honorary posts, great awards, and made them *noyans* of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands»<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, we can suggest that the *törö* characterizes the type of relationship inside and outside the society, which, in the framework of this political culture, is judged to be both correct and favorable. Thus, it can be assumed that the usage of the concept *törö* in describing the established relationship between China and the Tumen tribes of the Tumen is also judged to be correct. At the same time, in my opinion, it is not a question of uniting states, although the phrase «combine *törö*» (mong. *törö neyilekü*) is used in the text just as mutually beneficial format for both parties: «When those messengers arrived and explained everything to the Emperor and court, he in agreement with the others said, „If we return Daicing Ejei, there will be peace in the Great State“»<sup>15</sup>. The use of the phrases of the «great *törö*» (mong. *yeke törö*) and «Chinese-Mongolian *törö*» (mong. *Kitad Mon-*

*gyol-un törö*) highlights the great importance that the Mongols attached a relationship to the Chinese dynasties. At the same time, the Mongolian author evaluates them as the relations of equal subjects who «discuss» (mong. *kelelcekü*) and «establish order» (mong. *jokiqu*) of such relations: «Along with his younger brothers, Kündülen Khan of the Kharchin, Lord Daiching of the Yüngsiyebü, and Lord Sechen of the Ordos, at the head of the Three Western Tümen, rode out and approached, in order to discuss the tranquillity of Great State»<sup>16</sup>. The nature of these relationships in the Mongolian political culture was not hierarchical. Mongolian rulers did not position themselves dependent on the Chinese emperor, but also did not seek to dominate the Chinese territories. The latter correlates with the general patterns of development of nomadic polities, which benefited from coexistence with a thriving settled state, which was for them a source of necessary products and goods of prestigious consumption the so-called system of «remote exploitation» [Kradin, Skrynnikova, 2006. P. 498–501].

The proper nature of such relationships is also reflected in the impact that they have on the world around them. Explicitly this is expressed in the message of the Mongolian khan to the Chinese court mentioned in the biography of Altan Khan, where it is stated that if the *törö* is established, «the internal and external (peoples) will be happy»: «If you stabilize the unstabilized state, there will be happiness at home and abroad. If the decree of the Emperor releases and returns the child, there will be peace»<sup>17</sup>. Two of these sentences in the text are connected with a conditional verbal participle, which, in combination with the present-future time of the finite verb, conveys the meaning of the cause. This view correlates with similar ideas in «The Secret History», which reflects the existing, despite the long period of fragmentation and internecine strife, continuity.

Summing up, I will once again note the essential characteristics of the concept of *törö*, revealed in the course of working with sources. As an element of the political culture common to the Mongolian peoples, the *törö* represents an appropriate form of relations between the subjects of the political structure that emerged at the time of the emergence of the Chingis Khan empire and the formation of the Mongolian views of themselves as unity. This order is of great value for the whole community, as a result of which culture demands from the participants of these relations appropriate qualities and efforts. The implementation in practice of this order leads, in the eyes of the bearers of culture, to the stabilization of the society and its well-being. Distinctions between sources, caused in my opinion by the difference of regio-

<sup>13</sup> kiciyejü törö-dür tusalaysan noyad-tur Duduliqu Janjung cola soyurqaju ..kkir ügei yeke törö-yi bekileldügsen noyad sayid-tur tus buri cola ner-e ögcü [ETNS, 2003: 247].

<sup>14</sup> tere yeke ayan-aca bayuyad : yisün örlüg-üd ekilen : kücün-iyen öggügsed-e gün yeke cola . kündü yeke yambu : yeke öglige-yi jerge-ber ni . jayun-u noyad mingyan-u noyad . tümen-i noyad bolyan : bügüde-tür yeke qayir-a- tur [ShT: 9].

<sup>15</sup> tedeger elcis-i kürcü Qayan ekilen qamuy bügüde-yi bürin-e ayiladqysan -dur ..Dayicing Ejei-yi ögbesü yeke törö neyiley-e kemen jöbsiyeldüged [ETNS, 2003: 246].

<sup>16</sup> Degüner-ece Qaracin-u Kündülen Qayan Yüngsiyebü-yin Dayicing Noyan Ordos-un Secen Noyan terigüten barayun yurban tümen-iyer Kitad ulus-i siqaju mordayad ..tegsi-ber yeke törö kelelcekü-yin tula .deger-e qayalya-yin yadan-a bayuju [ETNS, 2003: 247].

<sup>17</sup> yegüdkel ügei törö toytabasu yadan-a dotan-a jiryamu ..yeke Qayan-u jarliy-+[iyar]+ köbegün-i inu yaryaju ög-gülbesü amur buyu [ETNS, 2003: 245].

nal political cultures, are expressed in that for authors of both sources different examples of such relations are correct. For the author of «The Jewel Translucent Sutra», such as the rule of Altan Khan as one of the most powerful, politically successful rulers of the 17th century, whose authority is strengthened not only by his ge-

nealogy but also by the support of «true» religion. For the author «The Yellow Chronicle», who lives among Chaharians or tribes subject to them, the correct version of the relationship is the traditional power of the Great Khan, passed among the senior branch of the descendants of Chingis Khan.

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### Daria Seliunina

#### Concept *törö* in the Mongolian political culture of 17th century

This article deals with analysis of the use of the term *törö* bases on the material of the early monuments of the Mongolian historical literature: «The Yellow Chronicle» (*Sir-a twuji*) and «The Jewel Translucent Sutra» (*Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*). The results of the research based on the comparative analysis of two mentioned sources and also usage of *törö* in the first Mongolian chronicle «The Secret History of the Mongols». Thus it allowed to use synchronic and diachronic research methods, which reveals meaning variations of the concept. *Törö* designated a type of connection between the subjects of political communication. Its origin in the Chinggis Khan empire time made this type of relation appropriate and sacred. Nevertheless, the actual content of the term was diverse and depended on the time, conditions and participants of the relations.

**Key words:** political culture, Altan-Khan, Chinggis-Khan, terminology of power, Mongolian chronicles.