

Notes on Some Chinese Loanwords in Old Turkic

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As is known, the Chinese loanwords are among the oldest borrowings in Turkic. Numerous Chinese loanwords occurring frequently in Old Turkic, especially in the Uigur texts, have so far been studied and identified as such by many scholars.

In this paper, I would like to make some comments on some of the Chinese loanwords occurring in the Old Turkic inscriptions in general and in the Uigur manuscripts in particular.

Since the main theme of this colloquium is “The Languages and Cultures of the Silk Roads”, I think it would be appropriate to begin with the words meaning “silk, silk fabric” occurring in the inscriptions.

1. Orkh. *işgiti* / *äşgiti* “a kind of embroidered Chinese silk brocade” and *kutay* “white silk girdle”

The first word occurs twice in the Orkhon inscriptions, once with initial /I/ sign and once without it: *işg(i)ti kut(a)y* “embroidered brocade and white silk girdle” (KT S 5), *kinl(i)g (ä)şg[(i)tis]in, kīrg(a)gl(i)g kut(a)yin* “their musk-scented silk brocade and bordered white silk girdle” (BK N 11).

The first word which occurs as *äşgürti* in MK has not yet been identified. According to Clauson it looks Tokharian (EDPT 358a). But the second word *kutay* has recently been identified by Choi as a Chinese loanword. According to him it comes from a Chinese compound, i.e. ACh. *g'ieu* “a kind of silk” = Sino-Ko. *ku* “white silk” and ACh. 帶 *tai* > M. *tai*, C *tai* “girdle, sash, belt” = Sino-J. *tai* id. (Karl. 962) = Sino-Ko. *tai* id. (Choi: CAJ 32:165). This identification seems to be correct.

Apart from *işgiti* / *äşgiti* and *kutay* there are several words meaning

“silk” or “a kind of silk fabric” in the Old and Middle Turkic sources, e.g. *agi* “silk brocade; treasure” (Orch., Uig.), *barčit* “silk brocade” (MK, etc.), *čixansi* “embroidered Chinese silk” (MK), *čuz* “Chinese gold brocade, red and black” (MK, KB, etc.), *xoliŋ* or *xuliŋ* “silk of variegated colors” (MK), *loxtay* “red Chinese brocade” (MK), *torko* “silk, silk fabric” (Uig., MK, KB, etc.), etc. Of these, only *čixansi*, *xoliŋ* / *xuliŋ* and *loxtay* look Chinese and actually have been identified as such by Clauson and Brockelmann (EDPT: 409, 622b, 763b).

OT (Uigur) and MT *torko* “silk fabric” survives today in the following languages: Tuv. *torgu*, Khak. *torgi*, Alt., Kirg. *torko*, Kzk. *torka*.

The Turkic native word for “silk”, on the other hand, is *yipäk*. It is derived from *yip*, the palatalized form of OT *yip* “cord, thread, string”, with the deminutive suffix [+Ak] and means “thin thread” originally. It first appears in the Middle Turkic sources: Taf. (Bor. 154) *yipäk* “silk”, Tarj. (Hou. 104) *yipäk* id., CC *ipäk*, *yibek* (*ypac*, *jibek*) id., etc. This word survives in the following languages: Trk., Gag. *ipek*, Az. *ipäk*, Trkm. *yüpek*, Nog. *yibek*, Bšk. *yibäk*, Tat. *yifäk*, Kzk. *žibek*, Uzb. *ipäk*, NUig. *žipäk*, Kirg. *žibek*, Khak. *čibek*.

2. Orkh. *yenčü l Yinčü*, Uig. *yinčü* “pearl” < Ch. 眞珠 *chen-chu* “genuine pearl” (Rad. III 339), *zhenzhu* (*chên-chu* G. 589, G. 2549)

This word first occurs in the Orkhon inscriptions as the name of the Syr-Darya (Jaxartes) River: *yenčü l Yinčü ügüz*. According to Radloff, it is a translation of the Chinese name *chen-chu ho* “the genuine pearl river” which occurs as such in the Chinese inscription on the Kara-Balgasun monument left by the Uigurs. As is known, the Chinese name of this river is itself a translation of *yaxša arta*, the Middle Persian name of that river.

Clauson thinks that the identity of the first syllable remains a mystery (EDPT 944b). As it is known, the first element of the compound *chen-chu* occurs as *čin* “real, genuine” in Old Turkic whereas the first syllable of *yenčü l Yinčü* “pearl” is *yen l Yin*. The initial *ly/* here, however, could be a substitution for an original *lj/*.

OT *yenčü l Yinčü* “pearl” survives in the modern languages as follows: Trk., Az. *inji*, Trkm. *hünji* “beads”, Uzb., NUig. *inju*, East.Trk. *yünjü*, *yúnjä*, *ünjä*, Tat. *enje* (> Chuv. *enje*), Bšk. *inyi*, Kzk. *injüw*, Nog. *inji*, Krč.-Blk., Kum. *inji*, Kklp. *hinji*, Alt. *yinyi* “beads”, Tob. *jinji*, Tuv. *činji*,

Kumd. *činči*, Shor *šinje*, Khak. *ninji* “pearl; beads”, Kač *nenji*.

This word passed from Turkic into Hungarian and Russian at an early date: Hung. *gyöngy* [jönj], Rus. *žemčug* (жемчуг), dial. *zémčuh* (земчуг). These forms are important; for they enable us to reconstruct the original Turkic form of the word.¹

The Hungarian word was borrowing from Old Chuvash or Old Bulgarian Turkic. The original form of Hung. *gyöngy* was probably **jenjü* while that of the Russian *zemčug* something like **jenčug* (cf. Ukr. *ženčug*, Old Rus. *ženčug* [женчугъ]). In other words, they both indicate that the vowel of the first syllable was /e/, and not /i/. The Khakas form *ninji* and the Kač dialect *nenji*, too, testify to this assumption. We may therefore conclude that the OT form of the word was *yenčü* with /e/, but it soon developed into /i/ in the palatal environment.

It is not easy to reconstruct the original Turkic form of the Russian *žemčug*. Because of its initial consonant, there seems to be no doubt that it was borrowed, like Hung. *gyöngy*, from Old Chuvash or a language very close to it. The /m/ at the end of the first syllable is in all likelihood secondary going back to an older **ženčug*, a form which is actually attested in the old Russian sources (cf. Vasmer II: 46).

It is difficult to explain the velar /g/ at the end of the Russian *žemčug*. Perhaps the Kazakh form *injüw* which probably goes back to an older **yinčüg* can be of some help in explaining the final velar of the Russian form. But in this case, we would have to assume that the Chinese word in question came into Turkic in at least three different forms; i.e. *yenčü*, **jenčü* and **jenčüg*.

3. Orkh. *t(e)nsi* /*tinsi* “son of heaven” < Ch. 天子 *t’ien-tsu* “son of Heaven, i.e. the Chinese emperor” (Thomsen 1912)

This word first occurs three times as *tinsi* in the Tunyukuk inscription: *y(e)nčü üg(ü)z(ü)g k(ä)čä tinsi ogli (a)yt(i)gma b(ä)nl(i)g (ä)k t(a)g(i)g (ä)rtü* “Crossing over the Pearl River and passing by the (white)-spotted Äk mountain which is (also) called Tensi’s son ...” (T 44). *tinsi ogli (a)yt(i)gma t(a)g* (T 47). The phrase *tinsi ogli* also occurs superflously on line 46. The word *tinsi* of the Tunyukuk inscription occurs however as *t(ä)nsi* in the first line of Irk Bitig: *t(ä)nsi m(ä)n* “I am Ten-si (i.e. the Chinese Emperor)” (Thomsen 1912: 196).

Ramstedt wanted to see a reminiscence of the Prometheus myth in the phrase *tinsi ogli yatigma* “where the emperor’s son lies on” occurring in the Tunyukuk inscription. According to him the participants in the expedition of Alexander the Great could have found the place of the captivity of Prometheus in a mighty cave in the Hindukush mountains. And the reference in Tunyukuk is thus to Prometheus. Grønbech, on the other hand, read the word *YTGmA* as *aytigma* “named, called” and translated the phrase accordingly (Aalto 1960: 58). I myself accepted Grønbech’s reading and interpretation in my Orkhon Turkic grammar written in 1965 and published in 1968. I still hold the view that the mountains which are referred to here with the phrase *tinsi ogli aytigma* are the Tien-Shan or Tengri Khan mountains (Turkish *Tanrı dağları*) in Kirghizia, especially the snow-covered peak of this mountain range which is called Ala-Too “the Speckled Mountain” (= *bänlig Äk Tag*) in Kirghiz.

4. *s(ä)ñün, s(a)ñun* < Ch. 將軍 *tsiang-kün* (Gab.) *sänün* “General”, Pinyin *jiang-jun* (< G. 1212, 3276)

In Old Turkic this word occurs in two different forms which came into being as results of regressive and progressive assimilations: *sänün* occurring in Orkhon I, II, T, Tariat and *sañun* occurring in Irk Bitig, in the Miran manuscript and in some Yenisei inscriptions.

We know that in Old Turkic there were some native terms for officers at lower ranks, e.g. *yüz baši* “the head of a military unit consisting of one hundred soldiers” (Tariat W 7), *beš yüz baši* “commander of a military unit consisting of five hundred soldiers” (Tariat W 6; occurs twice), *biñ baši* “major, the head of a military unit consisting of one thousand soldiers” (Tariat S 7; occurs twice), but there was not any native term for “general” commanding an army. In the Tariat inscription, however, the periphrastic term *beš biñ är baši*, i.e. “head of five thousand soldiers” seems to occur as the Turkic equivalent of the Chinese title *sänün*: *b(e)š biñ (ä)r b(a)ši išb(a)ra s(ä)ñün y(a)gl(a)k(a)r* (W 7).

Even the Chinese title *t(a)y s(ä)ñ(ün)* “great general” < Ch. *ta-tsiang-kün*) occurs several times in the Old Turkic runic texts: *lisün t(a)y s(ä)ñün b(a)š(a)d[u] biš yüz (ä)r(ä)n k(ä)lti* “under the leadership of the great general Li-Tsüan five hundred men came” (S 11), *(a)ltun t(a)y s(a)ñun* “the great general Altun” (Tun. IV 5-6). *(a)z sipa t(a)y s(ä)ñün* “great general Sipa of

the Az (tribe)” (Tariat N 3).

The Chinese loanword *sāñün* also has a plural form in *-t* in the Tariat inscription occurring there twice. As it happens plural forms of other titles ending in *-n* (*tegin: tegit, tarkan: tarkat*) the final *-n* drops: *s(ä)ñüt biña* “the generals and *Bingas*” (N 2), *[b]i[ñä] s(ä)ñüt* “the *Bingas* and generals” (S 4).

5. Orkh. *sin* “tomb, grave”, Uig. *sin* < Ch. 寢 *ts'in* “the rear hall in an ancestral temple; tomb” (Gab.), Pinyin *qin* (*ch'in* G. 2091)

This word first occurs in the Tariat inscription left by the Uigurs: *sin s(i)zdä* “the tombs (of our ancestors) are in your possession” (South 5). In the same line we also have *sinl(ä)g* “graveyard, cemetery”, derived from *sin* with the suffix {+lAg}: *sinl(ä)gdä* “at the graveyard (of our ancestors)”. This word is the older form of Turkish *sinlä* “graveyard” occurring frequently in the 14th-century OAT texts.

The word *sin* occurs as *sin* in some Middle Turkic sources; İM (Kilisli) *sin* “tomb”, سنلاغ *sinlag* “cemetery” (EDPT: 832b), Muk. *sin* “mezar”, *sin-ga* “into the grave” (Yüce: 175), etc. But this back-vocalic form is probably due to a contamination with *sin* “human body, stature, height, memorial statue” (cf. Uig. *sin süñök* “body and bones, skeleton”). On the other hand, this word is always written with the letter س *sin* in the OAT texts and it lives on as such in many Anatolian dialects (SDD 1229). In the village Uçhisar of Nevşehir *sin* is used in curses, e.g. *sinine siç-* “to shit on one’s grave” (from M. Ölmez). Cf. also *sinlik* “mezarlık” listed there as a local word used in Gavurdağı, Cebelibereket - Seyhan (SDD 1232).

6. Orkh. *ti* “firmly, constantly, steadily, persistently”, Uig. (Gab.) *tī, tii* “immer, beständig, fest” < Ch. 定 *ting* < *d'ien*g ~ *tei* (Gab.), Pinyin *ding* (*ting* G. 11248) < Ch. *ting* “fest”.

This adj.-adv. occurs rather rarely in the Uigur texts: *ti turkaru mänilikin* “with a continuous and long-lasting happiness” (TT III 110), *küsäyürlär ärti birgärü küntämäk ti sizni körgü üçün* “they all together were wishing to see you every day continuously” (TT III 96), etc.

Apart from the binaries *ti turkaru* and *küntämäk ti* in the Uigur texts, I believe we also have *ärtiñü ti* “exceedingly, constantly” occurring in the

Bilge Kagan inscription: (S 14) ... *bunča m(a)tı b(ä)gl(ä)r k(a)η(ı)m k(a)g(a)nka (ä)rt(i)ηü* (S 15) *(ä)rt(i)ηü ti m(a)g kılıtı* “(When my father, the Turkish Bilge Kagan, sat on the throne)... this many loyal lords lauded (and praised) my father, the kagan, exceedingly and constantly” (the second *ärtinü* is superfluous), [*kañım kagan t]ürük b(ä)gl(ä)rin bod(u)nin (ä)rt(i)ηü ti m(a)g itdi ögd[i]* “my father, the kagan, lauded and praised the Turkish lords and tribes exceedingly and constantly” (S 15).

7. Uig. *sin* “body, stature”, MK *sī:n* “human body, stature, height, external appearance” < ACh. 身 *sien* > M. *sən*, C. *sən* “body”; Sino-J. *šin* (< *sin*) id. (Karl. 869); Sino-Ko. *sin* id. (Choi: CAJ 32: 166).

This word is generally regarded as a native term in Turkic. Recently, however, it has been claimed that it is a Chinese loanword (see above).

The word *sin* first appears in the Manichean and Buddhistic Uigur texts. It also occurs in Middle Turkic in the binaries *bod sin* “body, stature” and *sin süñök* “body and the bones”. It survives in quite a many modern languages: Tuv. *sin* “stature; mountain range”, Khak. *sin* “statue; mountain range; height”, Tat. *sin* “figure, stature, body, statue”, Bšk. *hın* id., Nog. *sin* “stature, figure”, *sinli* “tall, well-proportioned”, *sintas* “statue, stone statue” < *sin taš*, Kzk. *sindi* “like” < *sinlig*, Chuv. *si* in *pü-si* “body, figure, stature” < Tat. *buy-sin*, NUig. *sin* “stature, figure, external appearance”, Uzb. *sinli* “tall, well-proportioned” etc.

Clauson seems to have mixed this word with the following above-mentioned *sin* “tomb” which he wrongly reads *sī:n* (EDPT 832). The example *sin* “a memorial statue” taken from CC 226 belongs here and not to the item *sin* “tomb”. The author of *Tarjuman turki wa ‘arabi*, united the two homographic words in one item: *sin* “al-qabr wa’l-sanam” (both read *sin* by Hou. 6, 11). Clauson is mistaken by citing these two examples, i.e. *sin* and *sin*, only in the item “tomb”. The example *sin* “statue” taken from Tuhfe 21a 5, too, belongs to the item *sī:n* meaning “body, stature”.

8. *bi* “knife, sharp edge, blade” < ACh. 匕 *pyi*, M *pi* “dagger” = Sino-J. *pi / hi*, Sino-Ko. *pi* “dagger, spoon, arrowhead” (Choi: CAJ 32: 163)

The late Sir Gerard Clauson suggested that Uig. *bi* (Br. *pi*) might come from some word like *p’i* “to split” (EDPT 291b). Recently Choi has offered

a more convincing etymology for Old Turkic *bi*. According to him, it comes from Ancient Chinese *p'ji* “dagger” > *M pi*, Sino-Korean *pi* “dagger” (CAJ 32: 163; Karlg. 713).

In Old Turkic, *bi* is normally used in the binary *bi bičgu* “cutting instruments”. When used alone it usually means “blade, sharp edge of a knife or razor”, e.g. *y[üli]günüñ bisi* “the sharp edge of a razor” (TT VIII A. i).

OT *bi* [bi:] seems to have survived today only in Yakut *bi*: “blade, edge of a knife”, e.g. *bihax bi:tä* “edge of a knife”. It also survives in the root of Middle Turkic *bilä-* “to sharpen”, Trkm. *bi:le-* id., Yak. *bi:lä-* id., Trk. *bile-* id., etc.

In Uigur we also have *bičäk* “knife” derived from *bi*, not from the verb *bič-* “to cut” as Clauson thinks (EDPT 293b). The back-vocalic form *bičäk* occurring in some Middle Turkic texts and modern languages must have come into existence as a result of contamination. OT *bičäk* seems to have survived today only in Tuvinian *bižek* “knife” < **bišäk* < *bi:čäk*.

9. *čan* “a cup” < Chinese 盞 *chan* “a cup for wine or fat/oil” (EDPT: 424a).
čanak “a wooden bowl or dish” (BT IX: 71,1; Ham. 1986: 34, 1-2),
 Pinyin *zhan* (*chan* G. 300)

This word is well attested in the Uigur texts, e.g. *birär čan kuma yağın* “one cup a day of linseed oil” (Heil. I 64), *bir čan bor iki čan suv birlä čokratıp* “boil a cup of wine with two cups of water” (Heil. I 122), etc.

In Uigur, apart from *čan* we also have *čanak* “a wooden bowl or an earthenware bowl, dish”, a diminutive form, e.g. *čanakların kizartmış kızıl bakır suv susup içärlär* “Mit ihren Holzschalen trinken sie glühend gemachtes Kupfer” (BT IX: 71), *ekki kümüş čanak* “two silver bowls” (Ham. 1986: 34, 1-2). This word is attested in many Middle Turkic sources. MK: *čanak* “a wooden cone, bowl”, Tafs. *čanak* “bowl”, Chag. *čanak/čanag* “bowl”, CC *čanak* “an earthenware bowl”, Khwar. *čanak* “bowl, dish”, Qaw. *šanak* id., etc. (EDPT 425b), Yel.Uig. *činak, činak* “a tea cup”, etc. It survives in some modern languages: Trkm. *ča.nak* “a wooden bowl or cup”, Trk. *čanak* “an earthenware pot or pan”, NUig. *čanaq* “a cup, a cone” etc. The Turkmen form indicates that the /a/ of the first syllable is originally long.

Another diminutive noun derived from *čan* is Kirg. *čanač* “a leather cup

for serving kumiss or ayran”. It is formed with the suffix {+Ač}.

10. MK (Oghuz) *sindo/sindu* “scissors” < ACh. *tsiän* > M *tsien*, C *tsin* + ACh. *tau* > M *tau*, C *tou* “knife”, Sino-J. *to*: “knife, sword, blade”, Sino-Ko. *to* id. (Choi 1992:194)

Middle Turkic (Oghuz) *sindu* /*sindo* occurs today only in the Oghuz group of languages, Azerbaijani not included: OAT *sindu*, *sindi*, Anat. dial. *sindi*, Trkm. *sindi*. This word does not have a convincing etymology in Turkic. Brockelmann regarded *sindu* as a deverbal noun derived from *sin-* “to be broken” with the suffix {-DU} (1954:99). But this etymology cannot be correct for phonetic and semantic reasons: 1. The /i/ of the verb *sin-* is long originally (cf. Trkm. *sī:n-*) whereas that of *sindu* is short (Trkm. *sindi*); 2. Trkm. *sī:n-* is a reflexive/passive stem meaning “to be broken” whereas *sindu* is an agent noun.

11. Uig. *yaŋ* “a pattern, model; kind, sort, manner” < Ch. 樣 *yang* (Gab., EDPT: 940b, Giles 12854)

This word occurs frequently in the Uigur texts, in MK, KB and other Middle Turkic sources, i.e. Kipchak, Chagatay and OAT texts. It survives in modern languages: Alt., Bar. *yaŋ* “soul, state of mind”, Kirg. *jaŋ* “gesture, movement”, Yak. *saŋ* “quality, character”, Tuv. *čaŋ* “(human) character, disposition”, Alt.Kum. *d’añ* “habit, custom”, *d’añda-* “to believe, to contract a habit”, Kir. *jaŋ* “gesture, movement”, *jaŋda-* “to make or use a gestures or gestures”, etc.

The same word is found also in Mongolian: *jaŋ* “character, nature; disposition, temperament; custom, habit, conduct”, Khal. *žan* id. According to Doerfer, the word *yaŋ* passed from Turkic into Mongolian where it has an initial /j/, and from Mongolian into Manchu-Tungus (TMEN IV: 202 ff., Tungusica: 115).

Apart from Kirg. *jaŋda-* (< *yaŋ+la-*) mentioned above, the Chinese loanword *yaŋ* have the following derivatives in Turkic: Chag., Tuhf. *yaŋla* “like” (< *yaŋ+la*), and Uig., MK, Chag. *yaŋlig* id. The latter seems to have survived today in the following languages: Tuv. *çaŋniŋ* “having the character of”, Uzb. *yaŋliġ* “like”, Yel.Uig. *yaŋniŋ*, *yanniŋ* “having the form of, like”, id., and Trkm. *ya:lu* “like” < *yaŋlig*.

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