

**On the Original Text of The Secret History of the Mongols
Written in 'Phags-pa Script**

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1. The famous historical source for the Great Mongol Khans and their genealogy presented along with their secular and military deeds, known as the *Secret History of the Mongols* (SHM), was written in two sets: the first ten chapters were composed at the end of the 1220s and the last two chapters at the end of the 1240s. Following the date of composition of this source, it is obvious that the historical time slot corresponds to the period where the Uighur- Mongolian script was in official use. Therefore, the first original text without doubt was written in Uighur-Mongolian script. Unfortunately, that original text of the SHM has not been preserved and only reached us in a form of Chinese characters of early Ming dynasty. Interestingly, the survived text of the SHM in Chinese transliteration remains as the greatest document that shows the basic linguistic distinctiveness of the Middle Mongolian.

The text of the SHM written in Uighur-Mongolian script differs very much linguistically from the text of the SHM preserved in Chinese characters. The reason is that the original text of the SHM in Uighur-Mongolian script shows the linguistic characteristics typical to the late period of the Ancient Mongolian, whereas the text in Chinese transliteration shows the linguistic features of the Middle Mongolian. In other words, these two versions of the SHM represent two different stages of the Mongolian language development.

During many centuries the language of the sources written in Uighur-Mongolian script has been evolved, and by reaching the period of Middle Mongolian, many new linguistic features were introduced; the diphthongs and vowel assimilations were brought in, consonants were weakened as it is shown in the transliterated text of the SHM. Many other linguistic changes that were unknown before have been observed, and for that reason, some modification has been introduced in morphology and grammatical form. Consequently, the scholars are interested in finding the relationship between these two versions of the SHM.

2. In addition to these two texts, the option of the text written in 'Phags-pa script might be available as well. From the historical point of view, Khubilai Khan ruled over a vast empire inhabited by various civilizations, cultures, and nationalities, like Mongols, Chinese, Jurchens, Uighurs, Turks, Tibetans and many other ethnic groups that belonged to different faiths and religions, including Shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam and Nestorian Christianity. Among the state policy of Khubilai Khan, a policy of having united script was essential. He decided to use none of the scripts of above mentioned nationalities, but to invent a new script. Khubilai Khan decreed

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the Tibetan monk 'Phags-pa Lodoijantsan(?) to create such a script that is capable to depict the linguistic characteristics of all ethnic groups of his Empire. The scholar introduced a script in which he combined a form of the Tibetan and a literary system of Mongolian that was became to be known as *square script* or 'Phags-pa script.

Khubilai Khan declared the newly invented 'Phags-pa script as a state script and in order to spread this script, he initiated a campaign of teaching this script widely, and transferring all historical and juridical documents written previously in Uighur-Mongolian script into 'Phags-pa script. Therefore, it can be claimed without any doubts that the SHM was the first to be transliterated into 'Phags-pa script.

3. Up to now, unfortunately, the original texts of the SHM written in Uighur-Mongolian script and in 'Phags-pa script are not found, and only the text of the SHM transliterated into Chinese characters was preserved. The opinions of scholars are not unanimous for a question whether this survived text was transliterated from the Uighur-Mongolian script or from the 'Phags-pa script. Some agree that the survived text of the SHM was transliterated from Uighur-Mongolian script,¹ some from 'Phags-pa script.²

In order to define which text was used for the preserved SHM, it is suggested to compare the languages of the sources of the 13th-14th century written in Uighur-Mongolian script and the language of the other sources written in 'Phags-pa script, which were established chronologically in the same period as the text of the SHM in Chinese characters. The followings are the selective examples of comparative study of the above-mentioned three scripts:

Table: As the above example of comparative study shows, it is apparent that the linguistic features of the survived text of the SHM in Chinese characters were varied from the linguistic characteristics written in Uighur-Mongolian script of the 13-14th century and were more similar to what is written in 'Phags-pa script. This identifies that the language of the Ancient Mongolian and thus the language of Uighur-Mongolian script dissimilar to the language of the Middle Mongolian or what was written in 'Phags-pa script and what was transliterated into Chinese characters.

The comparative study shows that the preserved text of the SHM was transliterated into Chinese characters not from the Uighur-Mongolian original text, but from the text written in 'Phags-pa script, which can be attested by the followings as well:

- The 'Phags-pa was not only the script of the Mongols; it was used widely by the various ethnicities within Yüan Empire. It is also important to note that among the sources there are more Chinese sources written in 'Phags-pa script rather than Mongolian sources. Therefore, the tendency to claim that the SHM was transliterated into Chinese characters from the 'Phags-pa script is high, although the consultation with the original text written in Uighur-Mongolian script is also possible.
- The linguistic characteristics of Ancient Mongolian that was portrayed in Uighur-Mongolian script cannot be justified directly to the features of the Middle Mongolian.
- The 'Phags-pa script text of the SHM that was so fitted to the phonetic system of the Middle Mongolian was more suitable to be transliterated to Chinese characters. For that reason, the language of the preserved text of the SHM is almost same as the language of the medieval sources written in the 'Phags-pa script.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Uighur-Mongolian text of the SHM was transferred into the 'Phags-pa script first in the Yüan period, and then, the latter was transliterated into Chinese characters.

¹ Sh. Choimaa, *The comparative study of the SHM and Altan Tobchi* by Luvsandanzan, UB, 2002.

² Sh. Hattori, *On the Possible Existence of a Text in the hP'ags-pa Script from which the Existing Text of Yüan -ch'ao Mi-shih was transliterated with Chinese Characters*, GK 19-20, 1951, 120-121.