

Comparative approach of two historic vestiges within prescriptive purposes in Korea and Mongolia¹

Alain Desjacques
(University of Lille, France)

Abstract: From the text of a prescriptive stele located at the Koguryo tomb complex, the author proposes to compare it with a Mongolian order panel having the same function. It appears that all riders, regardless of their status in society, should follow the same rule to approach the mansion of their sovereign, on a large area in East Asia.

My whole approach here presents results from a thought, during a short stay in Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in May 2011. There it was possible to visit the tombs of Koguryo complex including the famous mausoleum of King Tongmyong (-298 / -259 BC)², founder of the kingdom, which is located in the district of the Ryokp'o in Pyongyang. This complex covering a 233 hectares area includes many graves (about thirty), the Jongrung temple and the remains of the Koguryo Kingdom. This exceptional site has been listed among the national treasures of the DPRK as No. 36, and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2004, at the 28th session of the World Heritage Committee.

The current location has enjoyed a remarkable redevelopment whose inauguration took place on May 14 in the year Juche 82 (1993). A stele was erected on the site, with this engraved text: "In order to eternally transmit the effort and the care that President Kim Il Sung consented for its redevelopment, our people erected here the Stele for the redevelopment of the tomb of King Tongmyong".

Koguryo kingdom is considered by scholars as a period spreading on almost thousand years (-277 to 668), occupying a large part of eastern Asia and it was the most powerful state in the history of Korea. When the Koguryo Kingdom decided to transfer his capital, which originally was in Jilin Province, near the capital of Koguryo Hwanin, to Pyongyang in 427, the tombs of the founder king and other kings and principal dignitaries were also moved on the current site.

After this visit, I still amazed by the unique quality of this treasure of humanity, returned with my guide, to the parking area, located a few hundred meters from the entrance. And when I was near the car, my eye was suddenly caught by a stele, a little

¹ This text is the result of a paper delivered at a symposium organized by Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang on the occasion of its 70th anniversary in 2016. This is a revised version.

² Other authors report different dates: -58/-19 before JC (Il-yeon (1206-1289): *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*, translated by Tae-Hung Ha and Grafton K. Mintz. Book I, pages 30-32. *Silk Pagoda* (2006).

over a meter in height, standing at the entrance of the site. This stele, a monolithic stone erected on a squared stand with carved ornamentations, is engraved on its south face by ancient Chinese characters (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Monolithic stele engraved at the entrance of mausoleum of King Tongmyong's site. (Photo A. Desjacques, 2011)

Behind the stele, there is a bush delimiting the parking area and the site entrance and a no parking sign after the bush. Noting the characters one by one, we get :


	大	da	high
	小	xiao	small
	人	ren	people
	民	min	(variant of 员 yuan)
			rénmín = people
	皆	jie	all
	下	xia	ride down
	马	ma	horse

Figure 2. Detail of the text, followed by its modern version (pinyin) and translation of characters³. (Photo A. Desjacques, 2011)

³ I warmly thank my colleague F. Y. Damon, Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Lille to have clarified it for me.

The meaning of the text would be:

« Everyone, important [or] small people dismount [from] horse».

The stele is not dated, but it is certainly very old. Knowing its dating would be very helpful to know if it is really from the time of site creation and to allude to the possibly question on the use of Chinese characters as a written language, in the same period. Also, according to sinologists, it is not uncommon to find this type of stone in China, near the temple's enclosure in particular.

Thus, there is a stele bearing an order addressed to all members of society ("high" or "small") to the entrance of a high place of governance. So everyone had to be on an equal footing, in some way, in front of the highest personality inhabiting these places, usually the sovereign. It is also the expression of a form of respect that each subject, whatever its function and its place in society, had towards his sovereign. Transgress this order was probably severely punished so much so that nobody has a mind to do so.

When I was in front of this monument, I was reminded of a similar prescriptive panel in Mongolia. This panel no longer exists but was photographed by Stephane Passet in Mongolia between July 6 and 25, 1913⁴.



Figure 3. Order panel near the ceremonial door of the palace of Bogd Khan in Urga.
(Photo S. Passet, 1913)⁵.

⁴ The author, commissioned by the banker Albert Kahn to take pictures in Mongolia, as part of an extensive program of Archive Images, uses autochromes. The autochrome was the first color photographic process invented by the Lumière brothers in 1906, who commercialized it in 1907.

⁵ I warmly thank the Albert Kahn Museum to allowing me to use this image for my communication.

I first tried to locate this panel (*sambar* in Mongolian) in the ancient city of Urga,⁶ with a painting of a city map from the beginning of twentieth century, so that's the period of Stephane Passet's photography. The eastern part of the town is reproduced below, in black and white.



Figure 4. City map of Urga at the beginning of the century, called Niislel Khuree (1911-1924). Part of a painting from Zanabazar Museum, Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

After thoroughly scrutinized the details of the plan, chronologically identified the course of the photographer through his shots and spotted the buildings behind the panel, I finally managed to locate the panel:



Figure 5. Detail of the previous plan (Fig. 4) locating the position of the prescriptive panel.

⁶ Urga is the former name of the Mongolian capital, which after several name changes, ultimately called Ulaanbaatar, "Red Hero" since 1924.

The prescriptive panel is on the left side of the ceremonial south gate of a complex of temples and yurts, delimited by a perimeter of defensive logs against animal approach, called *šörög mod*, which we can see a segment on photography. On the map, appears a Mongolian term *urdu* meaning "south". The place is well identified as the temple of Dechingalav and the Palace of Bogd Khan. It is the place of the central government. According to the Mongolian historian Idchinnorov I met about it⁷, to the north was a temple with a statue of the Maidar deity, height of twenty meters, built by Buriats Mongols. This place is located near the nowadays Children Artistic Creations Center (*Hüühdiin urlan büteeh töv*).

Enlarging the photo, the text written in classical Mongolian (known as Mongolian-Uighur or ancient writing system) became intelligible:

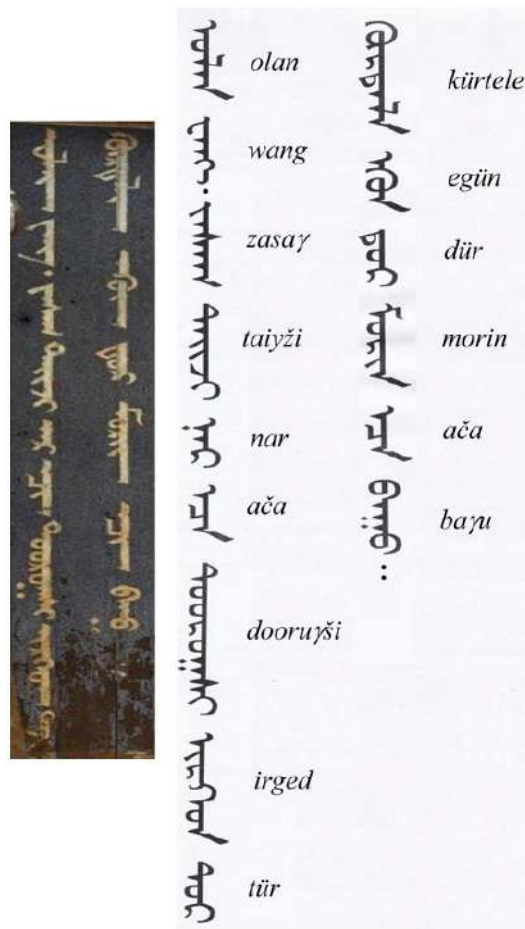


Figure 6. Detail of the panel text and its standard classical Mongolian transposition and transcript.

⁷ Interviewed on April the 16th, 2003.

Horizontally, with translated vocabulary:

olan wang, zasay taiyži nar ača dooruysi irged tür
 mass prince authorities knight [plural [ablative to the bottom citizen [dative-
 many, great lords noblemen suffix] of origin] locative]

kürtele egün dür morin ača bayu.
 To, until, even [demonstrative [dative horse [ablative ride down
 [fixed form of pronoun] locative] of origin] [categorical
 Terminal converb imperative]

hüreh (« to reach »)

So, in Cyrillic Mongolian:

« Олон ван, засаг тайж нараас доорогш иргэдэд хүртэл энд мориос
 буу. »

In English translation:

«All, princes, lords, nobles down to ordinary citizens, dismount here. »

This translation is made possible by the expression of the original ablative case *ača* followed by the fixed form of the terminal converb *kürtele* : « from..... to (until) »

The meaning of this text is the same as on the Korean monument, despite several centuries' interval. That said, here is the formula detailed in the list of upper class, while other social categories are merged into "ordinary citizens" *dooruysi irged* (literally « the citizens to the bottom»). Then there is the question of the meaning of this listing. Was it to be clear that there was no possible exception to this order regardless of its title in the high social position? Or, *a contrario*, this list had to mark an exception? like : « apart from ..., excluding ..., except, ...» to the benefit of these higher classes? In this case, it must be accepted that the postponed original ablative may have this shade of exclusion. So the ablative case *ača* does not work with the form *kürtele* but with *dooruysi* indicating a downward movement from an origin point ⁸: » ; which gives the following translation:

«Except princes, lords and nobles, all the ordinary ("who are down")
 citizens, dismount here».

If this order had to be well understood in its second version, there would be two separate places to dismount, the first closed of this panel, the other near the palace where probably was marked the place to dismount. So, who had to execute this order? One of the possible ways to try to answer this question is to examine historical sources through travel accounts left by some travelers in Mongolia, which can be traced back at least to the Mongolian Middle Ages.

⁸ That just shows the example given by Ya. Ceval in his dictionary, cited in bibliography, about *dooruysi*: [Mongolian Cyrillic] *xödölmörjн бүтээмžиж үүнээс дорogш оруулж болоxгүј.* "We can't put the work's result down from there (" this level ")"; or into the affirmative structure : "can be estimated that from this level there is a result of work".

Thus, Giovanni di Plano Carpini, a Franciscan monk sent by Pope Innocent IV, wrote a "History of the Mongols" after his trip during two years in 1245-1247. He gave a description of Guyuk camp when was his election to the supreme title of Khan⁹:

«When we arrived, was already mounted a large purple canvas tent which, in our view, was large enough to accommodate more than two thousand people. All around there was a wooden fence painted in various figures. [...]. In the fence, there were two large doors; by one the Emperor alone could enter and there was no guard, although it was open, because no one dared to enter or go out by this way; by the other one came all who were admitted and there, there were guards with swords, bows and arrows. And if anyone approached the tent beyond the limits, he was struck if he was closed or they pulled on him if he ran away, but the arrow's head wasn't in iron. The horses' place was aloof from two arrows' shot around ».¹⁰

Another passage:

« No stranger to his house [Batu Khan's] dares to approach his tent, unless called, whatever its importance and power, unless to know what he wants»¹¹

These two passages show us that the horses were kept at a far enough distance from the imperial house or tent, and there was no free pass to approach the Khan, whatever his social position.

Some years later, another account is reported by the Franciscan friar William of Rubrouck sent by Saint Louis (Louis IX) in Mongolia, during 1253-1255. He went to the court of the great Mongol Mangu Khan (Möngke Khan) and reports:

« For those going to the court, dismount away from Chan's [Khan] home, aloof from a bow-shot: there we leave the horses and servants who guard them».¹²

Again no doubt about it : The horses were kept aloof and any authorized person had to walk to the ruler's house. This rule should probably be spread in Asia, China, seeing as found in Korea. Anyway, it seems to be arrived before the Buddhist theocracy in Mongolia, and thus the regulation of access to the temples. So this Mongolian order panel probably erected in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries, by the will of the sovereign theocratic in this time, the Eighth Jebtsundamba-khutukhtu who bore the title of Bogd Gegeen ("Living Buddha"). It transmits in its own way a type of regulation that goes further back in time in the Mongolian space; which

⁹ Guyuk is the son of Ogodei, third son of Genghis Khan. His election is held at a quriltay in the summer of 1246, to the source of the Orkhon.

¹⁰ §29 et 30 from chapter IX, page 117.

¹¹ §17 from chapter IX, page 111.

¹² Cf. Bibliography. The mentioned passage is taken from chapter XXVIII, p. 144.

could legitimate the first version of our translation. Having said that, however, it is not impossible that could be an evolution in this custom to a relaxing towards important persons close to the power; which would legitimate the second version. More commonly, and even today among the people of breeders in the steppe, the horses are kept out of the yurt. About twenty meters a place arranged for this purpose, called *moriny uyaa* "tie to horses," consists of two poles connected by a rope in their peak, around which the riders hang the lead rein. Then everyone heads for the yurt. That shows that this ancient rule is still strongly fixed in contemporary Mongolian popular culture.



Figure 7. Horses place near residential yurts, Khovd Region, Mongolia. Photo A. Desjacques, 1991.

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