

**OBSERVATION ON THE TRANSCRIPTION
OF THE CLEAR MONGOL SCRIPT'S LONG VOWELS**

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The Clear Mongol script was created in 1648 by the Oirat erudite Zaya Pandita Nam-mkha'i rgya-mtsho (1599-1662)¹. The script was largely used by Oirat scholars in their literary composition. However, in spite of its longevity, the use of this script did not expand beyond the inner circle Oirat scholars. Nevertheless, a comprehensive history of the Clear Mongol script would indicate that this script made a substantial contribution to the literacy development of the Mongol people as testified by its use in Buddhist manuscripts, the Buddhist philosophy in the 17th and 18th century as well as in literary composition in general.

The Clear Mongol script signs were mainly developed on the basis of the Written Mongolian script and yet are fairly distinctive from the Written Mongolian script by a few facts as recorded by several researchers quoted below.

The Clear script is based on the Mongolian alphabet but is more phonematic and closer to the spoken language. The written language is based mainly on the Torguud dialect, but incorporates some Dörbed features². Further, this script was used only by the Oirats and, among them, the Kalmyks, who retained the Old Mongolian vowel system, including palatal vowel harmony³. This script is still used by the Oirats of Xinjiang today. As we can see from a comparison of the two scripts, the Clear Script is more precise in that it distinguishes between *o* and *u*, *ö* and *ü*, etc⁴. Upon this distinction a new supradialectal written language, Written Oirat, was built. Linguistically, Written Oirat may be viewed as a more or less accurate normalization of the speech of the Western Mongols as it was in the mid-seventeenth century⁵.

The first materials on Oirat spoken dialects, mainly word lists and phrases, were recorded and published in 1839 by A. Bobrovnikov⁶, Nicolaes Witsen, J. von Strahlenberg⁷, and P. S. Pallas. The actual foundation of the field was laid by G. J. Ramstedt⁸, whose 'Kalmyk dictionary' (1935) contains data also from the Jungarian Oirat (Öelet). John R. Krueger⁹ made a substantial contribution with his Oirat-Mongolian dictionary. Recently, more Oirat dictionaries (without Kalmyk) have been published by Tsooloo (1988), Luntu (1998), and Choijingjab and Gereltu (1998). One should also look at the collection of Oirat folklore by Vladimircov (1926). Later, there were more text collections and folklore publications by Choijingjab et al. (1986) and György Kara (1987, cf. also Kara 1959). On the grammatical side, there were several publications in Mongolia on the description of individual Oirat dialects, notably the monographs by Tsooloo (1965) and Vandui (1965)¹⁰. Selected dialectological topics are also treated in the papers of Luvsanbalдан¹¹ (1975), Jamiyan¹² (1970).

Unlike the Written Mongolian orthography, the 'Clear Script' is phonemically adequate. Special letters, positional variants, and diacritic symbols are used to express features such as vowel quality, vowel length, and obstruent

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¹ Radnabadara. *Rabjamba Zay-a bandita-yin turyji Saran-u gerel kemekü ene metü bolai*. CSM. T-V. Fasc. 2. Улаанбаатар. 1959: 2b-11b.

² J. Svantesson, and all, *The Phonology of Mongolian*. The Phonology of the World's Languages. Oxford: University Press. 2005: 148-149 p's.

³ J. Svantesson, and all, *The Phonology of Mongolian*. The Phonology of the World's Languages. Oxford: University Press. 2005: 190 p.

⁴ I. Rachewiltz and V. Rybatzki, *Introduction of Altaic Philology: Turkic, Mongolian, Manchu*. Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 8. Central Asia. Vol. 20. Leiden: Brill. 2010: 145p).

⁵ John Janhunen, ed. *The Mongolic languages*. Routledge Language Family Series. London: Routledge. 2003: 210 p.

⁶ А. Бобровников, *Грамматика монгольско-кальмыцкого языка*. Казань. 1849.

⁷ J.R. Krueger, *The Kalmyk-Mongolian Vocabulary in Strahlenberg's Geography of 1730*. Stockholm, Sweden. 1975.

⁸ Ramstedt, G.J. *Kalmückisches Wörterbuch*. Helsinki: Soumalais-Ugrilainen Seura. 1976.

⁹ J.R. Krueger, *Materials for an Oirat-Mongolian to English Citation Dictionary*. Part I. (The Vowels);

II. (The Consonants); III. (The Consonants). Bloomington, Indiana: The Mongolian Society. 1978, 1984.

¹⁰ Janhunen, J, ed. *The Mongolic languages*. Routledge Language Family Series. London: Routledge 2003: 211-212p's.

¹¹ Х. Лувсанбалдан, *Тод үсэг, түүний дурсгалууд* Улаанбаатар. 1975.

¹² Г. Жамъян, "Тод үсгийн зөв бичих дүрэмд урт эгшгийг хэрхэн тэмдэглэсэн тухай асуудал." *Монголын судлал* VII. Улаанбаатар. 1970: 257-289 тал.

strength. It is true, some Written Mongol conventions, such as the use of a zero-value consonantal initial (v) before initial vowels, are retained in the ‘Clear Script’, but generally the written image can be automatically represented in terms of an unambiguous Romanized transcription (rather than a transliteration). The Clear Script is still used by some of the Oirats in China, although the official policy since 1982 is that the Oirats should abolish the Clear script and use Mongolian as their written language.¹³

Furthermore, it distinguishes and marks all sounds of the spoken language and thus closely represents the spoken language. Contrary to the Written Mongolian Script, the Clear Mongol script does not mark the beginning of words with an accent known as the *тумэм* (support for a vowel in Mongol script). Also ‘palatal’ and ‘velar’ vowels are differently transcribed in every individual word whereas consonants that have the same sound and yet different transcription (e.g. γ/x, d/t, s/š, b/w) are respectively and distinctively noted. This might give the impression that the Clear Mongol Script has more letters and signs than the Written Mongolian script. Furthermore, the transcription of every sound allows for the tracking of the origin of every word as well as making easier to trace back the original calligraphic transcription of sounds and signs.

It is also important to highlight that the Clear Mongol Script and its grammar is closer to the spoken language and especially to the 17th and 18th century phonology. Therefore, the present issue regarding the transcription of Clear Mongol script manuscripts of that period is not only about the transcription of individual syllable but specially about the distinctive features of the language phonology as well as the use of technology in transcription work.

In my recent experience of transcribing two manuscripts written in the Clear Mongol Script, the following quote became a guiding principle. ‘In general terms, transcription of old manuscripts is not only about transcribing signs by signs but most important it should aim at doing comparative research about the context of the language as well as about its phonetic at that particular period of time. As for the Clear Mongol Script, long and short vowels are differently noted which makes transcription easier than in the Written Mongolian script. Therefore, it is necessary to correctly explain the meaning of every single sign’¹⁴. Furthermore, this experience brought to light a much debated topic regarding the transcription of some phonemes of the Clear Mongol Script, especially the long vowel. I would like to review the terms of this debate and offer my suggestion.

The terms of the debate are as follow. How does one transcribe the ‘*удаан*’ (orgul) sign (┆) when it is followed by the secondary phoneme (a, e, i, o, ö or ‘*хөндий*’ (hallow) vowel o, u) of a long vowel (o, u, ö, ü); especially when the latter (long vowel) is followed by a sign that ends a close syllabus or ‘*дэвсгэр үсэг*’. In other words, how does one transcribe the sign that was meant to distinguish two sounds of a double vowel (the sign is written between the vowels), especially when the long vowel is followed by a sign that ends a close syllabus? I will list hereafter a few but influential views on this debate.

According to scholars such as Bobrovnikov¹⁵, Vladimirtsov¹⁶, Poppe¹⁷, Sanjeev¹⁸, Rinchen¹⁹, Lubsanbaldan²⁰, Jamiyan²¹, Luvsanvandan²², and Shagdarsuren²³, in transcribing the long vowel of the Clear Mongol script, an accent on the sign of the primary phoneme would sufficiently indicate the length of the vowel. Thus the calligraphy should read *ū, ü, ā, ē, ī, ö, õ*. However, according to Jamiyan and Luvsanvandan, the transcription should note the secondary phoneme and mark *ā* and *ē* as independent vowels. Accordingly, the transcription should note the long vowel as follow *ou, uu, öü, üü, aā, oā, eē, iē, öē*. These are completely two different opinions and in his, Lubsanbaldan (1975)

¹³ Janhunen, J, ed. *The Mongolic languages*. Routledge Language Family Series. London: Routledge 2003: 211-212p’s.

¹⁴ Any vowel that comes before long vowels *ā, ē, ī, ü* in the Clear Mongol script has no phonemic function it is meant to separate the long vowel from the preceding consonant. This is most applicable when the sound of the long vowel contains both short and long clear sounds. In case this observation is accurate, early Mongolian language *ayā, ayū, egē, egū*, middle age Mongol language *aā, aū, eē, eū* and Clear Mongol script *aā, oū, eē, öü* are traces of the long vowels found in contemporary Mongol language. Thus long vowels *aa, oo, uu, ээ, өө, үү* that are transcribed with two vowels according to the rules in contemporary Mongol language can be traced back to the vowels mentioned above. This is also evident in teaching children the alphabet. One writes two vowels *a, a* and in the process of reading those they become long vowels. Ш. Лувсанвандан, *Ойрдын тод үсгийн дурсгалын зүйлийг галиглах тухай асуудалд* *Studia Mongolica* (Permanent Committee International Congress of Mongolists). Т-III(II), Fasc. 3, Улаанбаатар. 1975: 57-58 тал.

¹⁵ А. Бобровников, *Грамматика калмыцко-монгольского языка*. Казань. 1849.

¹⁶ Б.Я.Владимирцов, “Сравнительная грамматика монгольского письменного языка и халхаского наречия. Введение и фонетика”. Ленинград. 1929.

¹⁷ Н.Н. Поппе, *The Primary Long vowels in mongolian*. *Journal De la Société Finno-Ougrienne*. 63. Helsinki. 1962.

¹⁸ Г.Д.Санжеев, *Сравнительная грамматика монгольских языков*. Том. I. 1953

¹⁹ Б. Ринчен, *Монгол бичгийн хэлний зүй*. Vol. Тэргүүн дэвтэр. Улаанбаатар. 1964.

²⁰ Х.Лувсанбалдан, *Тод үсэг, түүний дурсгалууд* Улаанбаатар. 1975.

²¹ Г. Жамъян, “Тод үсгийн зөв бичих дүрэмд урт эгшгийг хэрхэн тэмдэглэсэн тухай асуудалд.” *Монголын судлал* VII. Улаанбаатар. 1970: 257-289 тал.

²² Ш. Лувсанвандан, *Ойрдын тод үсгийн дурсгалын зүйлийг галиглах тухай асуудалд*. *Studia Mongolica* (Permanent Committee International Congress of Mongolists). Т-III(II), Fasc. 3, Улаанбаатар. 1975.; Ш.

Лувсанвандан, *Дөрвөлжин, тод үсгийн зөв бичих дүрэмд монгол хэлний урт эгшгийг хэрхэн тэмдэглэх нь*. *Монгол хэлний авиа судлал*. VI боть. 2010[1970].

²³ Ц. Шагдарсүрэн, *Монгол, Тод бичгийн дэвсгэр үсгийн нэр томъёоны тухай*. *Хэл зохиол судлал* [Studia Linguae et Litterarum]. Т-XVI, fasc.9, Улаанбаатар. 1982.

disagreed with Jamiyan (1970)'s idea of transcribing the secondary phoneme as an independent vowel. However, after a careful re-examination of the arguments and using examples from the middle Mongolic period language, Janchiv (2002) backed up the suggestion by Jamiyan.

Here are some prominent arguments behind these opinions.

1. In most Mongolian language dialects, long vowels are composed of two vowels that contained a consonant in between. That consonant, mainly γ , g , y or w , was lost over time but also most suffixes that came after the γ , g consonant changed into male vowels and therefore into a long vowel.²⁴ Early Mongolian language $a\gamma\bar{a}$, $eg\bar{e}$ and the like forms have become long vowels in the contemporary Mongolian language although they have also remained the same in some words. Sometimes these forms may have become long vowels in a word in one dialects and have remained intact in another dialects of the region. According to Ramstedt²⁵, early Mongolian language $a\gamma a$, ege as well as other similar forms have developed in the above mentioned different direction according to the fact that some had a symbol known as ‘ өргөлт ’ (stress) whereas others did not have any. It is this understandable that in the 17th century, because those words were pronounced using a long version of the vowel, they were written in the Clear Mongol script with a long vowel. Following the Old script grammar, there are a few words wherein the short vowel that comes after the γ/g consonant is pronounced as a long vowel. In fact, in the 17th century, those short vowels in the above mentioned words were pronounced as long vowels which are very close to the writing system in the Clear Mongol script where they were noted as long vowel. Here is an example. In the Written Mongol script $\check{c}\gamma\bar{a}\bar{n}$, $geg\bar{e}\bar{n}$, $\check{o}g\bar{u}\bar{l}ek\bar{u}$, $nig\bar{u}\bar{l}esk\bar{u}$, $a\gamma\bar{a}\bar{r}$, $kemeg\bar{e}\bar{d}$, $terig\bar{u}\bar{l}en$, $b\bar{o}l\bar{u}g\bar{e}$. In the Clear Mongol script $c\gamma a\bar{a}\bar{n}$, $gege\bar{e}\bar{n}$, $og\bar{o}\bar{u}\bar{l}/\bar{u}\bar{l}ek\bar{u}$, $nig\bar{o}\bar{u}\bar{l}/\bar{u}\bar{l}sek\bar{u}$, $a\gamma a\bar{a}\bar{r}$, $keme\bar{e}ge\bar{e}\bar{d}$, $terig\bar{o}\bar{u}\bar{l}/\bar{u}\bar{l}en$, $b\bar{o}l\bar{u}ge\bar{e}$ or $-l\bar{u}\gamma a\bar{a}\bar{l}/-l\bar{u}ge\bar{e}$, $-no\gamma\bar{o}\bar{u}\bar{d}$. Guiding principles about phonemes $*\Gamma^{26}a > \gamma a\bar{a}$, $*\Gamma e > ge\bar{e}$, $*\Gamma u > \gamma u\bar{u}/\gamma\bar{o}\bar{u}$ are closer in the writing.

2. According to the grammar of the Khalkha Mongol dialect as well as in other contemporary dialects of the Mongol language, a long vowel may contained a consonant γ (g), y , w , $*\beta$, $*\eta$, $*m$. This is specially the case when the two syllables of the long vowel are composed of two similar vowels. One of the consequences is that when such a long vowel is rather composed of two different vowels, they have slowly developed into a diphthong.²⁷ Besides, ‘ever since, long vowels in the Mongolian language and its dialects grew out of the sign ‘ өргөлт ’ (stress) meant to distinguish the sounds of individual vowels in a double vowel phoneme. Long vowels grew out of the ‘ өргөлт ’ sign that was always preceded by a short primary vowel followed by γ/g and a secondary vowel corresponding to the contemporary long vowel²⁸. In other words, ‘The Clear Mongol script vowel that comes before \bar{a} , \bar{e} , \bar{u} , \bar{i} has the function of a phoneme only when in support of the consonant before the long vowel. Therefore, what has become long vowel in contemporary Mongol language evolved from the early $\gamma\bar{a}$, $g\bar{e}$, $\gamma\bar{u}$, $g\bar{i}$ which always came after a vowel and never after a consonant. It is similar to the middle age Mongol language wherein long vowels \bar{a} , \bar{e} , \bar{u} , \bar{i} always came after a vowel.

3. According to Janchiv²⁹ ‘phonemes of the Clear Mongol script $o\bar{a}$, $\bar{o}\bar{e}$ are close to such phonemes as $qo\bar{a}\bar{s}un$, $bo\bar{a}\bar{l}$, $uy\bar{a}\bar{s}ar$ found in the middle age manuscripts. This suggestion is against Lubsanbaldan’s opinion and it explains why some of the phonemes in the Mongolia dialects are written exactly as they sound, also why words such as ‘ $i\bar{m}\bar{i}$ ($i\bar{e}m\bar{i}$), $t\bar{i}m\bar{i}$ ($t\bar{i}e m\bar{i}$)’ contain a long sign (┘). In fact, in the contemporary Mongolian language script, the lift ‘ өргөлт ’ in the primary syllabus that is under the influence of the vowel o labializes vowels a , e in the following syllabus changing them into o , u . Words in the Clear Mongol script that contain $o\bar{a}$, $\bar{o}\bar{e}$ correspond to the labialization of vowels in the middle age and this fact sustains the above argument according to which these phonemes were present at the beginning in the development of the language.

4. With regard to the origin of long vowels in the Oirat dialect’s oral literature, Tsoloo argues that “they originated from the early Mongolian language γ , g , y , b that was written between the two vowels. However not all the labialized long vowels fully developed. Such case includes the double vowel $o\bar{a}$, $o\bar{e}$ that follow labialized or not labialized two vowels.³⁰

These opinions show case the evolution of the long vowels in the Mongolian language as well as their connection to the writing of the Clear Mongol script.

The context of the development of the Mongolian language in the 17th century is in line with the discrepancy between the written language and the spoken language of the dialects. Examples for this include the evolution of long vowels in dialects of the Mongolian language, the writing of long vowels with Vowel+Consonant+Vowel to correspond to the sound of the spoken language as intended by the Oirat scholar Zaya Pandita in creating the Clear Mongol script.

²⁴ Төмөртогоо, Д. *Монгол хэлний түүхэн хэлзүй: Монгол хэлний түүхэн авиа зүй*. Vol. I. Улаанбаатар. 1992.

²⁵ Ramstedt, G.J. (1976). *Kalmückisches Wörterbuch*. Helsinki.

²⁶ such as consonant

²⁷ Г.Д.Санжеев, *Сравнительная грамматика монгольских языков*. Том. I. Москва. 1953: 77-78 стр.

²⁸ Д.Төмөртогоо, “Монгол хэлний түүхэн хэлзүй: Монгол хэлний түүхэн авиа зүй”. Vol. I. 1992: 12 тал.

²⁹ Ё.Жанчив Тод үсгийн тухай. *МУИС ЭШБ №10(122)*. Улаанбаатар, 1997: 48-55 тал.

³⁰ Ж.Цолоо, БНМАУ-ын нутгийн аялгуу. *Хэл зохиол судлал*, Т-ХVIII. Улаанбаатар. 1987 : 70-71 тал.; Ж.Цолоо, А.Мөнхцэцэг, *Урианхайн өв соёл*. Documenta Oiratica Collecta-VI. Улаанбаатар. 2008: 530-531 тал.

In the contemporary Mongolian language, there exist signs that are pronounced with long vowel sounds as I encountered in the manuscript “*Oyoi čiketü хаан көбөөни тойји орошбои*” (*The Tale of a Turquoise-ears Prince.*)³¹. I will provide a few examples of the transcription with comparative with the Mongol script.

aā – [>aγā]: хаан (>qayān хаан); čidaqsaār (>čidayṣayār чадсаар); taālal (>taγālal таалал)
 aā – [>uγā]: zurγaān (>jirγuyān зургаан)
 aā/iā – [>iγā]: tacaā/iāji (>tačiyāju тачааж); taraālang (>tariyālaṅ тариалан); aršaān (>rašiyān рашаан); хугаāji (>quriyāju хурааж); araātan (>ariyātan араатан)
 eē – [>egē]: üzeēd (>üjegēd үзээд); deēdü (>degēdü дээд); ideēn (>idegē идээ)
 eē – [>igē]: nizeēd (>nijigēd нижгээд)
 eē – [>ügē]: ükeēriyin (>ükügēr-ün үхээрийн)
 eē/iē – [>iγē]: kiceē/iēnggüi (>kičiyēnggüi хичээнгүй); mišeē/iēn (>misiyēn мишээн)
 oā – [>oγā]: toāloši-ügei (>toγālasī-ügei тоолошгүй)
 oā – [>aγū]: oāški (>aγūsḡi уушги)
 oā – [>oγū]: toārṣuq (>toγūrčuy тоорцог); хоālai (>qoγūlai хоолой)
 oā – [>iγā]: хоšoād (>qošiγād/qošiγād хошоод)
 öē – [>ögē]: öēdö (>ögēde өөд)
 üü – [>igū]: gemšiūleng (>gemṣigūlün гэмшүүлэн); sergiūcūi/öülküleē (>serigūčegülkül-е сэрүүцүүлэхүл);
 nöqčiiülүqsen (>nögčigūlүqsen нөгчүүлсэн);
 uū/oū – [>aγū]: oūla (>aγūla уул); surγuūli (>surγayūli сургууль)
 üü/öü, [>egū]: öülen (>egūle үүл); zöün (>zegūn зүүн)
 üü/öü – [>ügū]: kökōü/üülүqsen (>kökügūlүqsen хөхиүлсэн)
 iā – [>iγā]: arčīād (>arčiyād арчаад); dakiād (>dakiγād дахиад)
 iē – [>igē]: bičīēd (>bičigēd бичээд)
 iū/iā – [>iγū]: cuburiūlun (>čuburiγūlun цувруулан); ariūdхан (>ariγūdhan ариутган); хариūgi (>qariγū-yi хариуг); orčīūlүqči (>orčiyūlүqči орчуулагч; uturiūlun (>uturiγūlun утируулан); určīād (>určiyūd урчууд)
 iū – [>uγū]: buriūlun (>buruyūlun буруулан)
 γāā – [*Γā] aγāār (*aγār агаар); заγāā (*zaγ-ā заяа); -луγāā (*-luγ-ā -лугаа); bayilduγāāni (*bayilduγān-и байлдааны)
 geē – [*Γē]: tügeēmel (*tügēmel түгээмэл); kigeēd (*kigēd хийгээд); kemeēgeēd (*kemegēd хэмээгээд);
 ödügeē (*edügē өдгөө); -lügeē (*-lügē -лүгээ); bölügeē (*bölügē бөлгөө)
 γūū/γoū – [*Γū] -ноγoūd (*-nuγūd-нууд); aγoūlzan (*aγūlzan уулзан); niγūūca/niγoūca (*niγūča нууц);
 γadaγūūr (*γadaγūūr гадуур)
 gūū/göü – [*Γū]: nigūū/öülesüqči (*nigūlesügči нигүүлсэгч); geγigöü/üülen (*geγigūlün гийгүүлэн); terigūū/
 öūten (*terigūten тэргүүтэн); ögūū/öüleqsen (*ögūleqsen өгүүлсэн); iregūū/öülүqsen (*iregūlүqsen ирүүлсэн)

Resume

This article concerns the origin and evolution of longue vowels in the Mongolian language. It is our understanding that longue vowels in the Mongolian language grew out of transliteration of the second vowel of the Clear Mongol Script's double vowels.

In fact, the clear Mongol script contains double vowels which are transliterated in the Mongolian language script either by a linguistic sign or accent called ‘orgul’ / ‘yudaan’ (ᠣᠷᠭᠤᠯᠤ) or simply by longue vowels. Nevertheless, until the middle age, the Mongolian language longue vowels were not fully formed and appeared only in the transliteration of the Clear Mongol Script.

Therefore, our suggestion is to transliterate by longue vowels such as *oū*, *uū*, *oū*, *üü*, *iū* and *aā*, *eē*, *iā*, *iē*, *oā*, *öē*, the Clear Mongol Script's vowel with ‘orgul’/‘yudaan’ accent as well as its the double vowels.

³¹ In other spread name is that *Ünekeēr törölkitü sayin хаāni тойји орошбои* (*The Tale of a Real-Being King*).

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