

Сопоставительное исследование переводов описаний дворца Джангара в калмыцкой версии «Джангар»

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Аннотация. В тексте критически рассматриваются переводы описаний дворца Джангара в калмыцком эпосе «Джангар». Авторы представляют свои собственные интерпретации, частично под влиянием лекции 1991 г. в Монгольском национальном университете, предполагая, что дворец состоит из десяти слоев монгольских палаток или юрт. В результате образуются девять изолирующих промежутков, снабженных подвешенными к стенам мешками из оленьей шкуры, наполненными молочными продуктами. Эта интерпретация контрастирует с другими версиями, которые разделяют эти элементы. Хотя автор уверен в их понимании, он признает, что просматривал не все многоязычные переводы, и открыт для дальнейшего изучения этой сложной темы.

Ключевые слова: калмыцкий эпос о Джангаре, перевод, интерпретация, дворец Джангара.

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Exploring the interpretation of Jangar's palace in the kalmyk version of «Jangar»

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Abstract. The text critically examines translations of descriptions of Jangar's Palace in the Kalmyk Jangar epic. The author presents their own interpretations, partially influenced by a 1991 lecture at the Mongolian National University, suggesting the palace is structured with ten layers of Mongolian tents or gers, resulting in nine insulating gaps, and is furnished with deer hide bags filled with dairy products suspended on its walls. This interpretation contrasts with other versions which separate these elements. While confident in their understanding, the author acknowledges not reviewing all multilingual translations and is open to further insights on this intricate topic.

Keywords: Kalmyk Jangar epic, translation, interpretation, Jangar's Palace.

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1. Introduction

Purpose and Flow of Discussion in the Main Thesis

As is well known, Mongolian heroic epics are often characterized by concise expressions, and at times, it can be challenging to accurately capture their meaning. This characteristic is

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also observed in the epic “Jangar.” Here, it is believed that the description of Jangar’s Palace¹ in the prologue of the Kalmyk version of “Jangar,” narrated by Eelian Ovla, may not have been correctly interpreted. We will present our own translation of the Kalmyk version of “Jangar,” and then organize a comparison between our translation and other translations to demonstrate that our interpretation is the most reasonable.

2. Reinterpretation of the Description of Jangar’s Palace

Before presenting our translation, we would like to provide an explanation of the structure of the palace and the interior conditions we envision in our translation.

Jangar’s Palace is a traditional Mongolian tent, known as a “ger.” This ger is constructed by stacking layers, akin to Matryoshka dolls, forming ten layers in total. While an individual ger is portable, it becomes immovable when stacked in ten layers. Therefore, Jangar’s Palace is referred to as “baishin” (бәэшн), signifying a fixed structure (please see line 21 of Fujii New Translation below).

Above the base ger, nine additional layers of gers are layered in a tiered fashion, resembling the shape of a fishing net (referred to as «torloq», Төрлө, line 20). The term «tor», from which «torloq» originates, is used to mean a “net used for catching fish” in Mongolian and, in modern times it can refer to “plastic bags”. While the original text presents this as a proper noun, it is highly probable that it was not initially intended as such. The root of this concept lies in Mongolia’s traditional ger, so even though it has ten layers, this palace is made of felt. Because it’s felt, its color is white. Therefore, it’s essential to note that the descriptions of color regarding this palace are not primarily referring to the actual color. In many of the translations we will introduce below, the term «Йисн өңг» (yesön öngö, line 21) is translated as «nine colors», but this «өңг» does not mean «color»; it signifies «surface» or «outer side.» In fact, in the quoted section here, this term is used in the past tense as an attributive modifier, indicating the action of hanging bags of dairy products all over the wall, covering the surface of the interior walls of the ger. In other words, hints on how to interpret this term are woven into the description of the palace.

It’s evident that there are 10 gers, and between them, there are a total of 9 gaps. In other words, when «9 gaps» are mentioned here it refers to «9 surfaces or exteriors.» Since these are gers, their color is white. Therefore, the expression «golden building» (altan baishin, алтн бәэшн) should be interpreted to signify a radiance caused by sunlight, unrelated to color or precious metals (line 21). Jangar’s Palace is sometimes described as having «golden stripes», denoted as «altan tcoohor.» This indicates how the palace appears to shimmer like a mirage under the sunlight.

Interpreting colors in epics can be a complex task, but in «Jangar», 6012 individuals are described as «yellow» (sharyn) in the first line. This expression should be interpreted as referring to those who believe in «sharyn shazhin» (yellow religion), namely, «Buddhists.» In Eelian Ovla’s «Jangar», there are two chapters where a hero named Minyan battles against enemies who appear to be followers of Islam. Considering the absence of Buddhists among the surrounding ethnic groups of the Kalmyks, the modifier «yellow» should be emphasized as signifying «the Kalmyk people».

The distinctive feature of this palace is its ability to provide a warm and comfortable dwelling even during winter. With the presence of nine gaps, it can be expected to have excellent insulation.

When stacking the ten layers of felt tents, the process begins with placing the outermost tent. Normally, to set up a single tent, a minimum height is required, which can at least accommodate an adult. When dealing with ten layers of tents, it takes approximately twelve people to reach a height equivalent to ten layers. In essence, it is imperative that all twelve individuals participate.

¹ Russian translations of the Kalmyk are often influenced by the drawings of B.A. Favorskii. In my translation of the Kalmyk the author has avoided referencing these drawings for the purposes of this paper.

Hence, they “mounted the shoulders of the last of the twelve” (Шартан күрэд, line 3). While «Шартан күрэд» (shagtan khüreed) typically means «to reach the limit,» in this context, it signifies that all twelve individuals participated, including the last among them. Jangar’s «twelve craftsmen» constructed the outermost, largest tent while creating human scaffolding, akin to acrobatics. Due to the complexity of this task, they were rightfully referred to as «craftsmen».

This tent has five side walls, but in reality, it is circular. The side walls of the tent have a collapsible bellows structure and are assembled by connecting the five of them together. The curvature of these side walls is likened to the “cheekbone” of a human face. In particular, since “cheekbone” refers to a lateral bone, it is thought to depict the side walls of the tent expanding horizontally in a bellows-like fashion.

The decorations at the entrance of the palace are designed with remarkable practicality. While the exterior features lavish gemstones, the interior of the palace displays more modest ornamentation. Specifically, crystals are used on the outer side (line 9), whereas uneven skull crystals adorn the interior (line 7).

Regarding the entrances that constitute one of the side walls of the tent, the decorations on the other four side walls are described as follows. First, between the four outer side walls and the ground, rubies are embedded (line 17). Between the four inner side walls and the ground, practical steel is embedded (line 19).

As mentioned earlier, this palace serves as a tent for winter use. To illustrate this fact, the inner walls of the tent are adorned with deer-hide bags containing mare’s milk, Khiaram (a drink made by mixing water with a small amount of milk), as well as bags made of deer-hide filled with animal fat and butter, all hanging along the entire wall (lines 10 to 15). This signifies the abundant provision of food. Typically, mare’s milk is stored in bags made of cowhide, so it is possible that the originally mentioned “deer” (buga) may have been “cow” (bukha) due to the similar pronunciation of these words. However, considering the possibility of storing mare’s milk in deer-hide bags, further research on this matter is warranted.

From the description of Jangar’s Palace, it becomes evident that this palace is a well-insulated dwelling, with ample provisions of mare’s milk, Khiaram, animal fat, butter, and other food items inside. While the exterior appears adorned with luxurious gemstones, the interior is observed to be furnished with simple materials.

Living in such a warm and well-stocked palace during the winter season would have undoubtedly brought a sense of security and happiness to the residents.

I would like to introduce the original text and translation of the matters mentioned above. However, the original text referred to here is from the third edition of the Kalmyk book published in 1990 in Elista by B. B. Basangga [Джанрап 1990:11]. The Fujii New Translation is as follows:

1. Шарин зурхан миңһн

Six thousand and

2. Арвн хойр урчуднь

twelve craftsmen, adherents of Buddhism,

3. Шагтан күрэд ээрлдэд,

Climbed on each other’s shoulders until reaching the last of the twelve craftsmen.

4. Тал дундахурнь татурдад,

They lifted the massive wall of the Mongol tent in the center.

5. Т а в н и к шана һарһад,
They extended the wall of the five-sided Mongol tent like cheekbones.

6. һарх талк бийинь
The door on the exit side

7. һажг шиләр өңгүлгән
Covered with uneven skull crystals

8. Орх талк бийинь
The door on the entrance side

9. Усн шиләр өңгүлгән,
Covered with crystal.

10. Ар бийәрнь үвлзгән улс
In the back half of the (tent) room, where people endure the winter,

11. Өәрг, кимрәп һарх гиж,
Ensuring they can pass their time with (an ample supply of) mare's milk and kumis,

12. Алг буһин арсар өңгүлгән,
Speckled deer-hide bags, filled with ample mare's milk and kumis are hung along the entire wall.

13. Өмн бийәрнь үвлзгән күмн
In the front half of the (tent) room, where people endure the winter,

14. Өөкн, тосар һарх гихәд
Ensuring they can pass their time with (an ample supply of) animal fat and butter.

15. Өл буһин арсар өңгүлгән,
Slate-colored deer-hide bags, filled with ample animal fat and butter are hung along the entire wall.

16. һазад дөрвн өңцинь
Between the outer four walls and the ground,

17. һал шиләр нүдлгән,
Rubies have been embedded.

18. Дотад дөрвн өңцинь
Between the inner four walls and the ground,

19. Догшн болдар товчлгән,
Hard steel has been embedded.

20. Дуута Жаңһрин арвн давхр,
The famous Jangar’s tent was erected in ten layers,

21. Йисн өнг алтн Торлг бээшн
Thus, a palace gleaming in golden brilliance with nine interstitial spaces between ten tents,
like a fishing net.

22. Дөрвн талан
In the four directions,

23. Дөчн йисн жилэ хортн, дээсиг
Jangar’s Palace deters foes located at a distance that would take 49 years to reach

24. Дарн, талван дүнгәһэд бээв.
Jangar’s Palace stood tall, intimidating, yet calm.

This translation is provisional. As evident from this, the original text can be somewhat concise to the extent that its meaning might not be immediately clear, necessitating interpretation when translating it into another language.

3. Other Translations

To substantiate the credibility of my translation, this analysis draws upon six reference translations: two Russian translations from the Lipkin edition in 1989 and a collaborative edition in 1990[Джангар 1989: 23-24 ; Жангар 1990 : 198-199], a 1963 Mongolian translation by Dүgersүren[Жангар 1963: 13-14], a 1983 Chinese translation by Sedaoerji[Jianggeer 1989: 6-7], a 1995 Japanese translation by Hiroshi Wakamatsu[Jangar 1995: 16-17], and Saglar Bougdaeva’s 2023 Kindle edition English translation[Jangar 2023].

Interestingly, Wakamatsu Hiroshi’s Japanese translation was not the first to appear in Japan. During World War II, Tani Kohei introduced excerpts from S. Lipkin’s Russian translation, which was the initial Kalmyk Jangar translation. From 1940 to 1942, Tani translated and published five chapters, including the prologue, in a magazine called “Mongol” on multiple occasions. Although Tani had no knowledge of Kalmyk, he was a dedicated scholar who actively translated 19th-century Russian literature into Japanese. In contrast to Wakamatsu, Tani’s Japanese translation aimed to preserve the poetic elements, with careful consideration of word count and poetic resonance. His endeavor to transplant these poetic elements into Japanese culture is noteworthy.

Furthermore, the Mongolian translation version, while close to transliteration, is still considered as translation, because it involves interpretation.

Table 1: Key Differences in the Exterior Structure of the Palace Between Fujii New Translation and Six Translations

Translation Type	Тавн шана (tavan shana)	Арвн давхр (arvan davkhar)	ийсн өнг (yesön öngö)
Fujii New Translation	Five walls of the tent	Ten layers of tents	Nine interstitial spaces between layers of tents
Russian Translation 1 (Lipkin)	There are five towers on the top of the building	Nine stories high	The building features ten different colors

Translation Type	Тавн шана (tavan shana)	Арвн давхр (arvan davkhar)	ийсн өнг (yesön öngö)
Mongolian Translation	Same as Russian Translation 1	Ten stories high	The building features nine different colors
Chinese Translation	In addition to the main hall, there are five towers	Same as Mongolian Translation	Radiated with sparkling brilliance and a vivid array of colors
Russian Translation 2 (Collaborative)	Hollowed out the central part of the building, reforming it into five stories	Same as Mongolian Translation	Same as Mongolian Translation
Japanese Translation (Wakamatsu)	Five layers of the palace roof	Same as Mongolian Translation	Same as Mongolian Translation
English Translation	Same as Russian Translation 1	Same as Russian Translation 1	Same as Russian Translation 1

Table 2: Key Differences in the Understanding of the Interior of the Palace Between Fujii New Translation and Six Translations

Translation Type	буһин арс (bugiin ar’s)	Эдэг (airag) and other dairy products
Fujii New Translation	Leather bags for dairy products are hung along the entire wall of the tent	Dairy products are in leather bags
Japanese Translation (Wakamatsu)	Deer hides are hung on the wall	It is mentioned as a prayer for the abundance of dairy products, which are not actually present
Russian Translation 1 (Lipkin)	Same as Japanese Translation	Dairy products are actually abundant
Russian Translation 2 (Collaborative)	Same as Japanese Translation	Same as Russian Translation 1
Mongolian Translation	Алаг бугын арьсаар өнгөлсөн	Айраг хярамтай гараг гээд
Chinese Translation	Same as Japanese Translation	Same as Japanese Translation
English Translation	Same as Japanese Translation	Same as Russian Translation 1

4. Comparative Analysis between Fujii New Translation and Other Translations

In this section, I will concisely organize these variations by presenting a table for a comprehensive comparison between my recent translation and the others.

As shown in Table 1, it is noteworthy that my translation alone interprets the basic structure of the building as Mongolia’s traditional tent,commonly referred to as a “ger.” This interpretation took into consideration the structure of the ger while describing the palace. Therefore, in Table 1, the literal expression “5 cheekbones” represents the number of side walls of a ger, described as Тавн шана (tavan shana), indicating the size of the ger. In contrast, other translations interpreted it as a building, leading to the need to consider «5 cheekbones» as something separate from the building.

The issue lies in the fact that, assuming translations other than mine are correct, it remains unclear why there was a need for five towers separate from the Main Building or what these five towers symbolize. In this regard, in Mongolia, a five-sided ger is commonly considered of standard size, so understanding it as a ger resolves the issue.

Similarly, as shown in Table 1, the interpretation of Арвн давхр (arvan davkhar), which can be literally translated as «10 layers,» also differs in my translation. In my interpretation, I regarded it as a structure where gers are layered, and this interpretation eliminated the possibility of interpreting the term ийсн өнг (yesön öngö), which can be literally translated as «9 colors,» as «colors.» Instead, it aligned with the interpretation of there being «gaps» between gers. In contrast, in other translations where the palace's concept was not associated with gers, öngö was understood as «colors.» Assuming that translations other than mine are correct, it remains unclear how these nine colors were used for coloring.

While examining expressions related to the interior, a significant distinction arises regarding the descriptions of deer hides and dairy products in Table 2. In both the Mongolian translation and my own interpretation, all the mentioned dairy products are depicted as being contained within hide bags, suggesting that these hide bags are suspended on the walls of the tent, implying an inherent connection between them. Notably, the Mongolian version lacks explicit wording confirming its alignment with my interpretation. However, in 1991, I attended a lecture on the Jangar epic conducted by Mr. Dүгөрсүрэн at the Mongolian National University, during which I directly encountered this interpretation. My understanding of «milk products in leather bags» is directly influenced by his interpretation.

Conversely, in other translations, these elements have been interpreted as separate entities, making it challenging to explain their relationship. To adhere faithfully to the original text, one must consider the possibility of a certain ritualistic significance associated with placing deer hides on the walls. Information regarding the ritualistic act of hanging deer hides on walls is not available. If one were to consider deer hides and dairy products as separate entities, this relationship would need to be explained adequately.

4. Conclusion

To summarize the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that my translation in Tables 1 and 2 represents the most natural interpretation of the original text concerning Jangar's Palace.

Specifically, Jangar's Palace is understood to have ten layers of gers, resulting in nine gaps and a highly insulating effect. This palace is comprised of five side walls. Additionally, inside the palace, bags made of deer hide containing dairy products are suspended from the walls.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the relative coherence of my translation extends to other unexplored sections of this thesis. A detailed examination of this aspect is a subject for future discussion.

In conclusion, it is worth highlighting that this analysis did not incorporate multilingual translations of the Kalmyk Jangar text. Consequently, the possibility that these translations may support my interpretation cannot be ruled out. If such alignment is discovered, your valuable insights and understanding would be most welcome.

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