

WOLFGANG MIEDER

Sprichwörtersammlung. Mongolisch – Deutsch – Englisch – Französisch – Russisch. By Naraa Khalzhuu. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Institut für fremde Sprachen und Kulturen der Mongolischen Nationalen Universität, 2021. In print.

A few years ago, I received a surprising but most welcome letter by Dr. Naraa Khalzhuu from Mongolia informing me that she as a German university professor was eagerly at work comparing Mongolian and German proverbs. But not just that! She also announced that she would very much like to come to the University of Vermont in order to discuss her exciting paremiological work with me. I immediately sent her an official invitation, and it then became my pleasure and honor to welcome her together with her friend B. Chimegsaikhan to host her in Burlington between May 10-14, 2014. My wife and I shall never forget this visit! While we dealt with her scholarly work, there was also time to have a festive dinner in our country home. On that occasion she presented us with a beautifully framed proverb inscription in the ancient Mongolian alphabet that reads “Mit Kraft des Körpers besiegt man einen, Mit Kraft des Geistes besiegt man viele” (With the strength of the body one conquers one person, With the strength of the mind many). Ever since then I look at this image and message almost every day since it is prominently exhibited in my International Proverb Archive at the university. We have such wonderful memories of this visit, above all because we had never met someone from Mongolia and someone so very kind before. We learned so much about her beautiful country at that time, and we have stayed in contact ever since.

When Naraa Khalzhuu returned to her homeland, she sent me an abridged version of her dissertation about the comparison of Mongolian and German proverbs. This gave me the perfect idea of what she had in mind during our discussion. Her plan was to expand her comparative work to include not only German but also English, French, and Russian equivalents. This has never been done before, and international proverb scholars will be most thankful and excited

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about her new proverb collection that presents 450 Mongolian proverbs and their equivalents in four major European languages: *Sprichwörterammlung. Mongolisch – Deutsch – Englisch – Französisch – Russisch*. As can be imagined, Mongolian proverbs have not been included in the major polyglot proverb collections. In fact, there is still very much to be learned about the rich treasure trove of Mongolian proverbs. Naraa Khalzhuu's *magnum opus* will make this possible for general readers interested in the folklore and culture of her country but also for paremiologists wanting to study the indigenous proverbs of a distant land.

I can well imagine that there exist studies of Mongolian proverbs in their original language that I have not been able to add to my large International Proverb Archive, but here is a list of publications that I do own. Special mention must be made of the truly superb work by Janice Raymond who wrote her dissertation about Mongolian proverbs and subsequently published an annotated bilingual collection of *Mongolian Proverbs: A Window into Their World* (2010). While she translates the 1419 proverbs and provides cultural and historical comments, her valuable book does not contain a keyword index, making it very difficult indeed to find particular proverbs. Of course, she also does not add English equivalents or those of other languages. That has now been accomplished in superb fashion by Naraa Khalzhuu:

Aalto, Pentti. "Some South-Mongolian Proverbs." *Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia*, 98 (1950), 1-12. (a small collection)

Frye, Stanley N. "Two Hundred and Fifty Mongolian Proverbs." *Mongolian Folktales, Stories and Proverbs*. Ed. John R. Krueger. Bloomington, Indiana: The Mongolia Society, 1967. 61-83. (texts in English translation only)

Gül, Bülent. "Aile ve akrabalık anlayışı bağlamında moğol atasözleri [Mongolian Proverbs with Regard to Family and Kinship]." *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 27 (2017), 175-188 (in Turkish).

Hangin, John Gombojab, John R. Krueger, R.G. Service, and William V. Rozycki. "Mongolian Folklore: A Representative Collection from the Oral Literary Tradition. Part One." *Mongolian Studies*, 9 (1985-1986), 13-78 (proverbs and sayings, pp. 13-60;

226 proverbs in English translation only but with explanatory notes)

Harvilahti, Lauri. “‘Zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe’. Zum Parallelismus der Sprichwörter.” *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen*, 48, no. 1 (1987), 27-38. (a few Finnish and Mongolian proverbs)

Kara, György. “‘The Bush Protects the Little Bird’.” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 48, no. 3 (1995), 421-428. (connection of the Mongolian proverb with one from Turkey)

Naranchimeg, Khalzhuu. *Kontrastive Forschung deutsch-mongolischer Sprichwörter*. Diss. Universität für Geisteswissenschaften in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolei, 2001. 35 pp. (summary of dissertation comparing German and Mongolian proverbs; in Mongolian).

Rashidonduk, Sh. “Words of Wisdom and Words of Mockery – Remembered by an Old Mongol.” *Documenta Barbarorum. Festschrift für Walter Heissig*. Eds. Annemarie von Gabain and Wolfgang Veenker. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983. 282-285. (a dozen Mongolian texts with English translations)

Raymond, Janice. *Mongolian Proverbs. A Window into Their World*. San Diego, California: Alethinos Books, 2010. 374 pp. Published again at Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2014. 351 pp. (a bilingual collection of 1419 Mongolian proverbs with English translations and annotations)

Raymond, Janice. *Monggol soktam p'uri*. Ulaanbaatar: Soimbo Inswaeso, 2011. 286 pp. (Korean edition of J. Raymond's *Mongolian Proverbs*)

Raymond, Janice. *Proverbs as a Window into Mongolian Culture and a Resource for Developing a Contextualized Approach for Evangelism*. Diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2012. 209 pp. (cultural and folkloric analysis of Mongolian proverbs and the worldview expressed in them)

Veit, Veronika. “Farbepitheta und Sprichwörter in mongolischen Epen.” *Fragen der Mongolischen Heldendichtung*. Ed. Walther Heissig. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987. IV, 101-115. (color phrases and proverbs in Mongolian epics)

Wang, Jian-Jun, Wurencaodao, and Zhoulina. "A Tentative Analysis of English Translation of Mongolian Proverbs from the Intercultural Perspective." *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4, no. 2 (2014), 72-77. (a few examples for the difficulty of translating Mongolian proverbs into English)

Whyman, Neville J. "Mongolian Proverbs: A Study in the Kalmuck Colloquial." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no volume given (April 1926), 257-267. (anthropological, folkloric, and linguistic study of a few Mongolian proverbs)

Valuable as all of these publications are, they do not touch on the question how the proverbial wisdom expressed in the Mongolian language relates to equivalent proverbs in English, French, German, and Russian. Naraa Khalzhuu's multilingual collection makes this possible and thus represents a breakthrough for the study and understanding of Mongolian culture and folklore as contained in 450 proverbs.

A close reading of the extensive list of Mongolian proverbs with their literal English translations and followed by English French, German, and Russian proverbs reveals some interesting facts. First of all, as in proverbs from other languages, there are literal and figurative proverbs, with the latter exhibiting fascinating metaphors relating to the Mongolian culture and lifestyle. There are proverbs about age, animals, experience, family, friendship, happiness, knowledge, learning, life, love, marriage, speech, stupidity, wealth, wisdom, work, youth, and many other aspects of normal Mongolian existence. They amount to somewhat of a general worldview in proverbial form that grew over centuries of life in this distant land. Horses have and continue to play a considerable role in this society, and it is not surprising that there are numerous proverbs in which horses appear. Here is a good example:

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|--------------------|--|
| 14. Монгол | Адуу арав хүрвэл унах юм олддоггүй,
Хонь зуу хүрвэл идэх юм олддоггүй. |
| <i>Translation</i> | <i>When you have ten horses, nothing to ride;
When you have one hundred sheep, nothing to eat.</i> |
| Deutsch | Wer die Wahl hat, hat die Qual. |
| English | The wider the choice, the greater the trouble.
To keep a dog and bark oneself. |

Français Souvent qui choisit prend le pire.
 Русский ому выбирать, тому и голову себе ломать.

Another proverb referring to horses appears in this next example, showing the unique equestrian image of the Mongolian proverb. The many equivalents that follow in the four languages of this comparative collection make ample clear how diligently Naraa Khalzhuu has searched for fitting equivalents:

23. Монгол Азарга нь алаг бол унага нь ч алаг.
Translation *If the stallion is dappled, the foal is dappled too.*
- Эх нь хээр алаг бол хүү нь шийр алаг.
Translation *If the mother is dappled, the son is dappled too.*
- Deutsch А
 Wie der Vater, so der Sohn.
 Wie die Mutter, so die Tochter.
 Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.
 Wie die Alten (sungen), so (zwitschern) die Jungen.
- English Like father, like son.
 Like mother, like daughter.
 Blood will tell.
 True blood will show itself.
- Français Tel père, tel fils.
 Telle mère, telle fille.
 Bon sang ne peut mentir.
 La pomme ne tombe jamais loin de l'arbre.
- Русский Каков батька, таковы и детки.
 Каков отец, таков и сын.
 Какова мать, такова и дочь.
 Яблоко от яблони недалеко падает.
- Deutsch Б
 Wie der Vogel, so das Ei.
 Was von der Henne kommt, das gackert.
 Art lässt nicht von Art.
- English Like hen, like chicken.
 He that comes of a hen must scrape.
 Like begets/ breeds like.

Français	Bon chien chasse de race. Chat et chaton chassent le raton. Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop.
Русский	От свињи не родятся бобрята, а всё поросята. Род в род идёт.

This next comparative list is also of interest. It concerns the very common European proverb “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” that appears in Mongolian with its very own cultural flavor:

42. Монгол	Аль газар хаа явбал тэр газрын дууг дуулна.
<i>Translation</i>	<i>Wherever you go, sing the song of that land.</i>
<i>Translation</i>	Усыг нь увал ёсыг нь дагадаг. <i>If you drink the water of the land, follow its traditions.</i>
Deutsch	Wes Brot ich esse, des Lied ich singe. In Rom tu, was Rom tut.
English	Every land has its own law. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.
Français	A chaque pays sa coutume. Quand tu seras à Rome, agis comme les Romains. On doit vivre selon le pays où l’on est.
Русский	Чей хлеб ешь, того и песенку поёшь. В каком народе живёшь, того и обычая держись. В чужой монастырь со своим уставом не ходят.

But let me also mention yet another group of proverbs since it involves one of the most popular German proverbs that I remember well from my youth in Germany.

374. Монгол	Худал хугархай хөлтэй Үнэн түмэн хөлтэй.
<i>Translation</i>	<i>Lies have broken legs; truth has ten thousand legs.</i>
Deutsch	Lügen haben kurze Beine.
English	A lie has no legs.

	Lies have short wings/legs. Falsehood never made a fair hinder end.
Français	La vérité finit toujours par se savoir/ par éclater. Les mensonges ont les jambes courtes. Le mensonge ne conduit/mène pas loin. Le menteur ne va pas loin.
Русский	Ложь на тараканьих ножках ходит.

Several equivalents speak of lies having short legs and that they don't get far. The English equivalent "Lies have short legs" that appeared as early as the sixteenth century has by now fallen out of use. It must not be forgotten that proverbs come and go. Some proverbs will forever be current, but some disappear because they do not fit into modern life, and others are created now because they reflect modern mores. In any case, the Mongolian proverb "Lies have broken legs; truth has ten thousand legs" is a welcome piece of wisdom in that it does not only argue against lies but also stresses the high value of truth.

There are many more indigenous proverbs that could be mentioned, such as "Better be a blue-bottle fly's head than a tiger's tail" (no. 77), "One twig can't make a fire, One person can't make a family" (no. 104), "Do not tell the secret word even to a lake frog" (no. 218), "To shoot two rabbits with one bullet" (no. 222), and "You can't use your beautiful face to make a tea with milk" (no. 409). It cannot have been an easy task to find similar proverbs expressing the same ideas but with different metaphors in the other languages! And yet, despite the differences, there are plenty of similarities even if they are expressed in different images and words. After all, proverbs contain common experiences and observations, and it is to be expected that they find similar expression.

But there is another matter that is truly fascinating about the comparative proverb collection that Naraa Khalzhuu has put together after years of serious paremiographical labor. Mongolian proverbs like "No smoke without making fire" (no. 101), "A hand washes the other hand" (no. 107), "Everything that shines (glitters) is not gold" (no. 121), "Forge the iron while it is hot" (300), and "A word uttered is silver; a word non-said is gold" (no. 399) have basically identical parallels in many other languages. In Europe they go back to classical Greek and Latin or later to medieval Latin and

were translated into the vernacular languages. But how did they get to Mongolia? Were they loan translated into the Mongolian language, or were they coined independently from the European tradition? This leads to the fascinating question whether there is such a thing as polygenesis as far as proverb origins are concerned? There is no reason why these common-sense proverbs should not have been coined independently in the far-distant land of Mongolia. It is here where much more work needs to be done. It is a vexing problem especially since there might not be written references for them in Mongolian going back hundreds of years.

By the way, this also relates to stereotypical proverbs, as for example this unfortunate anti-feministic proverb:

425. Монгол	Эм хүн урт үстэй ч богино ухаантай.
<i>Translation</i>	<i>Women have long hair but limited (short) intelligence.</i>
Deutsch	Weiber haben langes Haar und kurzen Verstand.
	Frauen haben langes Haar und kurzen Sinn.
English	Long hair, little brains. Long hair and short wit.
Français	Longs cheveux, courte cervelle.
Русский	Волосы долги, да ум короткий.

It is unfortunately a widely disseminated proverb that should long have outlasted its claim to truth! But how did it get into the Mongolian language and culture? Was it brought there and loan translated? Or was it coined by a misogynous male there?

In any case, things are never easy when the question about the origin and historical dissemination of a particular proverb is asked. Here is one more interesting example dealing with the common proverb “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”:

396. Монгол	Хүсэл бий аваас хүрэх зам буй.
<i>Translation</i>	<i>If there is a will, there is a way.</i>
Deutsch	Wo ein Wille ist, da ist auch ein Weg. Fester Wille führt zum Ziel. Wer will, der kann.
English	Where there’s a will, there’s a way.

	A wilful man must have his way. Nothing is impossible to a willing mind.
Français	Vouloir, c'est pouvoir. Qui veut peut. A cœur vaillant rien d'impossible.
Русский	Там, где воля, есть и путь.

As can be seen, the English, German, and Mongolian proverbs are identical. I have recently established that the English text goes back to only the year 1822 – I would have thought that it is much older. Thirty years later it appeared in 1852 in a German newspaper with the distinct reference that it is of English origin! In other words, the proverb was loan translated into German. And the Mongolian proverb? Did travelers take it there or did Mongolians coming back home from Europe carry it there? Or is this another case of polygenesis?

Finally then, let's take a look at the proverb "Time is money" that has become an international piece of wisdom. For a long time, it was believed that Benjamin Franklin coined it in the eighteenth century in the United States as wisdom underlying the basic principles of capitalism and serious work, the so-called Puritan work ethic. As I have shown, Franklin did indeed cite it in 1748 and 1751, but he had found it in a British newspaper from 1719! Has this globally disseminated proverb found its way to Mongolia by now, perhaps even giving the indigenous Mongolian proverb "Time is gold" (gold probably stands for money?) a run for its money, to put it proverbially with a pun?

403. Монгол	Цаг бол алт.
<i>Translation</i>	<i>Time is gold.</i>
Deutsch	Zeit ist Geld.
English	Time is money.
Français	Le temps, c'est de l'argent.
Русский	Время - деньги.

In any case, I like the Mongolian "Time is gold" since it is more poetic and less mundane or materialistic. The Mongolian worldview looks at time as a treasure of life rather than a pragmatic concept for financial success. Be that as it may, as these short comments show, there is much that can be learned from Naraa Khal-

zhuu's comparative proverb collection. It is a delightful book of proverbial wisdom from five languages and cultures, and it contains much food for thought for general readers, scholars, and students. Above all, it brings Mongolia and the Mongolian people from so far away closer to the rest of humankind. We do owe Naraa Khaltshuu a great debt of gratitude for her labor in the service of proverbial wisdom that continues to play a significant role in an interconnected world.

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