

**TENGRIANSTVO AS NATIONAL AND STATE AND  
NATIONAL RELIGION OF THE TURKO-MONGOLIAN  
PEOPLE OF INTERNAL ASIA**

**ТЭНГРИАНСТВО КАК НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ И ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ  
РЕЛИГИЯ ТЮРКО-МОНГОЛОВ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ**

**ORTA ASYA TÜRK-MOGOLLARDA RESMÎ VE MİLLÎ DİN OLARAK  
TENGRİZM**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article deals with the synergetic role of Tengrian religion, influence of the ideology of “tengrism” on the processes of politogenesis of the Turkic-Mongolian people’s as well as the evolution of the imperial forms of statehood of the Hunnu (the Hunnu Empire) and the Great Mongolian Empire (Khamag Mongol Uls). It shows the role of tengrism in the process of social organization and self-organization in the nomadic civilization of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples of Central Asia.

**Keywords:** ideology of tengrism, “Tengrianstvo”, processes of social self-organisation, structurogenesis, the Statehood, Empire of Hunnu, Hamag Mongol Uls.

**АННОТАЦИЯ**

В данной статье рассматривается синергетическая роль тэнгрианской религии, влияние идеологии «тэнгризма» на процессы политогенеза тюрко-монгольских народов, а также на становление имперских форм государственности, в том числе на формирование государственности хунну (Империя Хунну) и Великой Монгольской Империи (Хамаг Монгол Улс), показана роль тэнгрианства в процессах социальной организации и самоорганизации в кочевнической цивилизации тюрко-монгольских народов Центральной Азии.

**Ключевые слова:** религия, идеология, тэнгрианская религия, синергетика, процесс социальной самоорганизации, самоорганизация, государственность, Империя Хунну, Хамаг Монгол Улс.

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## ÖZET

Makalede Tengrizm'in sinerjik rolü, Tengrizm ideolojinin Türk-Mogol Halklarda siyasî yaradılış sürecine, Hunnu İmparatorluğu ile Büyük Mogol İmparatorluğun kurulmasında, genel anlamda imparatorlukların kuruluşunda etken olduğu tetkik edilmiştir. Orta Asya Göçebe Halkların hayat ve düzeninde Tengrizm'in rolü gösterilmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** din, ideoloji, Tengrizm, sinerji, hayat düzen süreci, düzen, devlet, Hunnu İmparatorluğu, Hamat Mogol Uls.

As an efficient means of social self-organization and self-regulation, in a way of a cosmic "sacred vertical", performing universal synergetic functions in the nomadic societies of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples of Central Asia and Altai-Baikal region, tengrism as well as a closely-related religion of the so-called "Arians", the first Indo-European nomads (ancient Iranians, Indoarians, Sarmats, Massagets, Scythians etc.), have from the very beginning and evolution of nomadic civilizations, performed the functions of nation-state religion, possessing its own religious and philosophical teaching, concerned with the metaphysical foundations of being (Abaev, 2002).

It is Tengrian Religion, underpinned by the idea of the organizing power of the "Eternally Blue Heaven", non-entropic by character, have determined the aspiration for the universal cosmic order, which found its expression in the sphere of social organization as the idea of the world empire, ruled by "the son of Heaven", the major or even the "only" (Bur.-Mongolian «**gansa**»; Tuvan-Turkic «**changys**») earthly embodiment of the universal principle of the "Single", expressed through the concept of Heavenly Circle ("khor", "khorai", "khorloo") in the religious-philosophical sphere. In the ethnic tradition of the Iranian-speaking Scythian-Arians the term "khor" derives from the name of the God-Sun, symbolizing the masculine element (er, ere, ir, ar, ur: cf. Ra, Yarilo), and includes a whole range of religious-mythological, cosmological and metaphysical concepts: cosmic universe circle, heaven circle, infinity, eternity, eternal circle of time, calendar circle, unlimited emptiness etc. As a symbol of solar, heavenly light, which is in dialectic opposition to the night darkness, the theonym "Khor" came to denote a more general luciferous heavenly manly element "Heaven-Tengri", consisting of two stems – "ten//tan//tian (cf. Slavic "den") and khor-gar-gur-gar-gor (Abaev N. V., Ayupov N. G., 2009).

This religious and philosophical conception was embodied in the name of the common Supreme Deity of the ancient Scythian-Arians, Iranians, Sogdians and "Turanic" peoples (i.e. Turkic-Mongolian and Ugro-finnish), including the Buryat-Mongols – Khormust-Tengri, one of the protagonists of the epic "Geser", which incorporated mythopoetic and religious-cosmological traditions of the Turkic-Mongolian and Iranian-speaking ethnic groups as well as Tibetans, Tanguts and other peoples of Central and Inner Asia. The theonym "Khor" came to be incorporated into many ethnonyms of the peoples of the Sayan-Altai, and in particular, of the Trans-Sayans and Circum-Baikal (Khakhasian metaethnonym Khorai//Khongorai, Buryat-Mongolian ethnonyms Khongodor, Khoritumat, Khurkhuud, Guran, Dagur, Hunnu "Hun-Gorai"//Khungar, as well as Sayan-Altai Turkic and Mongolian ethnonyms "Uighur", "Uryankh", theonyms Kurbustu, Korbustan,

Kairakan//Khairkhan//Kheeragan//Khaiyran, Scythian-Arian and Iranian theonyms Khormazd//Urmazde//Ahura-Mazda//Ormuzd etc. (Abaev, 2004: p.226-237).

Considering the synergetic role and functions of the spiritual-cultural factors (in particular, Tengrism) in the process of self-regulation of complex systems, such as “nomadic” civilizations, it should be borne in mind that a high level of self-organization in “nomadic” societies is also sustained in the period of transition to the imperial forms of statehood, in which the aspiration for hard centralization around the supreme leader (kagan, khan, tzar) has gone dialectically hand in hand with the tendencies for self-regulation on the lower levels, which possessed communal forms of self-administration (Ayupov N. G., 2012).

The present-day ethno-political situation in the world, characterized with growing instability, chaos, social perturbations, has made prominent the social-regulatory role of ideology. In this respect, the rediscovery of the ancient religious ideologies, which could undoubtedly secure a relative stability of society, maintaining its order, without resorting to violence, atrocities, state sanctions on the whole (Feldman, 2009).

The ideological tasks in Central Asia and in the Turkic-Mongolian world have been vested in tengrianism. The rise of imperial statehood formations in Central Asia with the respective institutions of the supreme authorities and the formation of “tengrism” as predominantly a monotheistic ideology or having a tendency for monotheism and suppressing the original polytheistic intensions of the folk religion of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples, has been considered by us as cooperative, synergetic process, called into being not so much by external factors, as determined by the essential changes in the cultural-historical existence of traditional societies.

The major criterion of civilization, including the nomadic ones is the existence of certain spirituality, extending beyond its primordality (and by corollary its ethnicity), gaining in the process of development an institutionally formed interethnic, super-tribal and super-national character, inherent to such national-state (imperial) and world religions as tengrianism, which from the time immemorial, at least in the epoch of the Hunnu people (III BC) or even earlier, in the period of ancient Arian “nomadic” civilization at the beginning of the III century became widespread throughout the central part of Eurasia.

Tibetan-speaking, Scythian, Ugro-finnish, Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Central Asia and Sayan-Altai like many other peoples of the world passed through all the known stages in their historical development. Making transition to civilization they formed state formations in different historical forms, multiple forms of economic systems, created Runic and many other forms of writing and underwent a transformation of the system of religious-mythological outlook, which led to the transition from the archaic, early forms of religion (animism, totemism, magic, “shamanism” to the forms, typical for the “nomadic” civilization. They include the centrality of “tengrian religion” as a system-forming element in the traditional outlook of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples (Turk. Khan-Tigir, Tangara, Kudai-Deer, Tengri, Tengrikhan; Mong. Tenger, Bur.-Mong. Tengri – “Heaven”, “Heaven Deity”, “Lord”, “Supreme God-Father”) (Abaev N. V., 2004, p. 226 - 237; Abaeva L.L., 2004, p. 282-304).

The ideology, corresponding to tengrian religion is habitually termed as “tengrism”, and we also accept this term as convention, being aware that no “isms” existed in the East

at that time while what came to be known as “religious ideology” in the West was called “Teaching”, “Way”, “Law” etc. That is why, in the Russian language the name of the Tengrian religion, which was a dominant national-state religion of the Hunnu, Turkic peoples and Mongols, must be pronounced as “tengrianstvo”.

Tengri was the State national god of the Göktürks, described as the "god of the Turks" (Türük Tängri). The Göktürk khans based their power on a mandate from Tengri. These rulers were generally accepted as the sons of Tengri who represented him on Earth. They wore titles such as tengrikut, kutluğ or kutalmysh, based on the belief that they attained the kut, the mighty spirit granted to these rulers by Tengri (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tengri>).

Tengri was the chief deity worshipped by the ruling class of the Central Asian steppe peoples in 6th to 9th centuries (Turkic peoples, Mongols and Hungarians). The worship of Tengri was brought into Eastern Europe by the Huns and early Bulgars. It lost its importance when the Uighuric kagans proclaimed Manichaeism the state religion in the 8th century. The Mongolian Great Khans of the 13th century ideologically based their power on a mandate from Tengri himself, and began their declarations with the words "by the will of Eternal [Blue] Heaven" (Bira Sh., 2013; Dashnyam L., 2011).

In the religion of nomadic peoples Tengri was the main god of the Turkic pantheon, controlling the celestial sphere.<sup>1</sup> The Turkic sky god Tengri is strikingly similar to the Indo-European sky god, \*Dyeus, and the structure of the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European religion is closer to that of the early Turks than to the religion of any people of Near Eastern or Mediterranean antiquity (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tengri>).

The philosophy of the National Religion of Buryat-Mongol was elaborated on the basis of the worship of Tengri, a fundamental concept of the ancient Tengrian folk religion of all the Mongolian and Turkic nomadic peoples of Inner and Central Asia. According to this religion Tengri is something like God, representing alone the supreme masculine power in the universe, ruling all natural and social phenomena on Earth. And in relation to Tengri, the Earth represents a subordinate feminine force called Etugen. The Mongolian saying, even today, calls on «etseg Tenggeri, Father Heaven, and eke gajar, Mother Earth». Nevertheless, the Tenggeri and khan concept was a political theory" (Bira Sh., 2013; Dashnyam L., 2011).

Most contemporary foreign travellers observed that the Mongols “believed in one God (Tengri), who is considered to be creator of happiness and sufferings in the world. This dualistic idea was further developed in most of the official documents produced during the Mongol Empire. For example, in the edit issued by Guyuk Khan (r.1246-1248) and attached by Baiju Noyan to his letter to Pope Innocent IV, and in letter brought by Rubruck, from Mongke Khan to Saint Louis of France, a very peculiar preamble is preserved in the Latin rendering . (Bira Sh. Mongolian tengrism and modern globalism//Tenggerizm and Mongols. – Ulaanbaatar, 2011).

The first preamble in the edict of Guyuk Khan runs as follows: “Per preceptum Dei vivi, Chingischan filius Dei dulcis et venerabilis dicer quid Deus excelsus super omnia, ipse, Dues immortalis et super terram Chingischan solus dominus”. The second preamble in the letter of Mongke Khan likewise stated: “preceptum etemi Dei est. In celo non est nisi unius Deus etemus, super terram non sit nisi unis dominuis Chingischan, Fili Dei... This is

the order of the everlasting God (Mongke Tenggeri). In heaven, there is only one eternal God; on earth there is only one lord Chinggis Khan. This is the world of the son of God, which is addressed to you” (Jean-Paul Roux, *Die alttürkische Mythologie*, p.255). On the seal from Güyüg Khan’s letter to Pope Innocent IV (1246) the first four words, from top to bottom, left to right, was written “möngke tngri-yin kücündür” – “Under the power of the eternal heaven” (Bira Sh., 2011, c.20).

According to this, Tenggeri is the highest omnipotent divinity with absolute power in the universe, and, through His kucun or power, this protects and sanctifies the khan to act on His behalf and to realise His will on earth. Meanwhile, the khan is the absolute embodiment of Tenggeri on earth. It is the khan who, thanks to his *suu jali* or charisma, the gift of Heaven, can enjoy Tengri's favour and protection (Bira, *ibidem*).

Initially, Tenggerism developed elementary concepts, such as those of the divine origin of khanship, the dualistic nature of the khans power, his charisma and other related points. While the theory of divine origin of khanship was well known among nomadic peoples, it was the Mongols who not only kept the oldest version without interruption but also considerably developed it on the basis of their own perceptions and the achievements of more advanced civilizations.

For instance, at the time of the Yekhe Mongol Ulus (the Great Mongol State) which was created by Chinggis Khan in 1206, the old Totemistic belief of the origin of a leading clan had changed into a concept of divine origin from Tenggeri (Heaven). Hence, the very beginning of *The Secret History of the Mongols* (dating from the thirteenth century) states that "The origin of Chinggis Khan is a bluish wolf born having destiny from Heaven above." A few lines afterwards, this notion of divine origin is, reinforced with information about another ancestor of Chinggis Khan Bodoncar, who was the youngest of three sons who were borne Alan-Gua after the death of her husband, Dobun-Mergen. In the words of Alan-gua herself, «Every night, a bright yellow man entered by the light of the hole at the top or [by that] of the door of the tent and rubbed my belly. His light was wont to sink into my belly... If one understands by that, [it is evident that] its sign is [that] they are sons of Heaven...» (Dashnyam L., 2011).

Therefore, in this unusual way, Alan-Gua, the ancestress of Mongols, gave birth to her three sons, the youngest of whom was considered to be the direct progenitor of Chinggis Khan's Golden Clan (Altan Urug). From the above quotations, it is obvious that the progenitor of the Mongolian leading clan was not an ordinary wolf, but one who was "born having destiny from Heaven above", or a wolf preordained by Heaven itself. Moreover, as this idea became much more sophisticated in terms of interpreting super-natural cosmic forces, it could, be called a Heaven-Light concept. This might have been the result of crosscurrents and the syntheses of nomadic civilization with sedentary ones, particularly Chinese Confucianism and Iranian. It is interesting to note that the Mongolian idea of the light-born ancestor of Chinggis Khan's Golden Clan reminds us of the biblical immaculate conception.” (Bira Sh., 2013).

From the ancient times till the 17-th century the dominant religion of Buryats was Tengrian religion, mixed with “shamanism”. But after the Buddhist peaceful “conquest” of Central Asia in period of Mongol Empire Nomadic Civilization in this part of Eurasia gradually became Tengrian-Buddhist Civilization. But more fundamentally speaking, these Tibetan-Mongolian, Mahayana-Buddhist ideas and rituals, connected with the cult of

Emperor as a World ruler, who follows the Universal Celestial Law or “orders and commandments of the Eternal Blue Sky”, were deeply influenced by the Tengrian religion of ancient Turkic-Mongolian peoples of Central Asia and Siberia (Trans-Sayania and Altai-Baikalian region) in which the legitimate ruler was always regarded and worshipped as the “Son of Heaven” (Abaev N.V., 2010)..

The Chinese Emperor also was respected as “Son of Heaven” (Tienzi) but as well as the very concept of Heaven this cult of the Universal ruler migrated from Central Asia with protochinese Yin and Zhou tribes, who from the very beginning were nomadic and essentially Tengrian (Bira Sh., 2011). By the way, “Tengrism” as national and state religion of ancient Turks and proto-Mongols had nothing common with Tungus-Manchurian “shamanism” which was exclusive prerogative of minor primitive ethnic groups with more archaic cults and beliefs in which they never considered ideas like “statehood” and “Transcendental Being”. Moreover, the idea of “Son of Heaven” was the central idea of the Tengrian religion as a spiritual and cultural basis of all the Nomadic Civilization which consequently can be considered as a Tengrian Civilization (Abaev N. V., Ayupov N. G., 2009).

In Turkic mythology Tengri is a pure, white goose that flies constantly over an endless expanse of water, which represents time. Beneath this water, Akh Ana ("White Mother") calls out to him saying "Create". To overcome his loneliness, Tengri creates Er Kishi, who is not as pure or as white as Tengri and together they set up the world. Er Kishi becomes a demonic character and strives to mislead people and draw them into its darkness. Tengri assumes the name Tengri Ülgen and withdraws into Heaven from which he tries to provide people with guidance through sacred animals that he sends among them. The Ak Tengris occupy the fifth level of Heaven. Shaman priests who want to reach Tengri Ülgen never get further than this level, where they convey their wishes to the divine guides. Returns to earth or to the human level take place in a goose-shaped vessel. According to Mahmud Kashgari, Tengri was known to make plants grow and the lightning flash. Turks used the adjective tengri which means "heavenly, divine", to label everything that seemed grandiose, such as a tree or a mountain, and they stooped to such entities (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tengri>).

Researches of the last years showed that the Turkic-Mongolian Tengrian religion has close historical genetic linkages not only with "religion of arians" (ancient Iranians, skifo-arians of Sayano-Altai, hungarians and sogdians of Central Asia and East Turkestan, Indo-arians, etc.) (Ayupov, 2012).

In this regard the Kazakh scientist N.G.Ayupov noted that outlook of Turkic peoples, growing out of metaphysical thinking and knowledge, includes not only Turkic popular wisdom (falsafa), the millennia developing on the basis of informative practice and the strategy connected with traditions and customs and directed on knowledge of Space and the person, but also religious ideas. At different stages of the formation the Turkic religious spiritual culture accepted various forms. Through all transformations of religious ideas there passes "Tengeri's" idea as idea of depersonalized, transcendental and not defined Uniform God (but not god in Semitic religious tradition) (Ayupov, 2012).

Here it should be noted especially a role of the heroic epos of all mongolian "forest people" in formation and transfer of religious and philosophical ideas of a tengrian religion. The epos of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples of northern part of Internal Asia, Trans-Sayania

and Predbaykalie in general was directly connected with their tengrian religion and ideas about the supernatural force (back) of tengrian deities which, at the same time, it is allocated both the epos, and its performer (jangarchi).

So, known Kalmyk researchers E. Bakayeva in connection with the analysis of religious and mythological bases of the epos Dzhangar notes that Hormust-Tengri, could strike with "a thunderous arrow", and the White aged man was responsible for a rain and therefore him asked about a rain and posterity continuation, and that Dzhangar it is possible to consider as magic means "rain callings" (Bakayeva, 1996: p.26). Thus the author draws an important conclusion about religious character of the epos Dzhangar concerning and other types of heroic legends and Mongolian, and the Turkic people (for example, Sakha - the Yakut Olonkho).

In this case it is especially important to emphasize that "The white belief" (Akh-Chayaan or «Burhanism») of Altaians and Khakas, ethnogenetically connected with "religion of ariens" (by the way, this phrase can be translated literally "white belief") and in the ethnoconfessional relation representing more ancient option of the last, is also more ancient option of the Mongolian tengrianism or, at least, its religious and philosophical, metaphysical theory.

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