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FROM THE HISTORY OF THE GENESIS OF LITERARY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UZBEK AND CHINESE PEOPLE

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Abstract: The socio-historical, religious-philosophical, cultural, and literary ties between the peoples of Uzbekistan and China, located along the Great Silk Road, have very ancient roots. The ancient ancestors of the Uzbeks, like the Chinese, believed that heaven was the kingdom of Tengri. The two peoples shared many similarities in their mythological beliefs about the pantheon of gods. They practiced Buddhism for a time, and, according to Islamic sources, were considered descendants of a single ancestor, Japheth. All of this was rooted in historical and cultural ties. This article comparatively examines the roots and development of the literary and cultural ties that arose between the two peoples.

Keywords: literary ties, mythology, genesis, plot, mythological hero.

Аннотация: Социально-исторические, религиозно-философские, культурно-литературные связи между народами Узбекистана и Китая, расположенными на Великом Шелковом пути, имеют очень древние корни. Древние предки узбеков, как и китайцы, считали небо царством Тенгри, у двух народов было много сходств в мифологических представлениях о пантеоне богов, некоторое время они исповедовали буддизм, и, согласно исламским источникам, считались потомками одного предка – Иафета. Все это было обусловлено историческими и культурными связями. В данной статье сравнительно исследуются корни и развитие литературно-культурных связей, возникших между двумя народами.

Ключевые слова: литературные связи, мифология, генезис, сюжет, мифологический герой.

At the beginning of the genesis of Uzbek–Chinese literary relations stand the most ancient folklore materials and myths. The common features found in these myths make it possible to identify the primary and ancient sources from which the literary traditions of the two peoples originated. In ancient Uzbek–Turkic folklore, myths related to the creation of the world and humankind are in many respects very similar to Chinese myths with the same themes and content. Some legends that appear in Chinese folklore are also found in ancient Uzbek mythology, which indicates that they share a common genesis. Such myths include, in particular, cosmogonic, calendar, heroic, astral, and myths about animals and mythical creatures. Chinese and Uzbek mythological characters such as Pangu (盘古) and Tengri**,** Nuwa (女娲) and Mother Umay**,** Xi Wangmu (西王母) and Erlik, as well as the dragon and the horse, the wolf, the archer Yi (后羿) and Alpomish, show striking similarities.

Table 1. Similarities in the pantheon of supreme deities

Supreme Gods	Female Deities	Deities of other world

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Upper world	Middle world	Lower world	Qaha gift to the hero
Tengri	*Umay*	*Erlik*	Ability to travel between other worlds
Pangu (盘古)	*Nuyva* (女娲)	*Sivangmu* (西王母)	Element of immortality

Ancient Chinese people regarded the sky, the sun, and the earth as sacred. "In the past, they performed various rituals in order to appease the forces of nature. As a result, animistic cults emerged among the farmers of the Chinese Neolithic period, among which the cults of Heaven (天崇拜), the Sun (太阳崇拜), and the Earth (土崇拜) became especially widespread" [1,10].

Similarly, in the worldview of the ancient Uzbeks these three cosmogonic concepts also occupied a central and sacred position, represented by the deities Tengri, Umay, and Erlik. Among Turkic and Mongolian peoples, the spilling of the blood of respected individuals onto the ground was strictly avoided. For this reason, even when a member of the khan's lineage was sentenced to the highest punishment, a special type of execution was chosen so that his blood would not touch the earth. Consequently, in none of the ancient Uzbek epics was execution carried out in the form of beheading. Such beliefs were mainly connected with the Tengri religion, in which the sky, the earth, and the sun were revered, similar to the beliefs of the ancient Chinese. In both Chinese and Uzbek mythologies, the supreme creator is directly associated with the sky. His dwelling place is the heavens, from where he governs the entire universe and maintains order and balance. The Chinese referred to their country as the Celestial Empire, while the Uzbeks considered their people as a nation living under the protection of the sky. These ideas originate from ancient mythological concepts.

The Kül Tegin inscription mentions that in the beginning the sky and the earth were united as a single entity, and that they were later separated according to the will of Tengri. It also suggests that if they were to reunite or if the earth were to split apart, it would bring great destruction to humanity. Other sources also report that Tengri corresponds to the Chinese term Tian (天) or the Sumerian word Dingir. The observations of Zaur Hasanov, the author of *Royal Scythians*, are noteworthy in this regard:

"The creation of the concept of Tengri belongs to the period of the Altaic ethnic unity and is part of the mythological heritage of all Altaic peoples. According to researchers, it existed in this phonetic form already in the third millennium BCE. Its origin is linked to the original Turkic word *chenli*. It is also related to the Chinese word *tian* and even to the Sumerian word *dingir*. In all three cases they denote the sky" [2, 312]. When the Chinese pilgrim and monk Xuanzang (7th century) wrote that "the Turks worship fire; therefore their thrones were not made of wood" [3, 343], he was referring to the Tengri belief system practiced by the ancestors of the Uzbeks.

When Tengri is compared with the supreme deities of other mythological pantheons, it most closely resembles Pangu (盘古), the chief deity of Chinese folklore. The remarkable similarities between these two divine figures, which have largely escaped the attention of folklorists, cannot simply be regarded as coincidence. Such parallels were clearly influenced by certain historical, migrational, and evolutionary processes within the mythological matrix.

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According to Xu Zheng's (3rd century) work *Sanwu Liji* (三五历记 – "Historical Records of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors"), in ancient times the world in the Pacific region consisted of darkness resembling a giant egg. Within this world a great hero named Pangu (盘古, Pángǔ) was born. Pangu slept inside the egg for eighteen thousand years, and finally awoke. When he opened his eyes, everything around him was still covered in darkness. He tried to break the egg with his body, but it was extremely strong. When he struck it with his axe, a thunderous sound echoed, and the dark egg split open [4, 27]. All the light and pure elements rose upward and formed the sky, while the heavy elements fell downward and formed the earth. Fearing that heaven and earth might unite again, Pangu held the sky with his hands and pressed the earth with his feet, beginning to grow upward. After another eighteen thousand years, when the distance between heaven and earth reached its present form, he finally stopped growing [4, 58].

In ancient Uzbek mythology, there are variants of the Chinese myth about the Egg and Pangu. In one account, it is said that long ago, the bird Umay flew from somewhere. Over a vast sea, it kept flying repeatedly, unable to find a place to land. The eggs it laid in the air fell into the water and drowned. Then Umay plucked several feathers from her chest and began to build a nest on the water. However, the waves destroyed the nest and carried the feathers to the bottom of the sea. Realizing that firm land needed to be created first, Umay bravely dived to the bottom of the ocean, took some mud in her beak, and brought it to the surface. Slowly, land began to appear from this mud, growing into solid dry ground [5, 275–276].

In another Turkic myth related to the egg and the creator, it is said that in ancient times, there was neither sky nor earth, only a vast sea. From it appeared the White Light, from which a moving egg was born. It had no arms, legs, or head, but it could move; it had no wings but could fly; it had no mouth, yet it could produce sound. The creator of humanity, Tengri, slept within it for a long time, and upon awakening, searched for a way to emerge from the egg. Inside the egg, he found only a steel hammer and spear, which he used to break the egg open. From the upper part of the egg, the sky was formed, and from the lower part, the brown earth was created [6, 64].

The egg motif in ancient Turkic mythology was understood not only as the beginning of the world but also as a strong fortress and a source of power. In Russian tales of Turkic origin, the character Koschei's immortality lies in his soul being hidden in an egg. Among Uzbeks, it was customary to feed a newly sighted child an egg, a practice believed to hold symbolic power. The Pangu myth in China emphasizes a cosmological system encompassing both the macrocosm—the universe—and the microcosm—humans. The idea of the unity of the macrocosm and microcosm (or the greater and lesser worlds) later influenced other fields of human knowledge, including medicine and physiognomy. The 20th-century Chinese mythologist Yuan Ke (袁珂) associates the image of Pangu with Panxu, considered the ancestor of the Miao and Yao peoples, and calls him Pangu [7]. Sources from the 4th–5th centuries CE describe this Pangu (Panxu) as a "five-colored dog," married to a woman and fathering children.

This resembles Uzbek (Turkic) legends in which a child, whose limbs were cut off by enemies and thrown into a swamp, was nurtured by a she-wolf. When grown, the child married the she-wolf, and together they bore children. Eventually, their descendants formed separate clans, including Ashina, who became a khan, commemorating his origins by hanging a wolf-headed banner over his dwelling [8, 220–221]. In N.Ya. Bichurin's account, a human child marries a she-wolf: certain traditions claim that the Gaoguy family's ancestors originated from

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Xiongnu ancestry. A she-wolf nurtured the surviving child, who later married her daughter, and their offspring founded the state. In the "Oghuznama," the wolf is a central figure advancing the plot, portrayed as a protector and helper of the tribe. Such representations are linked to the Ashina clan, which considered itself descended from wolves.

The common motif of the cosmic egg in Chinese and Turkic myths also appears in other cultures with complex similarities. Russian scholar V.N. Toporov devoted a study to the egg motif in Slavic traditions. In these tales, the hero Koschei the Immortal's soul resides in a magical egg, which must be found and broken to defeat him [9, 82]. Like the heroes of Chinese mythology, main characters in ancient Uzbek folklore often have composite animal features. For example, Oghuz Khan is described as: "Face like a leopard, shoulders like a wolf, body covered in thick hair, legs like an ox, chest like a bear" [10]. Similarly, in the Kyrgyz epic "Manas," Manas has a tiger-like neck, serpent-shaped eyebrows, and wolf ears [11, 122]. Such depictions show parallels with Chinese mythology.

In Uzbek and Turkic myths, the fragmentation of the sky is linked to divine conflicts, reminiscent of the Chinese Nuwa myth. In one Uzbek tale: "Thus, Angur and Tangur quarreled, hitting each other with long sticks. Their blows struck the sky, splitting it. The Milky Way seen in the sky was created during this fight. Then the deity punished Angur and Tangur by submerging them into the sea" [12]. In Chinese myth, Nuwa killed a giant turtle and used its four legs as pillars to support the sky [13, 32]. Attention to Uzbek myths reveals that the Milky Way originated from Angur and Tangur's quarrel, while in Chinese mythology, the story of "The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd" describes Zhinyu, the daughter of the Jade Emperor, weaving clouds in the sky. She descends to the earth with her sisters, and is eventually caught by the cowherd Niulang. Their love is opposed by the Jade Emperor, preventing her from returning home [4, 28–29].

The extraordinary love between Zhinyu and Niulang, involving unions between humans and otherworldly beings, has parallels in Uzbek-Turkic folklore. Examples include the relationships between G'uro'gli and fairies, or boys being enticed by spirit-like girls at night. Among ancient Turks, sky-descending otherworldly beings represented benevolent powers, often symbolized as water birds. Umay as the Humay bird or as a swan-like maiden falling to earth and becoming an ancestor is integral to oral tradition. These parallel depictions suggest a shared genesis of Chinese and Uzbek cosmogonic myths. Similarly, unions between elemental beings, like earth and fire, in Uzbek-Turkic folklore echo the marriage of Zhinyu and Niulang. For instance, in "Kitobi dadam Qo'rqut," Tepakoz, born from a human and fairy union, inherits both benefits and dangers [14]. The one-eyed giant (Cyclops) motif appears not only in Greek mythology but also in Turkic and Chinese myths. In "Manas," forty heroes fight one-eyed humans, confirming that such figures were familiar in ancient Turkic mythology. Folklorist H.G. noted similarities between Scythian and Greek Cyclops myths, suggesting that the motif traveled westward through interactions with the Huns [13, 141]. In ancient Uzbek-Chinese mythology, Tengri corresponds to Pangu and Umay to Nüwa, sharing a common origin but diverging through national characteristics, cultural context, and historical factors. Pangu's emergence from an egg, breaking it with a hammer, and creating the universe parallels the Turkic Tengri, while his canine form, marriage to a human girl, and progeny evoke the wolf totem in Uzbek myth. Among ancient Turks, the wolf symbolized strength and power, as noted on the Kul Tegin monument: "Tengri's power gave my father's army the strength of wolves" (KT.50). Similarities among deities indicate that the ancestors of the Chinese and Uzbeks historically shared demiurgic concepts. Observations show that although myths have a common

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root, they underwent parallel evolution, sometimes transferring plots or characters from one culture to another, or even recurring in spiral-like cycles across multiple peoples.

In studying Chinese-Uzbek folklore, one can also see parallels between the figure of Buddha and the Turkic hero Qorqut-ata. Qorqut, afraid of death, constantly observes signs, changing location to avoid danger, while Buddha lives in a marvelous palace, shielded from death and aging, but ultimately discovers the reality of suffering [15, 265; 16, 304]. Such parallels are not coincidental; they indicate shared artistic and historical roots. Today, there is growing interest, supported by UNESCO, in the literary heritage of peoples along the Silk Road, exploring causes and processes of cultural exchange, and promoting universal human values. Until now, the comparative study of Uzbek-Chinese literary heritage had not been undertaken. This article examines the similarities in ancient Chinese and Uzbek mythological views, the historical stages of cultural interaction, the evolution of mythological figures, the emergence of parallel cosmic plots, and their causes and processes.

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