

## Chinese Standard Histories on the Origin of the 突厥Tujue<sup>1</sup>

Barnabas Csongor

(1923-2018)

(Budapest)

**Abstract:** This paper argues that the origination of the Tujue (and of the Ruanruan as well) as given in the Chinese standard histories was conceived on the basis of historical analogies drawn from political considerations rather than handed down in the historical tradition.

**Keywords:** Tujue, Ruanruan, Chinese historical tradition

**Özet:** Bu bildiri de Çin standart tarihi kaynaklarında verildiği gibi Tukyuların (ve Ruanruanların) oluşumunun, tarihsel gelenek içinde aktarılması yerine politik düşüncelerden kaynaklanan tarihi analogiler temelinde tasarlandığı savunulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Tukyular, Ruanruanlar, Çin tarih geleneği

Records relating on the history of the Tujue are to be found in the following standard histories (*zheng shi*) of China: Sui shu (compiled in 629–36 on the years 581–618), ch. 84.; Bei shi (compiled in 630–650 on the years 386–581), ch. 99.; Zhou shu (compiled in c. 629 on the years 557–581), ch. 50.; Jiu Tang shu (compiled in 940–945 on the years 618–906), ch. 194 *a-b.*; Xin Tang shu (compiled in 1043–1060 on the years 618–906), ch. 215 *a-b.* The compilation, the editing of these standard histories was a task specially allotted to a separate department within the Chinese imperial bureaucratic system. Following the rise of a new imperial dynasty it has been the duty of this Bureau of History to collect the documents drafted by the administration of the previous regime, and to compose the official history of that epoch on the basis of this material.

<sup>1</sup> This paper had been presented via Skype.

The standard histories had a rather complex construction: one chapter related the important events in chronological sequence, another one described the bureaucratic system, a third dealt with the astronomical events observed during that period, presented the catalogue of the imperial library etc. The chapters describing foreign people living outside the empire were placed at the end of the standard histories, following the biographies of outstanding people, both famous and infamous. The method of the composition was both mechanical and meticulous: the excerpts from the documents used were cited verbatim without alterations, without naming the source. In some cases a record was followed by the remark *huo yue* „according to some” citing another statement diverging from the previous one. The ready work was judged by the emperor himself and, if approved, obtained the status of an official history. The documents used for the compilation were then destroyed as superfluous ones.

Out of the standard histories containing materials related to the *Tujue*, the *Sui shu*, the *Bei shi* and the *Zhou shu* the respective chapters begin with statements concerning the origin of the *Tujue*:

*Sui shu*: “(They are) mixed Western barbarians from Pingliang... Some other sources report that their former country on the West Sea was destroyed by a neighbouring country”... (then the legend of their origin from a she-wolf follows)

*Bei shi*: “As to the *Tujue*, they formerly lived on the right side of the Western Sea [Qinghai?]. They were an independent tribe; they were possibly a separate kind of the *Xiongnu*. The (clan/family) name is *A-shi-na*. Later on they were destroyed by a neighbouring country” (then the legend of the she-wolf follows).

*Zhou shu*: “As to the *Tujue*, they are possibly a separate kind of the *Xiongnu*; their (leading) clan is the *A-shi-na*, a separate tribe. Later on they were destroyed by a neighbouring country” (then the legend of the she-wolf follows).

The term „mixed Western barbarian” is rather deprecatory. It originated certainly from the reports of the garrisons on the frontier – by the way, the same term is used on the Asiatic Avars, their predecessors in

the world of the steppe (most probably influenced by the Tujue generals in Chinese service). The fact that this statement was followed in the Sui shu by a lengthy account of the she-wolf's legend, myth, probably reflects a change in the social composition of the frontier guards, generals of Chinese extraction having been substituted by Tujue chieftains converted to loyalty to the emperor in the meantime.

In every one of these sources the ruling clan A-shi-na is mentioned. There are more than twenty A-shi-nas mentioned in the standard histories, several of them entering into the service of the Chinese emperor, and having received in turn a rank of a general in the Chinese army, or even an imperial princess as a wife etc.

The statement found in the Bei shi and the Zhou shu – “*they were possibly a separate kind of the Xiongnu*” – has no parallels, no equivalent in the Turkic runic inscriptions. On the other hand, it can be easily explained as an acknowledgement of the importance the Tujue played in those times. This is further corroborated by a passage found in ch. 103. of the Wei shu, relating about the origin of the Ruanruan, dubbed commonly as Asiatic Avars: “*the Ruanruan are offsprings of the Dong-hu*”. Now, the Dong hu, to my knowledge are mentioned only once in the standard histories: ch. 110. of the Grand Historian's Annals (Shi ji) describes them as a mighty nation living in a place North to the Xiong-nu; the time when Mao-dun came to power, they started to harass him with a variety of demands. At first Mao-dun complied but finally, having had enough of these demands, he made war and destroyed them.

The original text of the recent *Ruanruan* chapter of the Wei shu has been lost, together with certain other chapters related to the *Ruanruan* (the chapter on a *Ruanruan* princess married to a Wei emperor e. g.), and was substituted by the text of the *Ruanruan* chapter from the Bei shi. In the course of times, these originally identical texts underwent minor changes: the present day Bei shi chapter on the *Ruanruan* does not contain the initial sentence cited above.

One has got the impression that all these changes and divergencies are due to the influence of the *Tujue* on Tang politics: all traces of

*Ruanruan* grandeur, former slave-holders of the *Tujue* had to be wiped out, obliterated.

In addition, the initial part of the chapter on the *Tujue* in the Zhou shu (and, partly, in the Sui shu) and in the *Ruanruan* chapter of present day Wei shu respectively are rather similar: The Zhou shu has “*their (leading) clan is the A-shi-na, a separate tribe*”, the Wei shu / Bei shi (chapter on the *Ruanruan*) has “*their (leading) clan is the Mu-jiu-lü*, then follows the early history of the *Ruanruan*, starting with a date equivalent to sometime before 277 A. D., only to prove that the ancestor of the Asiatic Avars was a dumb slave only: he forgot even his name, and was therefore named by his lord as “bald-headed” *i. e.* slave (“*his hairs reaching to the brows only*”).

To sum up: the origination of the *Tujue* (and of the *Ruanruan* as well) as given in the Chinese standard histories was conceived on the basis of historical analogies drawn from political considerations rather than handed down in the historical tradition.