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THE PHONOLGY AND LEXICON OF EARLY MODERN MONGOLIAN AND LATE SOUTHERN MIDDLE MONGOL AS DOCUMENTED IN A 17TH CENTURY MING CHINESE-MONGOLIAN DICTIONARY

ABSTRACT

Although the existence of early Ming lexicographical sources on the Mongol language, e.g. Hua-Yi yiya 華夷譯語 (1389), has been known for quite a while, certain late Ming dictionaries from the 16th and 17th centuries have also been treated as exclusively “Middle Mongol” sources in the previous literature (e.g. Manduqu 1995, Apatóczky 2009, and Rykin 2011, 2012), despite the fact that such texts were composed centuries after the Mongol Empire, and despite identifiable Modern Mongolian phonological innovations evident in these texts.

In this article I present a preliminary analysis of Beilü Kao 北虜考, a 17th century Ming dictionary of Mongolian, and demonstrate its value in elucidating information on the phonology and lexicon of Early Modern Mongolian and Late Southern Middle Mongol. Previous scholarship has largely treated the Beilü Kao and other

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variants of *Beihu yii* as a unitary source representing a single language. In fact, the *Beihu Kao* is a mixed lexicographical source, including wordforms copied from early Middle Mongol lexicographical works, as well as late Southern Middle Mongol dialectal forms, and most importantly, transcriptions of Early Modern Mongolian, as I will demonstrate in this paper.

1. Introduction

While relatively good philological data exists on the phonology and lexicon of Middle Mongol, there is very little evidence on the period immediately following it, a stage of Mongolic which we may term ‘Early Modern Mongolian’, as it deviates significantly from Middle Mongol phonology, exhibiting a number of innovations characteristic of Modern Mongolian (or ‘Mongolian Proper’). See below for my definition of ‘Early Modern Mongolian’:

**Early Modern Mongolian:** The Mongolian language (i.e. the language which later developed into present-day Mongolian Proper and its dialects, including Khalkha, Baarin, Chakhar, Khorchin, Aru Khorchin, etc.) in the post-Middle Mongol period, beginning around the late 16th century, extending at least through the 17th century, and ending sometime before the early 20th century (the approximate end date remains to be determined).

Very little work has been undertaken on the phonology, morphology, lexicon, or syntax of this period of Mongolian. Among the few studies in this area of research, we may note Lee et al.’s (2000) study of 17th century Written Mongol chronicles and Šagdarsüren’s (2006) observations on 17th-century Mongolian phonology based on

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1 In my periodization, ‘Early Middle Mongol’ (13th c. to 14th c.) refers to Middle Mongol as spoken during the the Mongol Empire; ‘Late Middle Mongol’ (15th c. to early 16th c.) refers to Middle Mongol as spoken after the Mongol Empire; and ‘Early Modern Mongolian’ denotes Mongolian as spoken beginning around the late 16th century and extending at least through the 17th century, if not later.

2 Note that Mongolian here refers to Mongolian Proper, excluding other Mongolic languages like Oirat, Buryat, Daur, etc.