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THE ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF TURK'S IMAGE  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF CHINESE AND TURKISH  
HISTORY BOOKS.

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## 1. Introduction

In the essay, the differences and similarities between Turkish and Chinese sources is investigated. In the essay, Turkish and Chinese School books, Book of historians, and online sources are used. School History books form the backbone of this essay. Most of the historical background of the society in a country is taught in schools by school history books. School history books are not the same with chronicles or monographies written by specific historiographers. Thus, students cannot question it. They are responsible to learn the information that is inside the school history books. Their knowledge or concept of truth, therefore, may change from one society to another because of different perspectives, so, it is important to detect the content and information differences between high school books.

When the history is first taught to students, it is often defined as a collection of objective facts. If history does not consist of anything other than pure objective statements, then there should be some questions about how the relation between cause and effect can be discussed purely objectively and if it is not, what could be the consequences of different interpretations of history? History affects the way of thinking and the future actions of a society against other cultures or other nations. Therefore, by detecting the differences between them, I propose to indicate the different perspectives of two different culture; Chinese and Turkish culture.

## 2. Construction of Great Wall

There is a significance difference between Turkish and Chinese sources about the origin and construction of the Great Wall. Its significance about why and how it is built is mentioned differently in both sources. According to Turkish history text books, it is mostly indicated that the Great Wall was built because of attacks, actually for defense, Especially in Kemal Kara's *High School History Book*; the relationship between Turkish Culture and the Chinese culture is indicated as "*China constructed the famous Great Wall to prevent Turkish invasion. (214 BC)*" (Kara Lise için 107) The Great Wall is, therefore, included in the Turkish Central Asian History and in most of the school books.

When Chinese internet sources are investigated, it is seen that Great Wall is constructed to prevent the attacks of Mongolians, other dynasties and tribes. However no 'Turkish' invasion is specifically mentioned as a reason of the construction of the Great Wall in Chinese sources contrary to most of the Turkish School books or some internet sources mentions. But some Chinese Internet sources indicate that some invaders in 221 BC were called 'Xiongnu'. (Four Beauties of China: Wang Zhaojun) Chinese online sources imply that Xiong nu establishes an empire in 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC and it is said that they established their empire beyond the borders of modern day Mongolia. They defeated and displaced the dominant Yuezhi<sup>1</sup> and became the predominant power in North China. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, it is said that "*These nomadic people were considered so dangerous and disruptive that the Qin Dynasty began construction of the Great Wall to protect China from their attacks*" (Four beauties of China: Wang Zhaojun) After Qin Shi Huang<sup>2</sup> unified China in 221 BC and establishing the Qin Dynasty, to protect the empire

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<sup>1</sup> The Yuezhi or Rouzhi (大月支, dà yuè zhī) are an ancient Central Asia People.

<sup>2</sup> Emperor Qin Shihuang (also called the First Emperor of China) was the founder of the first unified empire in the history of China. He established an autocratic state with centralized power over the feudal society. ([http://www.culturalink.gov.cn/gb/en\\_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content\\_22854.htm](http://www.culturalink.gov.cn/gb/en_aboutchina/2003-09/24/content_22854.htm))

against attacks by the Xiongnu people from the north, he ordered the building of a new wall and later Han, Sui, Jin dynasties repaired or built the Great Wall against Northern invaders. . This nation has a lot of similarities with Huns since it is known that some part of the great wall was constructed against them. It is said that the name ‘Xiongnu’<sup>3</sup> might be cognate to the name Huns, however, these sources refer that the evidence is still controversial and there is no significant sentence that addresses ‘Xiong nu’ people as Huns. Even though the evidence is still controversial in Chinese sources, Turkish School Books define ‘Xiong nu’ as Huns. In the School History Book of Nurer Ugurlu, Huns are defined as “Xiong nu”. *“The oldest Turkish State in Central Asia is established by Huns who are called as “Huns” by Europeans, and as “Hiung-nu” or “Kuns” by Chinese.”* (Uğurlu 137) So it can be said that in Chinese sources ‘Xiong-nu’ refers to the word ‘Hun’ in Turkish according to the Turkish sources. In Turkish High School book, it says that *“Hun Turks consistently attacked China at the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In order to stop the attacks of Hun Turks, China unified the walls of Great Wall which the castles of it was constructed to the North for the same aim before.”*(Kara, Lise Tarih 109)

Most of the Chinese internet sources do not give detailed information in the history of Great Wall. They mostly say that Great Wall *“was built, was rebuilt, and was maintained between the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and 16<sup>th</sup> century to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire during successive dynasties.”*(Zheng) It is indicated as *“To conquer other states, stronger ones made frequent wars upon others.”*(Origin of the Great Wall). Therefore, it only indicates that the Great wall was constructed in order to stop some conquerors. The names of these conquerors are not given.

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<sup>3</sup> The Xiongnu (Chinese: 匈奴) were the confederation of nomadic tribes from central Asia with a ruling class of unknown origin. Proposals by scholars include Iranian, Mongolic, Turkic, and Yeniseian. (<http://dbpedia.org/page/Xiongnu>)

Beyond Internet sources or school books, academic books also provide information and different ideas can be seen concerning the Great Wall among different Turkish sources. High School History books are different than the history books written on academic level. The literarily translation of Great Wall into Turkish is “*Chinese Wall*” or “*Chinese embankment*”. In the book of Prof. Gomec<sup>4</sup>, it is said in one of the footnote that “*the construction of Great Wall has actually started in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, to what extent we can call this wall as “Chinese wall”? For the Great Wall was not constructed in order to prevent Chinese nation from Turkish invasion, it was constructed in order to prevent Turkish nation from Chinese invasions. Therefore, calling this wall as “Turkish Wall” would be more appropriate.*” (Gömeç 160) Furthermore Gomec claims that Turkish nation started to build the Great Wall to protect themselves from Chinese invasions in 9<sup>th</sup> century BC then Chinese people connected different Walls together to prevent Turkish invasions in 216 BC when Hun Turks strengthened. (Gömeç 160). On the other hand, In Chinese internet sources, it is said that Chinese Nation was already familiar with the techniques of wall building in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC against the attack of small arms. Hence, there is a contradiction about which state started the construction of the Great Wall since both nations know the techniques of Wall building in 9<sup>th</sup> century.

In Turkish sources, School Books claim that the Great Wall was constructed against Hun Turks while Academic book of Prof Gomec claims that the Great Wall was not constructed by Chinese, it was constructed by Turkish and the walls are connected by Chinese states. There is a clear contradiction between these Turkish texts. In Chinese online sources, there is no such statement mentioning Turkish invasions.

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### 3. The History of Mongolians

The tribes in Central Asia were in a complicated relation that even some writers and historians were not able to distinguish their relationship or their roots. Because of this fact, there are two ideas where one refers that the roots of Genghis Khan is from Turkic tribes, and other refers that the roots of Genghis Khan do not have any relation to Turkic tribes. According to some Turkish magazines and some academic books, Genghis Khan who is also known as ‘Temujin’ is considered to be Turk or half Turk because of his mother. ‘*Genghis Khan who was called as Mongol or Tatar by Chinese, was actually a Turkish. His mother was Turkish.*’ (Çetinoğlu)

Even some Turkish writers and especially articles in the Turkish magazines show that Genghis Khan may have Turkish roots, Chinese historians, such as Ray Huang, do not agree (with this). In Chinese sources, there is no specific evidence that addresses Genghis Khan as Turk. In the book of Ray Huang it is stated as ‘*In the north, the Mongolian who is named as Temuchin, declared himself as ‘Genghis Khan’ which means ‘The Mongolian son of the god’*’ (Huang 161). From this statement, it can be seen that there is no such references for Genghis Khan’s ‘Turkish roots’ as said in some Turkish sources. In contrast, Ray Huang points the meaning of the name of Genghis Khan as ‘*the Mongolian son of the god.*’

The contradiction about the roots of Genghis Khan may also lie in the Turkish epics which explain the relationship between Turks and Mongols. In his book, Prof. Gomec gives information about Turkish Epics and Turkish Central Asia History. In Turkish Epic *Oguz Kagan*, it says that, Oguz Kagan (Mo-tun), legendary hero in the Epic, fights with his father and kills him, he takes

the believers of god with him and leaves his uncles and cousins who do not believe in god. He calls them as “Mogol” and “*According to Turks, Mongolians are one of the Turkish families that did not accept the Islamic faith.*” (Gomeç 65) In the Epic, this departure is expressed as “*Oguz Kagan (Mo-tun) exiled those who does not believe in god and rejects him. He exiled them to Karakurum. They lived in those east countries impecuniously, and they starved and grieved. Hence, Oguz family called them as ‘Mogol’. Now, this place where they are living is called as Mongolia.*”(Gomeç 65)

The History of Mongolians and the relationship of them with Turks is not only discussed in epics and academic books, but also discussed in Turkish School Books. In Tahir Erdogan Sahin’s History Book for high schools, it says that Mongolians lived under the rule of Hun Turks, Kok Turks, and Uighur Turks for a very long time as tribes. (Şahin 259). Genghis Khan integrated all of the Mongolian territories, and “*forced some of the Turkish clans to accept his imperium*” (Şahin 260) However, none of them mention about the roots of Genghis Khan or the relationship among Turks and Mongols. In the high school book of Kemal Kara, it describes Mongolian history much more differently than as it is done in other sources. ‘*Uighurs that were culturally and urbanely much more progressive than Mongolians, they were brought to some important jobs of the country. They taught their language to them and the language of Uighur became a widely distributed language. Mongolian country gained a Turkish-Mongolian property by the effects of Uighur and Turkish tribes. Turkish tribes made some Mongolians Turks.*’ (Kara, Lise için 109)

According to Turkish Academic Books, the discussion about Genghis Khan is expressed as “*by his genius organizer mind Genghis Khan with his tiny tribe, he not only took large*

*countries and tribes under his sovereignty but also united all of these tribes under a single empire by establishing a 'new order'. The dominant element of the empire is the Mongols, although the vast majority of the inhabitants that constituted the military are the people of Turks. The principal of the state organization is nothing other than the continuation of the Turkish tradition. Because of that fact, "Turkish-Mongol Empire" would be an appropriate name for the state that is established by Genghis Khan.*" (Kurat 20) Inside the book of *Turkish tribes and countries* by Prof. Kurat, this relationship is indicated as *'The country that is established by Genghis Khan, essentially contains the inseparable part of the Turkish History.'*<sup>5</sup>(Kurat 22)

A Turkish Academic book that explains the relationship between Turk's and Mongol's cites that during Kok-Turks and Uighurs, the same historical progress can be seen in both of them. Turkish states first arose in History, then rapidly developed, established empires, and compressed Chinese Empire. Yet, *'the Chinese conspiracy policy is weakening Turkish Empires and causing them to collapse in a very short time period.'* (Taşağıl, Yaşayan en eski uygarlık) It also refers that the concept of 'Mongol' and being Mongolian is very different in spite of the fact that Mongols and Turks are in a very close relationship for centuries. According to Taşağıl, the name of 'Mongol' became a common name between all Mongolian tribes during Genghis Khan Period in 12<sup>th</sup> century. Before that age, different Mongolian tribes came into prominence, their name was mentioned in the historical scene. Yet, as they lived very close to Turks and there was so much communication between them, the concept of 'Mongolian' and 'Turkish' always mixed up. In the article, the writer strongly states that Mongolians and Turks were different nations and Genghis Khan was not Turkish. He says *'Genghis Khan's himself and the Mongolians, they were*

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<sup>5</sup> There are also some European sources that support perspective of Turkish Academic books too. One of them is the book 'An introduction to the History of the Turkic People.' Written by Peter B. Golden. In this book, it is stated as 'Genghis Khan organized the Turkic-Mongolian tribes by mixing and crumbling them.' (Golden, Peter B. Page 253)



*not a part of Turkish nation yet they had many Turkish elements in their empires/countries. Especially, non-muslim Kirghiz and Kipchak were accepted in Mongolian Empire...*' (Taşağıl, Yaşayan en eski uygarlık.) Besides, it says *'In any case, After Genghis Khan-not even passed a century- Mongolian empires was under the sway of Turkish culture and to be turkized. Even Kubilay Khan who carry on the Mongolian empire in Chinese borders, he found consultants, scientists, and even civil foremen from Uighur and West Turkistan. He gave the name Turkish name 'Hanbalik' to his new established city in Beijing.'* (Taşağıl, Yaşayan en eski uygarlık)

In another article of the writer, it is mentioned that Mongolians whom do not have an entrenched empire custom before Genghis Khan, were in a position to allow for Turkish elements. He states that especially they bring some consultants that they took from the last Uighurs of East-Turkistan people 'Iduk-kut' to very high statues. Article states that *'As it is known that the Mongolians melt into Turkish cultural elements.'* (Taşağıl, Hanbalık) It is said in the article that even in China where rich settled cultures live, Mongolians needed Turkish culture. *'Most of the national leaders, scholars and artists were from Turkish origins.'* (Taşağıl, Hanbalık)

In Turkish sources, Turkish epics refer Mongolians as another clan of Turkish tribe where in several articles or books, it is said that the empire of Genghis Khan unified two nation but they are not from the same nation. It can be said that there are also some tribes that were mixed up with many nation at the same time that it is very difficult to address them as a one nation or distinguish them.

#### **4. Turkish Epics**

All nations in the world have epics and some animal figures that are explaining where and how they derived from. There are also many Turkish Epics because there are not much written documents. Turkish epics are mostly about the reproduction of the Turkish Nation from the Grey Wolf. The wolf plays a central role in Turkish Epics. In the Ergenekun, it says that the ancestor of the family was a female Wolf which is named as *Asena*. Chinese sources also state that the ancestor of Turks is a Grey Wolf.

The earliest known texts<sup>6</sup> of Turks in any Altaic language are found during Kokturks<sup>7</sup> period that is between the years 681- 745 AD. However it is known that most of the Epics are written before Jesus Christ. For example the *Oguz Kagan* Epic is created during the Hun Empire time which is between the years 220-150 BC. Therefore it can be said that most of the documents about Central Asia History of Turks are the Epics. Chinese nation began to record history earlier and they had much more written documents than Turkish sources. So, Central Asia History of Turks and even some similar Turkish epics about Turkish Nation can be found in Chinese sources too.

In Turkish High School books, some historical facts similar to Epics can be found. In Kemal Kara's High School book, it is said that Chinese couldn't stop the Turkish invasion and therefore; during Mete Han period, Turks outmaneuvered China and as a result it was imposed on a tax. The book says "*However, after Mete Han, most of the Hun emperors married with Chinese princesses. The marriages which were made to develop the political and commercial relation, were actually against the benefits of the country and against Huns.*" (Lise için 107)

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<sup>6</sup> The Orkhun Inscriptions (Also known as Gokturk inscriptions. Turkish: Gokturk Kitabeleri) which were written by Yulug Tigin and which were erected in honour of the two Kokturk prince Kul Tigin and his brother the emperor Bilge Kagan. It was written in both Old Turkic Script and Chinese.

<sup>7</sup> (Old Turkic: 'Sky Turks' Also known in Chinese sources as 突厥 (Tujue)) They were a Turkic people of ancient Central Asia that has firstly used the name 'Turk'.

Book claims that these marriages harmed Huns because Chinese diplomats used the family relationship to destroy Huns. It is very similar to the Turkish Epic *Göç*.

There are two perspectives on Uyghur Migration Epic, *Göç*. Prof Gomec's book also gives these two Epics from different sources. According to Turkish sources, there is a man who puts up a tent between two trees in his homeland. This man puts his children inside the tents and lights a kindle. Then, he tells people to respect these children. People choose one of them as their Khan. One day, trees, birds, horses, wild animals, dogs start to yell as 'migration'. Finally Uighur migrates and the sounds of immigration terminates. According to Chinese sources, Uighur Khan's son marries with a Chinese Bride to stop the war with Chinese Nation. However, during this time period, the Chinese envoys want to collect information about Uighur to destroy their country. They have found that the stone of Kutlug Tag is the source of the almighty power and wealth of the country. Then, they took this stone from Uighur and destroy that. After the destruction of the stone, birds and wild animals start to cry as 'migration'. Finally Uighur migrates.

## **6. OTTOMAN HISTORY FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.**

In Chinese and Turkish High school books, different perspectives to the History of Ottoman Empire can be observed. In Turkish High School books Ottoman Empire indicated as very just state that don't take high taxes or the books don't even mention whether the taxes taken were high or low. For example, in the high school book of Kemal Kara, it only mention about the tax system in Ottoman Empire which was called *iltizam sistemi* in Turkish. (Kara, Genel 137) In the High School Book of Tahir Erdogan, it discusses the Tax system between the people of the

country. In Ottoman Empire, non-muslims are giving additional taxes which are called *Cizye*. In Turkish sources, it does not call Ottoman Empire as cruel or it has strict rules. In the book of Turkish Ministry of Education (MEB), in the part of the “Ottoman government perceptiveness”, it says “*The original element of the Ottoman ruling system was justice, indulgence and asylum.*” (Başaran 131). It also says that the most important element among them was the concept of justice. It is an obligation for a multinational country. ‘*to live peaceful in a multinational empire as Ottomans needed to be ruled in a fair system.*’ (Başaran 131) In contrast to Chinese School book, Turkish school texts say that the economy of Ottoman is mostly based on agriculture. The economy concept in Ottomans, therefore, was related to the concept of ‘*better assessment of soil*’, ‘*not to left soil blank*’ and to ‘*take good taxes*’ from it. In the process of time, as the boundaries expanded, commercial activities brought changes to the economic system. These new changes, in commercial life, merchants also became important as well as the agriculture. In Turkish School Book, it says ‘*The understanding of the economic system in Ottomans was very similar to their understanding of ruling system of the country. The concept of Ottoman Ruling system was about the aim of the Sultan which was to make his own people life wealthy, safety, and comfortably. Therefore, All of the commercial activities in Ottoman Empire was aimed to make people live without being hard up. As a result of such an approach, all kinds of production were held at the needed rate. If the production could not meet the needs, the goods were purchased.*’ (Kara, Genel 180)

In Chinese High School books, Ottoman Empire is described as ‘*a Military Feudal Country where its religion is Islam*’ (Ren 55) whereas in some Turkish High school books it doesn’t even mention about that. In Chinese High school book it says that Ottoman Turks became the empire of bestride Asia, Africa, Europe, 3 big continents. Ottoman Empire had strict

rules and its cruel exploit, and his vast conquers to other countries prevent him to develop his economy. Ottoman Turks took very heavy taxes from merchants. Also in Chinese High School Books it is said that *'they first occupied Anatolia, then gradually permeate Balkans in Europe, started to threaten Byzantine Empire.'* (Ren 56) These facts actually stated differently in Turkish High School Books. Turkish school books mostly uses the words 'conquering' and 'capturing' rather than the words 'occupying' or 'permeating' for Ottomans. The reason of that could be the Education Policy of Turkish government in 1990's. Government aimed to give the feeling of nationalism to students even if the information is still ambiguous.

## Conclusion

To conclude, not only differences between Chinese and Turkish sources are observed, but also differences between two Turkish sources are observed as well. It is seen that the historical events are open to different interpretations. By considering different perspectives of historiographers or governments, it is possible to see differences among different interpretations of history. Any historical document can be interpreted quite different from the perspectives of two historiographers or two governments.

The differences between different sources such as the internet sources, school books or academic books are also observed. Some differences are observed in Turkish Epics. There are different sources that explain Turkish Epics in different ways. Most of the Chinese internet sources and articles either do not even mention anything about Turks or they mention about a nation called 'xiong nu' which is said that the origin is unknown but they may be the combination of three nations; Turkic, Mongolic and Yeniseian. It can be said that there were many different tribes in

the origin lands of Turks, and therefore this relationship between them is both very close and similar that even many historians are not even able to distinguish between them.

Most of the Turkish school books claim that Great Wall was constructed to prevent the invasion of Hun Turks. One of the Turkish academic book, cite that Great Wall was not constructed to stop Turkish invasion, it was constructed to protect Turkish nation from Chinese invasions. So, there is an ambiguity. This ambiguity among different perspectives is not only observed in the issue of 'Great Wall', it is observed in 'Ottoman Empire' as well. Turkish school books claim that Ottoman Empire is a very just state and care about its citizens where Chinese sources address Ottoman Empire as 'cruel'. The reason of these different perspectives of Ottoman history and Central Asia history among Chinese and Turkish school books is probably the education policy of the Turkish Government. Every country wants to be proud of their history and as a result of it, predominantly reflects the positive and important parts of their history. Thus, they aim to impose the nationalism to posterity and while doing this, they propose to strengthen the national unity of their country. School history books are very important in that way. So it can be said that, school history Books reflect the Government Policy since primary have to be approved by the Ministry of Education. However, most of the Turkish school books give strict generalizations on some issues that are still ambiguous.

History should not only be objective but also it should indicate both positive and negative sides and different perspectives of an event. Because history is not only leading people, but also it affects the attitudes of societies to each other. An ultra nationalism may create an aggressive society that has no tolerance to different ideas, perspectives or societies. Hence; the differences

between Chinese and Turkish sources not only indicated different interpretations of history, but also demonstrate two societies' mutual viewpoints of each other that survived for centuries.

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## APPENDICES