

## The etymology of “Manchu”: A critical evaluation of the riverside hypothesis

Andreas Hölzl, University of Potsdam

The name *manju* ‘Manchu’ is that of a people that established the Qing dynasty (1636–1912) and played an important role in the history of East and Central Asia. In English it is best known through the place name *Manchuria*. Despite numerous attempts, the etymology of the ethnonym remains elusive. Most previous approaches do not include any comparative data from other Tungusic languages, disregard regularities of phonological changes, or leave the underlying semantic development unexplained (see the summaries in Huang 1990: 272–282, Stary 1990, Chen Peng 2011, among others).

This talk will evaluate one of the most plausible etymologies that can be called “riverside hypothesis”. This hypothesis states that the ethnonym is cognate with a word for river in the other Tungusic languages, such as *mamgu* ~ *mamgo* in Ussuri Nanai. In a few languages, this word also has the secondary meaning of an autonym or exonym. For instance, *maŋmu* in the language Udihe refers to both the Amur and the Nanai people living along the Amur. The hypothesis already has a long history of research (e.g., Rinzō 1810, Schrenck 1883: 144, Cincius 1949: 239, Benzing 1956: 12f., Ikegami 1989, Norman 2003). This study aims to take a fresh look at this etymology, to point out specific problems in these earlier approaches, to present new evidence for the hypothesis, and to reject all arguments against it by Stary (1990).

The first part of the talk presents evidence for the role of rivers in all cultures of the area and points out parallels for the development of ethnonyms from river names (1a, 1b).

(1) Uilta (Magata 1981: 127)

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|----|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| a. | <b><i>maŋbū</i></b> | <i>úni-ni</i>  | ‘Amur river’   |
|    | Amur                | river-3SG.POSS |                |
| b. | <b><i>maŋbū</i></b> | <i>xalá-ni</i> | ‘Ulchi people’ |
|    | Ulchi               | clan-3SG.POSS  |                |

The talk will show that, as in these examples, the semantic shift of *manju* is the natural outcome of collocations with words referring to groups of persons, such as *cooha* ‘army’ or *gurun* ‘people’, as seen in documents from the 17th century onwards. The semantic development will be described with aspects of cognitive linguistics, such as metonymy (e.g., Langacker 1993).

The second part addresses the phonological development. It will be argued that the Proto-Tungusic reconstruction *\*mamgo* can explain all attested forms of the river word (cf. Janhunen 2008). The initial *ma-* as well as the final *-o* are straightforward and can be compared with well-known lexical items (*\*maŋga* ‘hard’, *\*lāmo* ‘sea’). But the consonant cluster *-mg-* shows highly complex developments that remained unexplained in earlier approaches. This talk demonstrates that the synchronic variation in all languages can be explained by a series of about nine sound changes that also occurred in *\*amga* ‘mouth’, *\*omga-* ‘to forget’, and *\*lūmgä-* ‘to swallow’. For instance, Udihe *maŋmu* shows a regular metathesis (also seen in *aŋma*, *oŋmo-*, *niŋme-*) of an earlier *-mŋ-* as in Negidal *mamju* (cf. *amŋa*, *omŋo-*, *nimŋə-*).

The main problem for the riverside hypothesis is that the regular outcome of *\*-mg-* in Manchu is *-ngg-* (e.g., *angga*, *onggo-*, *nungge-*). But while the development *g > j* is not entirely regular, it does have several parallels before close vowels, e.g. *jai* ‘2nd’ (< *jia* < *\*giā*),

*sunja* ‘5’ (< *sunjia* < \**tuńga*), *-nju* ‘-teen’ (Nanai *-ıŋgo*), *jiramin* ‘thick’ (Aihui Manchu *gireme*).

In sum, the study demonstrates that, despite this minor problem, the riverside hypothesis can be considered the most plausible etymology. It concludes with a brief discussion of the distribution of cognates around the lower Amur and Sunggari and its significance for the prehistory of the entire area.

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