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TURKIC-MONGOLIAN WORLD

Article

Mongolian National (*Khalkha*) Wrestling's Uniforms of the 16th century

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This article examines the history of Mongolian wrestling uniform, with a special focus on the 16th century, and its importance for understanding the history of this kind of sport from the ancient times to the present day.

Judging from the wrestling uniforms which appear in the copy of the wall painting of Erdene Zuu monastery known as 'Abtai Sain Khan', preserved in the National Museum of Mongolia, we can conclude that 16th century wrestling uniforms of the are not only very similar to the their 13th century counterparts (found in Shaanxi), but have also survived as the national wrestling uniforms of Mongolia today. The modern Mongolian national wrestling uniform consists of *malgai* (hat), *zodog* (uniform covering the chest), *shuudag* (uniform similar to shorts), and *guta* (boots).

However, according to the picture, these elements were used in wrestling in the 16th century. In the present-day Mongolian national wrestling uniforms the part which differs most from its historic predecessors is the *malgai*, which is unique in that it is the first image that has never been depicted in Mongolian historical wrestling monuments. But the *zodog*, *shuudag*, and *guta* have been handed down without much change. Our research on Mongolian wrestling uniforms is important for a more accurate understanding of the culture, history, and evolution of Mongolian ethnicity.

Keywords: Mongolian national wrestling; wrestling uniform; Mongolia; *zodog shuudag*



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ТЮРКО-МОНГОЛЬСКИЙ МИР

Статья

Форма монгольской национальной (халха) борьбы XVI века

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В статье представлено исследование монгольской борцовской формы, имеющей древнюю историю. Анализируется борцовская форма, которая изображена на копии настенной росписи монастыря Эрденэ-Зуу, известной как «Абтай Саин хан» (XVI в.). Она хранится в Национальном музее Монголии.

Анализ показывает, что борцовская форма монастыря XVI в. не только очень похожа на их аналоги XIII в., найденные в Шэньси (Китай), но и сохранилась по сей день. Современная монгольская национальная борцовская форма состоит из основных частей: малгай (шапка), зодог (нагрудная форма), шуудаг (форма, похожая на шорты) и гутал (сапоги).

Тем не менее отличия все же есть. Большие всего от своих исторических предшественников отличается шапка-малгай. Интересно то, что на росписи обнаруживается ее наиболее раннее в истории изображение. Остальные элементы одежды — зодог, шуудаг и гутал — передавались из поколения в поколение без особых изменений.

Исследование важно для понимания истории монгольской культуры и национальных традиций спорта.

Ключевые слова: монгольская национальная борьба; борцовская форма; Монголия; зодог шуудаг



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Introduction

Eriin Gurvan Naadam ‘Three competitions for men’ had long been a part of the ceremony of the Mongolian state, and this role is now formally recognized in legislation¹. *Eriin Gurvan Naadam* traditionally includes horse racing, archery, and wrestling. Mongolian wrestling is not only a national sport, but also a key part of the identity of the Mongolian people (Batmunkh and Boldbaatar, 2021: 988), used in state ceremonies, and as an expression of the spiritual unity of the nation. The three major currents of Mongolian wrestling — Uzemchin, Oirat, and Khalkha — all reflect geographical location of the scattered Mongolians, and create very distinct differences in wrestling uniforms. It can be understood that the social and political situation of Mongolians greatly influenced the development of Mongolian wrestling uniforms in these three versions.

The history of Mongolian wrestling can be divided into four periods: 1) ancient era of wrestling in Mongolian territory (prehistory to 10th century); 2) the rise of wrestling’s root feature (11th century — 1368); 3) branching into three types (late 14th century to early 20th century); 4) development in combination with modern physical education and sports (since 20th century).

The rise of the ancient history of Mongolian wrestling began during the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BC), and the evidence of this can be found in the rock paintings of Shiveet Khaikhan, Tsagaan Salaa, and Baga Oygor of Bayan-Ulgii aimag, Javkhlant Khaikhan of Umnugovi aimag, and Del Mountain of Dundgovi aimag. Two bronze plaques with wrestling double human figures (from to the Xiongnu period), historical sources during the Rouran and Khitan periods, and a pottery bowl depicting wrestlers — these are the sources for the history of wrestling during the ancient Mongolian states. As seen from the ‘Secret History of the Mongols’, wrestling was widespread among the Mongols in the 12th and 13th centuries. In the 14th century, wrestling developed intensively at the royal court of the Mongolian Empire and was handed down to the Mongols in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Mongolians are very fond of watching their wrestling matches, and they have developed legends and stories about their famous wrestlers. However, the study of the history, traditions, and cultural elements of Mongolian wrestling is lagging behind, which is the main reason for our research. Therefore, we aimed to study the history of uniforms, one of the main characteristics of Mongolian wrestling.

The main source of our research is 16th century painting that includes an episode of Mongolian wrestling. A copy of Abtai Sain Khan’s painting from the 16th century is kept in the National Museum of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar (132x80 cm, made at the beginning of the 20th century by artists Dendev, Gonchig and Darisuren). The original painting was preserved on the decorated wall at Erdene Zuu monastery. Our research is focused on the 16th century, but based on information from other periods of the historical development of Mongolian wrestling, we shed light on the evolution of Mongolian wrestling uniforms.

Uzemchin Wrestling’s Uniforms

The Uzemchin wrestling uniform consists of four elements: 1) *Jangaa*, 2) *Zodog*, 3) *Banjil*, and 4) *Gutal*.

“*Jangaa* which the strong wrestler in *Uzemchin bukh* wears around his neck, partakes the symbolism in common with the rite of shamanism observed in the *Ovoo* festival, which worships the god of the universe” (Rikido, 2006: 105). *Jangaa* means strength and invincibility of the wrestlers (Perenleisambuu, 1997: 354), and traditionally, in the *Naadam*, or *Ovoo* festival, if featuring over 128 wrestlers, a silk ceremonial scarf called *khadag* (*khoshuu jangaa*) was awarded to the wrestler who defeated all his opponents. Those who received the *khoshuu jangaa* three times were eligible they had to make themselves and wear the *jangaa* (Erdenetsogt and Buyandelger, 2013: 24). Subsequently, in each *Naadam* festival, wrestlers who defeat more than three opponents in a row are awarded a ribbon about two centimeters wide (*zusmel jangaa*).

Uzemchin *zodog* (chest uniform) is the only uniform that can be worn during wrestling. Holding other parts of uniforms (*banjil*, *tuuhuu* etc) is considered a violation of the rules. Uzemchin *zodog* is made of processed cowhide leather and sewn with strong thread such as fine leather cord. The sleeves and hem are stitched with thin leather to ensure Uzemchin *zodog*’s durability and style (Tsogzolmaa et al., 2012: 34). Traditionally, copper and brass mirrors (*toli*) were attached to the back of the Uzemchin *zodog*. But recently, they have started using the four Buddhist dignities (garuda, snow lion, tiger, and dragon) symbolizing

¹ Law of Mongolian national Naadam festival. *Mongolian Parliament*. 2022, 28 June [online] Available at: <https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail?lawId=16530657329231> (accessed 14 December 2023).



invincible power, or auspicious patterns and words symbolizing peaceful, prosperous, rich life. One of the main features of Uzemchin *zodog* is that it has metal studs (iron and brass) on both sleeves and the back, — an average of 300–350 per a *zodog* (Tsogzolmaa et al., 2012: 34). It makes the Uzemchin *zodog* even stronger, while retaining the ancient tradition of being reminiscent of military armor.

Banjil is a pair of baggy pants worn by Uzemchin wrestlers to allow free movement of the body while not letting the opponent guess the coming action from the leg movement (Tumurzurkh, Aruukhan, 1998: 58). By letting the broad part of the *banjil* partially cover the boots, the Uzemchin wrestler's adds more splendor to the wrestling run (*Buurin shogshoo*) and jump (*Arslangin choilolt*). In Uzemchin wrestling, the *tuuhuu* (knee pads) and *lavir* (layered garment to cover the belly and waist) are worn along with the *banjil*. *Tuuhuu* is worn on the outside of the *banjil*. Nowadays it is used for decoration, but in ancient times, it was used to protect Mongolians' knees from the cold while riding (Erdenetsogt, Buyandelger, 2013: 32). *Tuuhuu* are usually decorated with red, brown, and blue silk patterns, or colorfully stitched images of animals symbolizing power. *Lavir* is made of blue, red, and yellow crepe and it symbolizes three things: heaven, fire, and earth (Tumurzurkh, Aruukhan, 1998: 72). *Lavir* is not used in modern times because it makes it difficult for the wrestlers to hold the *zodog*, which covers the adjacent part of the *zodog* and *banjil*.

Uzemchin *gatal* is a sturdy boot made of leather and rounded at the toe. It is very important to prevent the wrestler's feet from getting injured or slipping during the fight. On the inside of the boots, cloth or felt socks are often fastened, or in some cases, a cloth scarf is wrapped around the legs. *Khuleg* is a thin thread that is tied crosswise under the sole to connect the laces and heels of the boots and prevent them from slipping. In order to protect the shin bones and muscles, the *savslaga*, — a thin piece of bamboo covered with silk — was in the past attached to the inside of the boots, but it is no longer used.

Oirat Wrestling Uniforms

Oirat wrestling has several names: Western Mongolian wrestling (*bukh nooldoon*) (Ochir, 2011: 69–73), Kalmyk national wrestling (Naranjargal, Mandakhbayar, 2020: 75–89) and Buryat traditional wrestling (Purev-Ochir, 2012). The traditional Oirat wrestling uniform is the *shalbuur* (leather shorts), made of up to eight layers of a he-goat or a bull hide¹ (Altan-Uul, 2008: 62). Common people use harness of camel and horse hides (*burantag*, *tsulbuur*) to wrestle by tying the fat part of the waist and thighs together (*shalbuur zangilaa*), except during *Naadam* festival (Altan-Uul, 2008: 2). In modern times, Kalmyks and Buryats wrestle with *shalbuur zangilaa*, or regular belts, wearing a variety of shoes and shorts, while in Inner Mongolia's Alxa (Alasha) League and China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the uniforms have evolved considerably. In these areas, only one traditional uniform — the *shalbuur* — was worn on its own, but during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1735–1796), it was decreed that the should be worn on the chest (*tseejmeg*) (Altan-Uul, 2008: 19). Since then, wrestlers have to wear the complete uniform consisting of 1) *Shalbuur*, 2) *Tseejmeg*, 3) *Boitog*, and 4) *Burkhuul*. *Shalbuur* is most symbolically made by using the skins of two bulls' heads, and it is believed that the wrestlers will absorb the strength of the bulls. *Tseejmeg* is a sleeveless vest-like garment that wrestlers wear over their chest. It is a uniform designed to enhance the appearance and is decorated with patterns that symbolize the strength and skill of the wrestlers. The tradition of barefoot wrestling has been abandoned in modern times, and wrestlers have started wearing *boitogs* (boots) made of soft leather, thin felt, or fabric sewn together in layers. Wrestlers cover their heads with the *burkhuul* — a piece of silk or other fabric — when they enter the wrestling arena. The yellow colour symbolizes Buddhism for monks, and red symbolizes success for others.

Mongolian National (Khalkha) Wrestling's Uniforms

Many researchers (Tsevel, 1951; Nyam-Osor, Batsukh, 1989) have stated in their works that Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling uniform consists of 1) *Malgai*, 2) *Zodog*, 3) *Shuudag*, and 4) *Gutal*. The four-sided *malgai* (hat) with its pointed top is taken off when wrestling with the opponent and doffed to the *zasuul* (referee) as a sign of respect before and after the round. Khalkha wrestling differs from other types of Mongolian wrestling in wearing a *malgai* and having a lot of special historical, symbolic and taboo contents (Buyandelger, Sukhbaatar, 2008: 7–16). The *Zodog* is made of fabric, with many rows of soft but strong thread stitching

¹ Batkhuu B. Shalbuur of Bukh nooldoon. *Mongolian National news agency*, 2020, 17 June [online] Available at: <https://montsame.mn/en/read/228583> (accessed 25 July 2023). (In Mongolian).



(*shirees*) along all edges for strength. *Khalkha zodog* has long sleeves that reach the wrists, open chest, back length from the shoulders to the 12th rib, and a belt (*eleg bus*) is attached to both lower ends. The *Khalkha zodog* is made with a narrow pattern around the shoulders (*senjig*) and armpits (Tsogt, Buyandelger, 2012: 51–52). *Shuudag* (textile shorts) are about four fingers (8 centimeters) wide at both hips, and the back covers half of the buttocks, while the front follows the crotch. The material and stitching are the same as the *zodog*, but the color is mostly different (Buyandelger, Sukhbaatar, 2008: 32–35). *Gutal* (boots) are traditional Mongolian boots made of cowhide, black or brown in color, very wide at the top, with upturned toes, and thick felt or cotton socks inside. The main distinguishing feature of *gutal* as a wrestler's outfit is the strip of leather fittings that fasten the soles and laces of the boots (*nogt*) and fix them around the shin (*turiinii boot*) to prevent them from slipping during wrestling, similar to the *Uzemchin gutal*. Mongolian national (*Khalkha*) wrestlers are allowed to hold (*barits*) opponents by any part of *zodog* and *shuudag*, so it has been able to create many versions of *barits* and dozens of techniques (*mekh*) (Nyamdorj, 2013: 122–141). Mongolian national (*Khalkha*) wrestling uniforms are characterized by highlighting the wrestler's chest and thigh muscles.

It is appropriate to create a historical chronology based on the 'important turning points' (Stearns, 2017: 83–109) of its development, as indicated in Table 1, since explaining the history of Mongolian wrestling in a straightforward chronological order occasionally necessitates that readers have a deeper understanding of Mongolian wrestling and culture (table 1).

Mongolian National (Khalkha) Wrestling in the 16th Century

A number of sources can prove that Mongolian national wrestling matured as a part of royal court ceremonies in the 14th century (Batmunkh and Boldbaatar, 2021), but it is not clear how it changed and developed afterwards, during the 15th and 16th centuries. At this time, the political situation of the Mongols was very unstable. On the one hand, a civil war was raging due to the struggle between the princes who refused to submit to the king, and on the other hand, there was an ongoing war against the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in order to strengthen their independence and regain strength (Ochir et al., 2003: 31–59). These reasons made the conditions for the development of Mongolian national culture very harsh, but the cultural heritage was never broken. It can be concluded that during the 15th and 16th centuries, Mongolian national wrestling was not redeveloped, but more focused on preserving the features of wrestling and uniform, symbolizing the desire to recall and revive the powerful empire. Only three wrestlers' names — Sorsun, Bayan, and Batbold — have survived in sources (Buyandelger, Dalanbayar, 2023).

The seven sons of Gersengi Jalayir Khongtaiji (1513–1549) ruled the territory of present-day Mongolia and celebrated the 'Khalkha seven banner festival (*Khalkha Doloon Khoshuu Naadam*)' once a year. From 1640 onwards, this festival was dedicated to *Undur Gegeen Zanabazar* (1635–1723) as the first head of Gelug (Yellow Hat) lineage of Buddhism in Khalkha and became known as *Danshig Naadam* of the *Khalkha Doloon Khoshuu* (Magsarjav, 1960). It can be considered that the division of the Khalkha administration into seven banners (*khoshuu*) in the 16th century had a positive effect on the development of Mongolian national wrestling. With the creation of a new administrative schedule called *Khoshuu*, the possibility of organizing an independent *Naadam* festival in *Khoshuu* has opened up. Training and sending wrestlers from every area to the joint *Naadam* festival helped develop wrestling in every *khoshuu* of Mongolia. Wrestlers are traditionally symbolic figures in their area (*nutag*) (Rikido, 2013: 84). The system of encouraging wrestlers to achieve better results than their competitors from other areas, and informally rewarding successful wrestlers, has been preserved not only in history, but also to this day.

Mongolians have a long-standing tradition of organizing *Naadam* festival for state ceremonies such as the King's coronation or the *Ikh Khuraldai* (Batmunkh, Boldbaatar, 2021). This tradition has been updated, but nowadays the Mongolian parliament has legally confirmed that the state ceremony during the *Naadam* festival must be performed. There is also a tradition of organizing the *Naadam* festival for events such as the construction of a new city or monastery. Erdene Zuu Monastery, built in 1587 on the outskirts of Kharkhorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire, is one of the largest constructions of the 16th century. Erdene Zuu was no ordinary city, and being the first Mongolian Buddhist monastery, it was undoubtedly very important to its founders (Natsagdorj, Naigal, 2005). Erdene Zuu was built by Abtai Sain Khan (1554–1588), a descendant of Chinggis Khaan (Ichinnorov, Banzragch, 1999: 34). 16th century sources have no record of Abtai Sain Khan holding a *Naadam* festival for the occasion, but the Erdene Zuu wall decoration painting remarkably preserves a depiction of the queen and her attendants watching a wrestling match.



Table 1. Historical periodization of Mongolian national wrestling

Table 1. Historical periodization of Mongolian national wrestling											
Period and stage	Mongolian history	Ancient Period		Medieval Period					Modern Period		
		Prehistory (before third century BC)	Ancient States (third century BC-tenth century)	Khamag Mongol (eleventh-twelfth century)	Great Mongol (1206-1260)	Mongolian Empire (1260-1368)	Political dissolution (end 14 century to beginning 17 century)	Mongolia under Qing Empire (17 -beginning 20 century)	Early 20th century (1911-1923)	Socialist Mongolia (1924-1990)	Democratic Development (since 1991)
	Mongolian wrestling	Ancient era of wrestling in Mongolian territory		Period when the root characteristics were formed		A period of branching into three types (this differentiation continued in the following period)		A period of development in combination with modern physical education and sports (On the example of Mongolia)			
Main feature		Ancient wrestling		Mongolian wrestling		Mongolian ethnic wrestling		Modern Mongolian wrestling			
		Origins of wrestling	Proto-Mongolian wrestling	Developed intensively reflecting the traditions of ancient and royal courts and the influence of neighboring countries		Khalkha wrestling, or Mongolian national wrestling		Inherited as a traditional culture	Developed as a national sport	National sport-culture-business complex	
						Oirat wrestling (Bukh nooldoon)			It was inherited by the Western Mongolians until the 1930s, when its development officially stopped		
						Uzemchin wrestling, or Inner Mongolian wrestling		In the framework of cultural cooperation between Mongolia and China (Inner Mongolia), irregular activities take place			
Main resource		Rock-carvings in Mongolian territory	Archaeological finds depicting wrestling	Secret History of the Mongols' and other written sources		Written sources and paintings		Research books, articles, daily newspaper reports, archival documents, photographs, etc			



Mongolian National (Khalkha) Wrestling's Uniforms in Erdene Zuu's Wall Decoration Painting

The painting presents three events related to Abtai Sain Khan, each with its own story. In the upper central part of the painting, Abtai Sain Khan is presented with a pipe, a bow and arrow, and a horse with saddle and bridle. In the next section, Abtai Sain Khan is watching a wrestling match with the queen and his subjects, while the other picture is unique in that he is performing a sacrifice to heaven with the nobles. This is the oldest surviving depiction of the full Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling costume (fig 1).

Malgai (hat)

The wrestlers' *malgai* is held by two men standing to the left of the king and queen. The *malgai* is a type of Mongolian traditional summer hat called a cymbal (*tsan*) worn by Yuan emperors, officials and male commoners (Wei, 2018: 165–185). With this illustration of wrestlers' hats, Mongolians have been able to express the popular custom of organizing the *Naadam* festival by wrestling in warm summer and autumn (Buyandelger, 2017: 98). However, it should not be forgotten that during the 12th–14th centuries Mongolian wrestling developed into a royal court ceremony. Wrestlers began to use *malgai* as ceremonial uniform, so it was customary to wear it regardless of the season, and the custom was passed down during the time of Abtai Sain Khan. Either way, *malgai* was an integral part of the Mongolian national wrestling uniform in the 16th century.

Wrestlers' hats have a little piece on top (*sampin*), a common decoration of Mongolian hats, and a ribbon hanging down from its base, which is distinguishable from the hats of the same shape in the rest of the painting. The fact that the wrestlers' hats are not held by the *zasuul* (the two men next to the wrestlers) shows that the current rituals of Mongolian national wrestling, where hats are worn after defeating an opponent, were not yet in use in the 16th century. Therefore, at that time, wrestlers' hats did not have any symbolism of success in wrestling. Thus, the painting depicts the Mongolian national wrestling hat for the first time, so it can become a supporting source for clarifying the renewal of wrestling hats after the 16th century.

Zodog

The *zodog* of 16th century Mongolian national wrestling as shown in 'Abtai Sain Khan' painting, is similar to the current wrestlers' uniforms. Just as now, it was made of silk or fabric, which we can deduce from the fact that the wrestler on the left is wearing a white *zodog*, and the wrestler on the right is wearing a blue one. According to the tradition of Uzemchin wrestling, which still makes use of leather *zodogs* (Purev-Ochir, Dalanbayar, 2013: 6–19), there is little opportunity to distinguish leather *zodog* by color. Interestingly, the image confirms the tradition that in Mongolian national wrestling, the *zodog* is made in white color (Shagdargochoo, 1960: 13). Previously, it was never supported by factual evidence. By the 16th century, the tradition of making *zodog* of Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling from silk and cloth has been already established (Batmunkh, Boldbaatar, 2021).

The 'Abtai Sain Khan' painting, is the first multicolor image related to the history of Mongolian wrestling. A brief description of the *zodog* in several pre-16th century monuments found in Central Asia and Mongolia is important for summarizing the history of Mongolian national wrestling uniforms. Rock-carvings from the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BC) in Mongolia are valuable relics of ancient wrestling, but they do not depict wrestling uniforms (Batchuluun, 1998; Tseveendorj et al., 2010). However, two bronze belt plaques from the Xiongnu period (En, 2003), an important relic of proto-Mongolian wrestling, depict a wrestling uniform, but as they are not paintings the color and material of the uniform cannot be determined. However, the shape and some features of Xiongnu wrestling *zodog* (hereinafter referred to as 'Xiongnu *zodog*') can be clearly observed from the bronze belt plaques. Because the Xiongnu *zodog* is shown covering the shoulders completely, the chest was closed. This is in accordance with the oral tradition among Mongolians that the *zodog* had a closed chest in ancient times (Buyandelger and Sukhbaatar, 2008). According to legend, the *zodog* became open-chested in order to reveal that the wrestler was not a woman trying to pass as a man (Munkhdul, 2010: 4). But how *zodog* were to be changed in the future can be seen from the historical monuments described below. The back of the Xiongnu *zodog* is long enough to reach the waist, the lower part has a belt that can be tied to the body, and there are openings on both sides. Xiongnu *zodog*'s sleeves are long enough to reach the wrist, and the fact that there are no decorations on the sleeves and the back suggest the possibility that they were originally made of leather.

A pottery bowl depicting wrestlers (Krippes, 1989; Wittfogel, Jia-Sheng, 1949: 254) found in the ruins of the capital of the Liao dynasty (Khitan), which ruled parts of Mongolia between 907 and 1125, also deserves



Figure 1. 'Abtai Sain Khan' (16th century). From the archive of the National Museum of Mongolia¹.
Рисунок 1. «Абтай Саин хан», XVI в. Из архива Национального музея Монголии.

¹ Published with permission of the National Museum of Mongolia.



a mention. The *zodog* (hereafter referred to as the 'Khitan *zodog*') is not shown clearly, but it is open on both sides and has a belt around the waist like the Xiongnu *zodog*. It is different in that it has an open chest that can be grasped from the shoulder area, but the wrestler wears a breastplate (*tseejivch*) that covers all of his chest. While it can be argued that Xiongnu *zodog* and Khitan *zodog* are distinct types that cannot prove the historical development of the same wrestling uniform, there is yet no published research findings on this. Therefore, we accept the line of argument (Nyambuu, 1992: 9; Altan-Ochir, 1986: 27) that these sources show the development of Mongolian wrestling about one thousand years apart from each other. Based on this concept, we propose the conclusion that the Xiongnu *zodog*, which was a closed chest type, gave way to an open chest-type of *zodog* by the Khitan period. However, it is suggested that the use of *tseejivch* that only partially covered the chest was a stage in the transition from the closed chest-*zodog* to the open chest-type.

One of the main reasons for making this proposal is the clay wrestling figurines found in Weinan, Shaanxi Province, China in 1986 (Lequan, 2009). The illustration gives a clear image of wrestling *zodog* (hereafter referred to as 'Shaanxi *zodog*'), which is of great value. We support the suggestion that the 'Shaanxi *zodog*' was a direct influence on the Mongolian wrestling uniform (Batmunkh, Boldbaatar, 2021). The Shaanxi *zodog* belongs to the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) (Lequan, 2009), because the Jin dynasty included a certain part of the territory and population of the Khitan people, and Khitanese traditions were one of the three sources of language and culture (Hansen, 2018). Shaanxi *zodog* is not only similar in form to the 16th century *zodog* — it can be described as a direct continuation of the rise of an open chest-*zodog* and its next stage after the Khitan *zodog*. Shaanxi *zodog* seems to have been made of silk, or other fabric, judging by the shape of the body and the long sleeves that reach the wrists. According to this, the tradition was directly inherited and used in the wrestling uniform of the Mongolian royal court in the 14th century, and the basic form has remained almost unchanged until now.

Shuudag

The *shuudag* of the 16th century is similar in shape and style to the Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling uniform of today. *Shuudag* is thin enough to be grasped by hand on both hips, and can be tied to the body at the waist and upper thighs. As for the material, it may be made of silk or other fabric, and it is called '*shuudag*' because the hem (*khormoi*) of the cloth pants or coat (*deel*) is turned around and (*shuuji baidag* is shortened to '*shuudag*') worn (Buyandelger, Sukhbaatar, 2008: 32). The fact that the above story is found frequently in Mongolian oral literature is an important basis for determining the origin of *shuudag* (Buyandelger, Khosbayar, 2020). The truth of this premise needs to be proven or disproved by searching for depictions of wrestling uniforms from before the 16th century. As mentioned above, the 16th century *shuudag* took the form of shorts. The historical development of the *shuudag* must have been linked to the tradition of the Xiongnu, Khitan and Shaanxi uniforms. The fact that the Shaanxi *shuudag* is identical in design to its 16th century counterpart is so clearly depicted that it is a continuation of the development without further explanation. The design of Khitan *shuudag* cannot be accurately determined, but bare knees and thighs of the wrestlers are clearly visible, suggesting that it was in the form of shorts. Based on the above illustrations, we can conclude that the *shuudag* had already taken this shape by the 10th century. However, during the Xiongnu period, it can be seen from sources that wrestlers wore wide pants similar to the *banjil* of the current Uzemchin wrestling. Based on this feature of the pants, the Xiongnu wrestling cannot be directly equated with the current Uzemchin wrestling. For example, the depiction of Xiongnu wrestlers holding the legs and doing *mekh* shows that the wrestling procedure was very different from today's Uzemchin wrestling. There is no need to doubt that it is wrong to equate ancient wrestling with the three major currents of Mongolian wrestling today. However, from the Xiongnu period to the 10th century, the shape of the *shuudag*, which was worn by turning the wide pants around and tying them around the thighs, was formed. The tradition has been passed down through the 16th century to the *shuudag* as it appears in the Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling.

Gutal

In the 'Abtai Sain Khan' painting, the wrestlers are wearing boots with upturned toes and thick soles. Also, there is a human standing at a distance holding boots similar to those of the wrestlers, as well as an arrow case (*saadag*) and a bow drawn. From this we can infer that 16th century wrestlers wore special boots for wrestling, not the regular ones. This leads to the conclusion that in Abtai Sain Khan's palace, wrestlers used to wear full uniforms. It is reasonable to assume that such a procedure may have been formed by the 14th century, and this can only be seen in connection with the activities of the special organization responsible for



wrestling in the Yuan dynasty, which we mentioned earlier. The design of 16th century wrestlers' boots is similar to that of regular boots (*Mongol gutal*), worn by other people in the picture. It seems that originally the *guta* was used every day except for ceremonial purposes, such as the events at the royal court. Mongolian oral narratives refer to 'wrapping old torn boots with leather cords' (Buyandelger, Khosbayar, 2020) for common use during wrestling, which is similar to the custom of using *nogt* and *turiinii boot* for Khalkha wrestling boots today. However, modern Mongolian national Khalkha wrestlers have a habit of changing their boots when they wrestle in a designated hall, as part of their uniform, while ordinary wrestlers in rural areas wear their everyday boots when they wrestle outside.

According to the records of Xiongnu, Khitan, and Shaanxi wrestling, the *guta* was worn by wrestlers with a short around their ankles, but by the 16th century, wrestlers had traditionally worn boots as a *guta*. It is interesting to know why and when wrestlers started wearing *Mongol gutal* in Mongolian wrestling. According to the relics from the Yuan dynasty stored in the Chinggis Khaan National Museum, noblemen started wearing *Mongol gutal* with an uneven vertical cut, flat sole, and upturned toe. It is concluded that this tradition was inherited from the 16th century wrestling uniforms and that Khalkha wrestling matured into a royal court wrestling. Also dating back to the 16th century, military-grade iron-plate boots¹ differ considerably in that they have a long shaft but with a smooth rounded toe, a narrow flat sole, and the length to cover the knee completely. So, the wrestling shoes of the 16th century are more similar to those used by ordinary people who accompanied the kings and nobles, rather than to the boots worn for warfare purposes.

Conclusion

Studying the history of Mongolian wrestling uniforms is important for clarifying the evolution of Mongolian wrestling. Researchers have found that the ancient Mongolian wrestling uniform dates back to the Xiongnu period (3rd century BC — late 1st century), but it has not yet been historically established when the three different types of Mongolian wrestling uniforms appeared. According to our research, a copy of the painting of the wall decoration of the Erdene Zuu Monastery known as '*Abtai Sain Khan*' stored in the National Museum of Mongolia dating back to the 16th century is the oldest surviving monument of the national wrestling uniform of Mongolia.

The 16th century was one of the most complicated periods in the history of Mongolia. The power of the kings of Chinggis Khaan's dynasty decreased significantly, the split of the Mongols into the three major groups began — the south, the north, and the west (Ochir et al., 2003: 81–102). Accompanying this process, the foundation was laid for the development of Mongolian wrestling in its three distinct types: Uzemchin, Oirat, and Khalkha. *Naadam* festivals are the most important activities that regulate wrestling, which is widespread throughout the vast territory of Mongolia, a single set of rules. However, in the 16th century, as the non-recognition of the king expanded (due to the influence of political dissolution), it became impossible to organize a large-scale *Naadam* festival covering the territory of Mongolia. Thus, during the Mongol Empire, wrestling, which had been united by one set of rules, lost its unity and gave way to three currents of wrestling with their distinct rules and uniforms (Bayar, 1993: 4–6).

Mongolian national (Khalkha) wrestling developed in the territory of present-day Mongolia (the central, eastern, and northeastern parts of Mongolia at that time). This form of wrestling developed during the 14th century as part of the royal court ceremonies of the Yuan dynasty (Batmunkh and Boldbaatar, 2021). When the Ming dynasty was established and strengthened in China, the seat of royal power moved to its native land and made Kharkhorum, located in the central part of Mongolia, the capital (Rogers et al., 2005), and the Khalkha wrestling was inherited by the local people. It is thus possible to conclude that the abovementioned form of wrestling was spread among the Khalkha people who lived in the eastern part of Mongolia from the beginning of the 16th century when the power of Bodi Alagh Khan was concentrated in the eastern half of Mongolia. The only painting that can be clearly studied about wrestling at that time is a copy of the wall decoration painting of the Erdene Zuu monastery built in Kharkhorum at the end of the 16th century.

It can be concluded that the Mongolian national wrestling uniform of the 16th century is not only very similar to the one that appears in the Shaanxi monument of the 13th century. It has also been handed

¹ Bolor J. From the collection of the National Museum of Mongolia: Plated armored shoes. *Mongolian National news agency*, 2020, 27 November [online] Available at: <https://www.montsame.mn/mn/read/244735> (accessed 25 July 2023). (In Mongolian).



down to modernity and is the current Mongolian national wrestling uniform. It includes the *malgai*, *zodog*, *shuudag*, and *gutal* as its main parts, all of which were used in 16th century wrestling. The most different from the current Mongolian national wrestling uniform is the *malgai*, and *gutal* is its two parts which has never been depicted in Mongolian historical wrestling monuments. The *zodog* and *shuudag* have reached modern times without much change.

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