

## THE DRESS OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE: GENEALOGY AND DIASPORA OF THE *TERLIG*

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*Terlig* is a characteristic Mongolian dress. It was originally developed to accommodate aspects of Mongolian lifestyle and culture. During the Yuan dynasty, it came to symbolise the dress of higher social status. The original composition of the garment, i.e. the clothing material, created the initial form of the coat with a cutline at the waist that facilitated an equestrian lifestyle. A waistband and folds on the waistline were similarly added later. After attaining symbolic value, some of the *terlig*'s original functionality was lost, the waistband disappeared, and only the folds on the waist remained. The dual aspects of the *terlig* as a functional Mongolian coat and its symbolic aspect became part of high culture and were spread to the Khanates and neighbouring regions by the official dress system. Through this process, hybridity with Islamic and other local cultures occurred. Through secondary diffusion in the Mughal Empire, the *terlig* gained a new identity. During this later period its continued use in China and East Asia became fixed around an aspect of formality. In some marginal regions of the former Mongol Empire, it has survived to this day as an ethnic costume. The *terlig*, as a legacy of the Mongol Empire, continues to be worn.

*Key words:* Mongol costume, *terlig*, coat with folds, *yesa*, *chöllik*, *jama*, *nasji*.

### Introduction

The *terlig*, a front-opening coat with folds along the waistline, has long been known as a characteristic clothing of Mongolia. Extant records and artefacts have been found dating from the Yuan period (1271–1368), and it was also worn in Central Asia and in the Mughal Empire in India. It is still worn as an ethnic costume among the Mongols and in some neighbouring regions. This essay will explore the composition of the *terlig*, its etymology, and the process of its diffusion. Through the study of these artefacts, a deeper understanding of Mongolian ethnicity and culture and transnational features in neighbouring cultures will emerge.

## What Is the *Terlig*?

### *A Functional Mongol Dress*

Located in the region of the dry steppe near Lake Baikal, the Mongolian climate consists of six months of winter, during which the temperature falls below –15 degrees Celsius. Consequently, Mongolian farmers must migrate twice a year to find fodder for their cattle. Horses, therefore, are a necessary means of transportation and an integral part of Mongolian life.<sup>1</sup>

Mongolian clothes have to meet two criteria: to protect the body from cold and to provide functionality for horse riding. The *terlig* satisfies both of these conditions. Its length, the deep fastenings at the side, and the long sleeves covering the hands are designed to keep the body warm. The folds at the waist and the side vent provide ease of movement for the lower body, and the tight-fitting bodice and sleeves are well suited for horse riding.<sup>2</sup> The coat is long enough to cover the rider's knees when on horseback, providing protection against the elements. In addition, a broad band-shaped detail, stitched with plaited threads or fabric along the waistline, supports the abdomen and lower back (see Figure 1).

The *terlig*'s design, with its voluminous folds at the waistline while still providing full mobility of the lower body for horse riding, is not the most economical way of making clothes. The design requires a large amount of material to cover the body surface, more than would be the case with a plain surface. In terms of these design features, the *terlig* represents a fairly unique example of men's coats in the history of costumes.

Originally, *terlig* would have been made from animal hides, with fabric only being used later. This exclusive use of animal hides had a primary effect upon the initial design, composition, and construction of the *terlig*, which resulted in a legacy of several traditional features in later times. Notable here is the composition of the *terlig* with the cutline at the waist, which is often found in regions where material is primarily limited to animal hide. Due to the irregular shape and length of the material, it often has a cutting line at the waistline, following the anatomy of the human body (Katō 2002). It was not worn on its own, but rather in several layers.<sup>3</sup> For maximum protection from the weather, outer layers were made of animal hide while inner layers near the skin were made of fabric that could absorb sweat and moisture as depicted in *Yuan Shizu chulie tu* [Khubilai Khan on the Hunt].<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Xu Ting, who was an envoy from the Song dynasty to the Yuan dynasty in the 1230s, once observed that he had never seen a man walking in Mongolia, and that everyone had at least one horse (Peng – Xu 1985).

<sup>2</sup> In riding, freedom of the hands is necessary to take control of the reins.

<sup>3</sup> According to Ruysbroeck's record, who visited the Mongol Empire in the 1250s, the Mongol people wore at least two layers of clothing made from animal hide over an inner layer made from silk, cotton or wool, according to the wearer's status (Ruysbroeck – Giovanni – Rockhill 1900).

<sup>4</sup> Liu Guandao, *Yuan Shizu chulie tu* [Khubilai Khan on the Hunt], paint and ink on silk, 1280, housed at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan.



Figure 1. Man with *terlig* on horseback  
 From Tympanum with Horse and Rider, second half of the 14th century, Caucasus.  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York ([www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org))

### The Terlig: Terminology

This coat with folds along the waistline has been given various names. In Chinese literature, it was called *Bianxianao* (辮線襖, coat with plaited line), or *Yaoxianao* (腰線襖 or 腰線襖子[-zi], coat with waist line), specifically indicating the details of the waist (*Yuanshi* [History of Yuan Dynasty], Carriage and Costume Section) (*Sancai tuhui*, Vol. 2: Dress, 1609). In Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), in a book on music, *Akhagwebŏm*, it was written as *ch'ŏbli* (帖裡) in Chinese characters, and possibly read as *tieli* in middle Korean, with an illustration of a coat with folds and a waist-band<sup>5</sup> (Sŏng–Ryu–Sin 1493). From 1424, it was written as *ch'ŏbli* (帖裏) in Chinese characters in the Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty. They were described as presents from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or as military uniforms. In Korean, it was written as *t'yŏllik* (털릭), *t'yŏnlik* (턴릭), *ch'ŏllik* (철릭), or *ch'ŏnik* (천익), and also as

<sup>5</sup> As in *Danch'ŏbli* for dancers meaning single-layered *ch'ŏbli*.

*ch'öbli* (帖裡, 帖裏, 貼裏) or *ch'önik* (天益, 天翼, 千翼) in Chinese characters during the Chosön period. The word, *t'yöllik* (털릭) was used in a Koryö (918–1392) song, *Chöngsökgga* (鄭石歌), documented later in Korean language in the Chosön period, reflecting Mongol influence during the Koryö period.<sup>6</sup> In the very rare examples of literature from the Koryö dynasty, which was contemporary to the Yuan dynasty, there is no reference to any term for clothing phonetically similar to *terlig*. In *Koryösa* 高麗史 [The History of Koryö], the Mongolian dress was generally referred to as *hobok* (胡服, barbaric outsiders' dress) or, in some cases, as *ilsaek* (一色, one colour) for *jilson* (質孫 or 只孫) banquets, but not by any actual name for the dress.<sup>7</sup> The earliest record that refers to the term *terlig* in Korea dates from the 15th century. Another term, *yosön ch'öbli* (腰線 帖裏, *ch'öbli* with waistband), appears fourteen times from 1460 to the end of the 15th century in the Annals of the Chosön Dynasty.

In the modern era, the term *terlig* is still used to describe the Mongolian ethnic costume. The first use by outsiders was in the 18th century by Russian students of folklore working with the *Buryat* tribe of Mongol, who were recorded as wearing clothes similar to Tartars and a coat called the *tyrlyk* (Badmaev 2010). Nevertheless, this was not necessarily a coat with folds at the waist. Among extant Mongolian folk costumes collected in the 1930s, the term *terlig* was used for coats both with and without folds (Hansen 1993).<sup>8</sup>

It has also been argued that the origin of *terlig* or *terleg* comes from the Turkic word *tärlik*. According to a study on the Tuvan language, the Tuvan word *derlik* refers to a Tuvan national summer-cloth, and Mongolic *terlig-terelig* means 'cotton-padded gown', as in Khalkha *terleg*, Buryat *terlig*, lower Uda Buryat *terlik*, or Oirat *terlek* (Khabtagaeva 2009, p. 204). Khabtagaeva argued that the Turkic word *tärlik* means 'something which absorbs sweat' because, quoting from earlier studies by Ras-sadin and Tatarincev, the word *tär* means 'sweat'. In this theory, the name of a type of clothing is determined by its material and not its design features, such as folds at the waist. In the context of their costumes, which need a thick outer layer of animal

<sup>6</sup> *Chöngsökgga* (鄭石歌) is in the book *Akchanggasa* (樂章歌詞), the collection of Koryö and early Chosön songs published during the Chosön period. It was presumably published in early Chosön, but the year is not known. Some vocabulary words in middle Korean originated from the Mongol language. This includes official titles, falconry, and military terms, as in *Bakt'ongsa* (1510s) and *Hunmongchahoe* (1527). *Thyellik* was an officer's uniform, from the written Mongolian term *terlig* (Lee–Ramsey 2011). Later, in the Chosön dynasty, there were additional terms written in the Korean script, such as *t'yöllik* (털릭), *t'yönlük* (턴릭), *ch'öllük* (철릭), *ch'önnük* (천닉), and *t'yöri* (터리).

<sup>7</sup> As Pelliot pointed out, in *Koryösa* 高麗史 [The History of Koryö] there is no reference to any term for clothing phonetically similar to *terlig* (Pelliot 1930), referenced as *Koryösa* (高麗史) at <http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/>. Also in a poem from the 1360s, the term *isa* was used. Yi Gok (1364, reprinted in 1662): Poem; Nan'gyöng gihaeng (樂京紀行), *Gajöngjib*, vol. 18. In one of his poems on a trip to Nangyöng, he described the Yuan officials' costume as *isa* (一色), "... same coloured dresses supporting the imperial carriage ..." [一色 衣冠扶鳳輦].

<sup>8</sup> Two coats were with or without folds at the waist. They were called *djun-u terlig* and *ekener un debel*. In Hansen's book, *djun-u terlig* was described as a 'caftan for an unmarried woman in the Buryat tribe', and it had folds at the waist. *Büs-ügei terlig* is without folds.

hide, this implies that the *terlig* was an inner layer or garment. A contrary point of view, put forward by Serruys, is that even though the word *terlik* in Russian is believed to have originated from a Turkic language, there is no context to support it, since there are no dress-related words similar to *terlik* in the Turkic languages. Instead, he suggested it originated from the Mongol language and suggested two types of Mongolian dress for comparison (Serruys 1967). One is *daqu* (*tahu*), a fur coat with the fur worn on the outside, which was the thick outer wear with animal hide, and the other is *terlig*, an inner layer. *Daqu* was written as *dabho*, *tabho*, or *tabhol* (搭胡, 搭胡, 搭護 – 搭護 – 搭忽) in Chinese characters in the Chosŏn dynasty, which was a short-sleeved coat worn over a long-sleeved coat, believed to be imported from the Yuan dynasty. According to this theory, the word *terlig* is not necessarily related to the Turkic *tār*:

Using these records and sources, the concept of *terlig* can be historically described as a Mongolian coat with folds at the waistline made of fabric for the function of protecting the body from cold weather and as equestrian attire.

## The Genealogy and Diaspora of the *Terlig*

### *The Dress of the Yuan Empire*

We now turn to the development and diffusion of the *terlig* during the Yuan period. The *terlig* became more established through the Yuan period. As shown in a hunting scene of *Kublai Khan* wearing the *terlig*, it was worn by all classes, from the emperor down to his guards (see footnote 4 above). The *terlig* with folds at the waist, tight sleeves, and especially a waistband is a typical feature of the period. However, there are fewer than ten extant items from the Yuan Empire.

The first is a man's *terlig* excavated from *Khuiten Khoshuu* in 2003, now housed in the National Museum of Mongolia. This *terlig* has all the features mentioned above as well as a Mongol-style cloud collar decorated with appliqué and embroidery. The garment is made of *nasji* (*nasič*) – a type of weave (*lampas*) in silk with gold thread – and incorporates trimming on the hemline, cuffs and upper arms (Oka 2009). Another example, also housed in the National Museum of Mongolia, is a woman's red silk *terlig* excavated from *Buhiin Hussu* in 2005. It does not have the same elaborate decoration but rather features embellishment along the hemline, in this instance with a white trim. The third, probably from a Christian Turkic Önggüt tomb site in Inner Mongolia and now housed in the Inner Mongolia Museum, has the typical features of the *terlig* with waistband. Interestingly, the material shows multi-cultural characteristics on the shoulder bands with a pseudo-Kufic inscription and a sphinx pattern on the inner layer. This *terlig* is also made of *nasji* (Zhongguo zhixiu fushi quanji bianji weiyuanhui 2004). These features resulted from state textile workshops that were regularly operated by Chinese and Muslim artisans who employed transcultural techniques and patterns (Feng et al. 2004).

Chinese dynasties imposed a dress system which was written into law. Dress codes were ascribed according to the wearer's status and originating from a philosophy respecting 'li' (禮, decorum) by the Han people. The diffusion of the *terlig* was also part of the dress system of the Yuan Dynasty. The system shared a basic structure with those of other Chinese dynasties ruling over mainland China, in grand ceremonial dress and ritual dress, etc. But it also reflected its own culture of dress; *jisun* (質孫 or 只孫, or *zhama* (詐馬) is the costume for the *jisun* (or *zhama*) banquet at court. According to *Yuanshi*, *jisun* is described as *yisefu* (一色服, dress in one colour) in the Chinese language. There is a difference between summer and winter costumes, but there are no specific rules for clothing. It was presented by the court to individuals. The most frequent fabric used in the *jisun* culture for this item was *nasji* (納石失).

Visual sources indicate that the *terlig* was worn by all ranks, from emperor to archer, with the wearer's status identified by the quality of the material. The record, "j*isun* with no specific rules", also implies that the most general type of garment in their lifestyle could be worn. This suggests that during the Yuan dynasty, the *terlig* was both a practical garment and a symbol of the wearer's social status.

### ***The Terlig in Hybridity: in the Khanates***

Besides the Yuan dynasty, we also possess artefacts of the period from the regions of the Khanates. Unfortunately, precise dates of manufacture and the contexts of their use are not known for these artefacts. Nonetheless, they clearly show the significance of the Mongol *terlig* and its combination with local culture. Most items were found in the region of the Ilkhanate (1256–1353) and demonstrate the influence of Islamic culture. There are examples at the Rossi & Rossi Gallery in London, in the sales records at an auction at Christie's in 2009, at the Aga Khan Museum, in the David Collection in Copenhagen, and in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar.<sup>9</sup> These are all in typical styles of the *terlig*, with waistband and long tight sleeve. Some of these (e.g., at Rossi & Rossi, Christie's, the David Collection, and the Aga Kahn Museum) have roundel patterns and pseudo-Kufic inscription showing Islamic influence similar to the item previously cited in the Inner Mongolia Museum. The bands along the shoulder and arms, possibly reinforcement strips, also suggest Islamic influences in the area, as such bands are often found on Seljuk Turkish coats.<sup>10</sup>

These artefacts also use high quality silk materials such as *nasji*, indicating they would have been worn on ceremonial occasions and under the influence of the Mongolian ruling class.

Some other examples have been found in Eastern Europe and Russia – areas where Mongolian expeditions had reached as well. The surviving costume of King

<sup>9</sup> The artifacts' details are as follows: Feng et al. (2004); 'A Mongol Silk Lampas Weave Robe' sold at Christie's, King Street, London, Oct 16, 2001: Lot Number 256 Sale Number 6497; Daiber–Junod (2010, pp. 174–175); Folasch–Bernsted (1993); Jon Thompson (2004, pp. 72–75).

<sup>10</sup> A good example is one from the Christie's auction list in London, March 2009.

Louis II of Hungary, from the early 16th century and now housed at the Hungarian National Museum, is one such example (Ember–Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1962). His shirt has the significant design element of the *terlig* – i.e., folds at the waistline – but the garment lacks the front opening with fastenings at the side. The mantle worn over the shirt has a relatively shorter front panel than the back, which is regarded for horseback use, demonstrating the relationship of this *terlig* to equestrian purposes. Another example is a *terlik* at the Kremlin, in Moscow, from the 17th century. This was elaborately made with velvet and damask and has folds along the waistline. Even though the upper part of the coat does not have the general feature of the *terlig*, the terminology and the design with the folds clearly show Mongol influences.

### *The Next Generation: East Asia*

After the Yuan dynasty in China, the *terlig* underwent further changes. An example from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) has been excavated from *Zhu Tan's* (1370–1389) tomb in Zouxian, China. It has tight sleeves and waistband, and is almost identical to those found from the *Yuan* Dynasty. However, during the later *Ming* Dynasty, we know from excavated *terligs* and other visual sources that a new style of a *terlig* evolved; the *yesa* (曳撒). According to written records, *yesa* was worn by emperors for casual occasions. It was described as *kuzhe* 袴褶 (attire with trousers for riding), the legacy of Mongol *jisun*. *Yesa* has folds at the waistline, but a wider bodice and sleeves, longer skirt, and expanded gussets on the sides. The waistband has disappeared. The folds, which used to be very finely gathered, were changed to wider pleats, with no folds on the centre of the front or back of the coat. Due to the expansion and elongation of the garment, it is no longer functional for horse riding. Additionally, the folds left as a formalised trace of the *terlig* also reduced functionality. The pleated folds at the back, which were hard to keep arranged when sitting, disappeared, and folds at the front, which interrupted the dignity of the vertical line, were also omitted. Later in the Qing dynasty (1636–1912), the formal *terlig* survived in court dress, where a robe with folds at the waist was worn as ceremonial dress, *zhaofu* 朝服.

Nearby, in Korea, one example from the Koryŏ dynasty and three examples from the early Chosŏn dynasty with the waistband have survived. *Yosŏn ch'ŏllik* from the *Mahāvairocana* statue at Haeinsa temple, dated from the early 14th century, has features of the Yuan *terlig*, but in local material, *mosi* (ramie). The three examples from *Byŏn Su's* (1447–1524) tomb are also very similar (Wŏnju Byŏnssi wŏnch'ŏn-gun jongch'inhoe 2010). But later in the Chosŏn as well as in the Ming dynasties, the waistband disappeared and sleeves became wider. In late Chosŏn after the 17th century, the skirt became longer than the bodice in proportion, forming a high waistline design. Nevertheless, the *terlig* was assigned as a military uniform despite its limited functionality, and was worn the most among Korean men. In China and Korea after the Yuan dynasty, the *terlig* lost its functionality entirely, and its original function and form were formalised.

### *The New Generation: Mughal Empire*

The diffusion of the *terlig* continued into the Mughal Empire (1526–1858) in India. Mughal (the name itself means Mongol) was founded by Babur from the Chagatai Khanate, who was a descendent of Chinggis Khan and Timur. In the Mughal Empire, the *terlig* was called *jama* and worn at the Mughal court. *Jamah*, or ‘clothes’ in Persian, suggests the relation to *zhama* in the Yuan court. *Jama* is a long coat with folds around the waistline and very long tight sleeves. Without the waistband, the waistline was raised higher. The long and voluminous coat was not suitable for the hot weather in India. It was instead used to show the dignity of the wearer by covering the body with high quality textile and the finest translucent cotton, as depicted in miniature paintings. *Jama*, initially worn by the ruling class of Muslims in the Mughal Empire, was conceived as a part of Islamic culture. The third Mughal Emperor Akbar (1452–1605) encouraged everyone to wear the *jama* coat and set up new clothing regulations aimed to integrate Muslims and local Hindus (Blochmann–Goomer 1965). Nonetheless, they still differentiated themselves by the direction of the fastening (Goswamy–Krishna 1993). Muslims fastened it on the right like the Mongols, and Hindus on the left.<sup>11</sup> The *jama* coats at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are good examples.

In the Mughal Empire, too, the *terlig* was the dress of the high class and displayed hybridity with local culture in both material and form, and symbolism took priority over function. This symbolism was regarded as a part of the newly emerged Islamic identity rather than Mongolian culture, and was related to religious conflict and external pressure.

### *The Terlig in the Present*

Lastly, there are ethnic dresses still worn today. For Mongols, however, the *terlig* is no longer the representative ethnic dress, even though the style survives in some female costumes among the Buryats (see footnote 10 above). The *terlig* that are worn today are from the regions of the Kipchak Khanate and *Ogotai* Khanate. Even though the *terlig* design remains functional and suitable for the Mongolian lifestyle, the symbolism from the time of the Yuan dynasty has overshadowed these functional aspects. Now the *terlig* only survives at the edge of the dominant modern cultures, but some coats are still referred to as *degel*, *debel* and *de’el/deel*, which shows the relation to the term *terlig* in the Middle Mongol language as shown in the 16th-century book of translation, *Yiyu* (譯語, *Translation*) (Apatóczyk 2009).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Mongols mostly wore their coats left over right, fastened with ribbons or buttons at the right side. Ruysbroeck also pointed out in his writing that Tartars (Mongols) fastened their clothes on the right, while Turks did so on the left. The direction of the fastening was an indicator of ethnic identity (Ruysbroeck – Giovanni – Rockhill 1900).

<sup>12</sup> In *Yiyu*, a 16th-century Sino-Mongolian glossary, there are several Mongol terms in the clothing section transcribed with Chinese characters, which shows the phonetic similarity to modern Mongol terms for clothing as shown below:



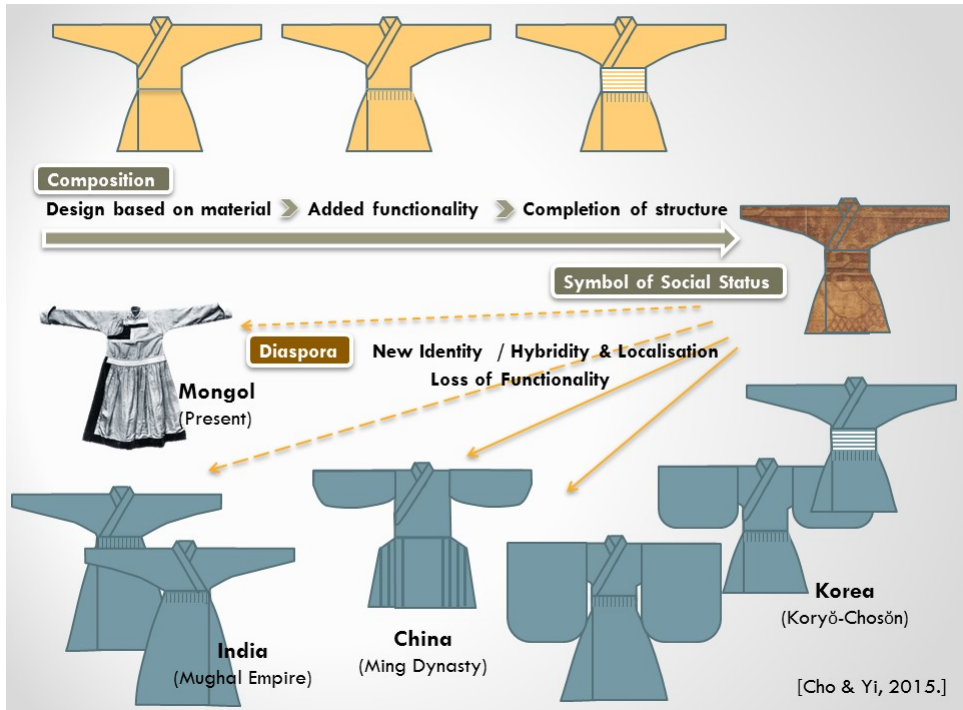


Figure 2. Genealogy and Diaspora of the *terlig* (© Cho & Yi)

## Conclusion

The *terlig*, a coat that originated from the Mongol steppe as a riding garment, achieved a new status as a type of formal wear in the Mongol Empire and was propagated by Mongol expeditions. Its unique design with a cut waistline was based on the Mongols' primary clothing material of animal hides, and gained folds along the waistline to enhance mobility for horse riding. The completion of the design came with the addition of the waistband for abdomen protection. The style and the material, which later changed into fabric, were also important elements for functionality. In the Yuan

453. yī 衣 'clothes' (*dé-é-ér* 得額兒) *de'el*.

457. yī-sā 倚撒 '?' (*dé-ér-lī-ér* 得兒里兒) *de'elī*, 'jacket, camisole'.

462. zhé-? 褶祈 (or -祈, zhé-qī) (*dé-lī-ér* 得力兒) *terlig* 'cotton padded garment'.

For 462. *dé-lī-ér* 得力兒, Apatóczy suggests that it can indicate 457. *de'elī* (Apatóczy 2009, pp. 54–55).

It surely indicates the Mongol word *terlig*, even though there is an inconsistency of the second Chinese character: “祈” in *Yiyu* manuscript of the Oriental Collection at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and “祈” in *Yiyu* version preserved at Peking University Library. In this period it is assumed that the Chinese term *yī-sā* was a general term, but there is no reference to any clothing term referenced to *zhé-qī*.

court, the *terlig* was developed as a symbol of higher social status based on the court dress system and royal patronage, and was made of the finest fabrics at the time.

As it spread through Asia, the *terlig* underwent hybridity and localisation through transnational coproduction, both in terms of its form and the materials employed in its manufacture. The Mongol Empire, the later Khanates and the neighbouring countries adopted this design and produced hybrid culture, internalising the system of the *terlig* even after the period. In some cases it gained new identity as Islamic dress in the Mughal Empire, and some examples are still worn among ethnic minorities throughout Asia. The culture of the *terlig* is a good example of transnational phenomena (see Figure 2).

Through this process, the *terlig* lost its original function and much of its original design elements, performing instead a role as a symbol of social status. However, the most distinctive feature, the folds at the waistline, has survived, and the *terlig* itself is a legacy of the Mongol Empire.

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