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HISTORICAL / DOCUMENTARY REPRESENTATION OF THE TEACHER THEME IN CONTEMPORARY MONGOLIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the portrayal of historical figures—specifically teachers—in contemporary Mongolian literature draws on both factual/historical materials and artistic imagination. Memoirs that recall historical personalities, and contemplative musings that express longing, help to consolidate the possibility of rendering historical figures into canonical form in literary works. The degree to which a literary work reflects actual historical events depends significantly on the individual author's disposition: some are willing to modify documentary excerpts, while others strictly adhere to them.

KEYWORDS

Documentary Character, Real Person, Biographical Narrative, Teacher Motif, Mongolian Literature

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Introduction

In literary and pedagogical discourse, there is a traditional maxim: just as water, flowing from its source, eventually reaches the snow-capped mountains, so too does the path of books culminate in the wisdom of the teacher. Though a parent gives life to the body, it is the teacher who cultivates mind, character, thought, and virtue. In the Eastern tradition, one hears: “May the teachings, decrees, manner, and image of the teacher be enshrined in your intellect; may the form of the teacher be revered softly in your heart.”

Historically, Eastern societies did not classify people into “four occupations” in the manner of merchants, artisans, farmers, and scribes, but placed the people of letters—the teachers and literate—as the highest. Across eras, literary creators have sought not merely to repeat prior models when depicting “heroes of one’s era,” but to seek fresh portrayals that reflect contemporary sensibilities. Even when narrative and plot are compelling, literature cannot fully convey existential truths except via well-constructed, successful artistic characters.

As K. Paustovsky observed, “a truly good gem is like a vivid, distinct character”—this underscores the importance of character in artistic creation. Moreover, V. G. Belinsky’s assertion that “art is the direct content of truth; that is, the feeling of thought expressed through character” frames why depiction of character—especially those with historical grounding—is vital. Historical characters are those whose lives, aspirations, and activities transcend their temporal bounds and are recognized in both the national and wider world. In literature, the aesthetic, stylized representation derived from factual character is termed a *historical fictional character*.

Examples in Mongolian literature include Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj's **Queen Mandukhai the Wise**, D. Tserembel's **Galdan Boshigt**, S. Jargalsaikhan's **Secret History of Chinggis Khan**, S. Udval's **Great Destiny**. These works feature not only central protagonists but also many historically real persons. A "real person" in this context signifies an individual who lived in society with verifiable existence. In works with the teacher theme, many such documented/deliberate characters appear.

Main Body

1. The 1970-1990s: The Rise of Biographical Narrative

The period of the 1970s through the 1990s was critical in the development of biographical (documentary) narrative in Mongolia. Works such as P. Horloo's **Teacher** Volumes I & II (1971, 1973), M. Chimid's **The Latin Alphabet Teacher** and **The First Teacher** (1982) are all examples of biographical narratives. The authors—P. Horloo, M. Chimid, D. Tsevmgid—were among the early modern teachers who took on the challenges of teaching in remote rural areas, establishing new schools under difficult conditions. Their own life experiences therefore furnish authentic material for literary representation.

For example, in Horloo's **Teacher**, the protagonist Khurlee, a young teacher educated in Ulaanbaatar, is assigned to Manhan sum in Khovd aimag. His character embodies the common traits of the first generation of rural teachers: bringing the "seed of culture" into remote places, dealing with resistance to change, and persisting for the sake of public education. According to literary scholar D. Oyunbadrakh, Khurlee "among the people still enmeshed in religious darkness and generational ignorance, understood the essence of the recently established people's school; not only teaching children but also helping common folk comprehend the policies of the new government; and furthermore undertaking the hard responsibility of confronting old customs and opposition."

Although **Teacher** is autobiographical in many respects, Horloo does not simply enumerate events. He attempts to integrate them into an artistic form that renders both character and social milieu vividly. He uses other artistic characters and narrative strategies to make the social circumstances of the 1930s visible and the moral and ideological tensions tangible.

2. Social Transformation and the Changing Teacher Figure

In modern Mongolian literature, the depiction of teachers evolves in accordance with stages of social development. The writer Ch. Lodoidamba, a major proponent of narrative prose, also produces skillful portrayals of teachers. In his novella **Our Schoolmates**, the protagonist Dalhaanyambuу seeks to reform outdated educational practices—rote memorization, oppressive discipline—introducing methods that encourage understanding, inquiry, and humane relationships between teacher and students.

A notable feature in Lodoidamba's works is the use of names—often grounded in real life or constructed to reflect the character's essence. For example, in **Our Schoolmates**, Dalhaanyambuу is a composite name drawing from real teachers such as Daljhav and Sharavnyambuу. Scholar Ya. Baatar notes that this is a kind of "name-contamination" allowing the character both to resonate with real prototypes and maintain fictional autonomy.

Furthermore, narrators sometimes merge with characters: while the narrator recalls childhood and early experiences, there emerges an overlap with the main teacher figure. Although some traits are autobiographical, the narrator remains a distinct voice, serving both as observer and participant.

These kinds of narratives show how teachers are valued socially, how new and veteran teachers relate, and how conflicts and expectations evolve over time.

3. The Case of Dondog Tsevmgid

In D. Tsevmgid's works, particularly **Student Ganbat**, we see a rich interweaving of biographical elements. The locale, timeline, and details (e.g., Ganbat's education path, rural upbringing, aspirations) correspond closely with those of the author Bökhiin Baast. This suggests that the character origin is rooted in real life. Tsevmgid recalled conceiving the idea for "Student Ganbat" already in his mid-teen years.

In **The First Teacher**, Tsevmgid portrays early rural teachers through the character Amarjargal: their educational mission, the obstacles they encountered, religious opposition, social resistance, as well as moral and ideological challenges. The work ends with a declaration of homage: **"With gratitude towards all venerable teachers... I have composed this biographical record which is woven with lives of many."**

In this way, Tsevmgid merges his own life with those of other teachers, employing both factual detail and artistic embellishment to produce a collective portrait and memorial.

4. Archetypal / Prototype Teachers in Short Prose

J. Lhagva often uses real teacher models as starting points, then develops archetypal or primordial traits which recur across different stories. Some illustrative examples:

* In *“Black Cat”*, the teacher Baatar, a young man educated in the city, lives alone, plays harmonica, lives modestly; acts kindly and participates in children’s lives.

* In *“Capital of My Heart”*, the teacher Bata is a recent graduate from the state teacher institute, whose presence in a rural area nourishes students’ dreams and aspirations.

* In *“Theater Arrived”*, the music teacher Davaajamts is spirited, engages students, extends art beyond the classroom.

* In *“I am an Argal Collector”*, small acts of learning and teaching are cast metaphorically; the teacher’s influence is measured in the cultivation of character and perseverance rather than grand-scale achievement.

5. Contemporary Developments and Poetic Homage

In modern narratives like J. Purev’s novel *A Thousand Letters*, the character Myagmar (a teacher) is displayed as one who observes, understands psychological nuances in students, and works individually with them. This character is based on the author’s wife, making the work semi-autobiographical.

Further, poetic forms such as the poem *“Teacher”* serve as tribute: lyrical, symbolic, invoking tradition, honoring past teachers, expressing longing and respect. The poem frames the image of the teacher as both deeply rooted in cultural memory and dynamically present in contemporary society.

Amid increasing pressures—rising class sizes, inadequate material resources, insufficient institutional support—the symbolic and emotional power of such poetry remains significant for sustaining teacher identity, professional dignity, and social recognition.

Discussion

Use of Fact vs. Artistic License. Literary works with a teacher theme negotiate between strict fidelity to historical sources and creative adaptation. Biographical detail enhances credibility, but artistic shaping (narrative structuring, imaginative reconstruction) is often necessary to express deeper truths of character, ideology, and human conflict.

Evolving Social Context. As Mongolian education systems, social values, and political climates evolve, so too do the characteristics attributed to teacher characters: from pioneering reformers in periods of social upheaval to agents of moral, psychological, and pedagogical sophistication in more stable times.

Naming and Prototype Use. The phenomenon of composite / prototype names, as well as merging the narrator’s voice with the teacher character, is a recurrent strategy by authors to balance personal experience, social representativeness, and fictional autonomy.

Valuation and Representation. The representation of teachers reflects society’s valuation of them. When society honors teachers, literature tends to elevate their portrayal; when material or institutional conditions for teachers deteriorate, literature may reflect tensions, nostalgia, or critique.

Conclusions

This analysis indicates that in contemporary Mongolian literature, the figure of the teacher is often based on real, historical persons whose biographies serve as material for literary creation. Authors draw on memoirs, personal experience, and factual history, but shape them artistically to produce characters that are both recognizable and idealized. Over time, the depiction of teachers has shifted: from subjects in nation-building and educational reform to more nuanced figures of psychological, pedagogical, and moral complexity.

Literary works that focus on documentary / biographical representations of teachers (such as *Teacher* by P. Horloo; *The First Teacher* by M. Chimid; *Student Ganbat* by D. Tsevegmid; *Our Schoolmates* by Ch. Lodoidamba) remain especially important. They serve not only as cultural memory but also as benchmarks for how society considers the role, dignity, and challenges of teachers.

While factual history is indispensable, the artistic truth often requires adaptation: selective emphasis, symbolic portrayal, and emotional resonance. In pursuing this, authors contribute both to historical understanding and the continuing evolution of literary tradition.

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