

GYANYIN GODDESS: TWO BRONZE FIGURES – TWO DIFFERENT STORIES

The first of these stories is connected with the name of Kazimierz Grochowski (1873–1937), the forgotten Polish geologist, archeologist, traveler and writer, to whom I owe my long-standing interest in the history of East Asia. He was a director of the Polish Gymnasium in Harbin (North-East China, Manchuria at that time) where I was born and where I received my secondary and high-school education. Grochowski also used to teach us the history and geography of the Far East and was a patron of our Polish Oriental Circle (Polskie Koło Wschodoznawcze), which he established in the frame of his educational work. I would like to recall a short outline of his biography. As a student in Lwow, he took part in anti-Russian activities and under the threat of arrest was forced to escape to Cracow (then under the Austrian annexation) and finally moved to Leoben and Freiberg where he received his higher education and a title of mining engineer. He came to Vladivostok in 1906 and started his professional career in the Trans-Ussurian Territory (Ussurijskij Kraj) and on Sakhalin Island. As a gold prospector in an international enterprise – The Upper Amur Gold Mining Co., he made four great expeditions in 1910–1914 across the little known regions of East Siberia (which belonged to China before 1860)¹⁾. Grochowski took part in numerous geological and archeological expeditions in Mongolia (1914–1916), in Uriankhai (present day Tuva, 1917–1918) and in the North-East China (1920–1934). After the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, he settled in Harbin and in the following years undertook a series of geological and archeological expeditions to the most remote regions of Manchuria. He died in Harbin in 1937 after a two year sojourn in Poland.

¹⁾ See: Kajdański (1986).

In 1916 and then again in 1924 Grochowski undertook two expeditions to the ruins of the ancient walled city in Barga²⁾, at the fork of three rivers: Gan, Derbul and Khaul (the tributaries of Argun River), very close to the border with Soviet Russia. These ruins were called “Genghis Khan City” by the local people and an earthen-and-stone wall nearby also bore the name of “Genghis Khan Wall”³⁾. Grochowski’s informers told him that no professional excavations had been carried there before his arrival. He had drawn a plan of the ruins and dug out several pits in different places there, hoping to find more information about the history of the ruins. Among other objects which were buried within the city Wall there was a gilded bronze figure of a Buddhist female deity which he identified crudely as “a Mongolian Buddhist goddess”. It was 54 centimetres high and seemed to him to have been made earlier than in the XII century – the time of Genghis Khan’s life. I saw this figure in my school-years in Harbin for the first time, at a small exhibition prepared by Grochowski for his pupils, their families and the members of the Polish Oriental Circle. Later I heard that Grochowski’s widow had been offered over 25,000 dollars to sell the figure to an American dealer and that she refused. In accordance with the last wish of her husband she donated all his manuscripts, books, printed matters, coins and other objects to “his beloved Fatherland – Poland”⁴⁾, namely to the Academy of Sciences (Akademia Umiejętności) in Cracow. This happened in 1949 when the Polish government delegate, Commandor Jerzy Kłossowski, came to Harbin to repatriate Polish citizens from China, which was still under civil war. I knew only that Grochowski’s widow handed over all these materials and objects to the delegate, but did not know where they were later transferred. In 1957, during my first trip to Harbin after my departure to Poland in 1951, I received the address of Mrs. Grochowska in the USA and wrote a letter to her. She replied that all the writings of her husband were to be found in Cracow and that the bronze figure alone had been chosen to be placed in the president’s palace.⁵⁾ So, if I wished to see it I should try to find it there. Of course, it was not possible

²⁾ Barga was a part of Heilongjiang province with Hailar as its capital. Now this region is called Hulunbuir and belongs to Inner Mongolia.

³⁾ Grochowski knew that the ruins and the wall had little reference to Genghis Khan. He wrote: “Engineers, who built Eastern Chinese Railway were not too familiar with the history and archeology and believed in popular legends that the wall was built by a Mongolian sovereign – Genghis Khan. In fact that wall was built about one thousand years earlier”. Grochowski (1928: 7)

⁴⁾ These are the words of Mrs. Elżbieta Grochowska written to me in a letter from USA in 1958.

⁵⁾ When Mrs. Grochowska left China the president of Poland was Boleslaw Bierut).

for me to fulfil my wish at that time, as for more than forty years the gates of the presidential palace were closed to the common people. It was only after 1989 that the figure was transmitted from the palace grounds to the newly established Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

How then we could now identify “Genghis Khan City” in which Grochowski found his Buddhist deity and does the figure really represent Guanyin as is suggested in the title of my paper?

Grochowski carried out his excavations in that place two times: in 1916 and in 1924. The knowledge of the history of Manchuria in Europe before the Second World War, in particular the history of the “barbarian” dynasties in the North China, like the Wei Dynasty ⁶⁾(the Kingdom of Xianbi people in Chinese accounts), or Bohayans and Khitans, who established their kingdoms Bohai and Liao on that territory, was then still at an initial stage. From the letters of Mrs. Grochowska, I knew that her husband had prepared some manuscript essays with preliminary descriptions of his archeological works before his journey to Poland in 1934. Supposedly, he intended to consult them with professor Władysław Kotwicz, a well-known Polish Mongolist in Lvov, with whom he corresponded for a long time. I tried to find these manuscripts in the National Library in Warsaw, where most of Grochowski’s papers were deposited, but in vain. Describing the ruins in his book,⁷⁾ he discussed the results of his preliminary investigations, pointing out that these needed further research and that such research was planned in the future. In fact, I found a press-cutting in one of Grochowski’s notebooks⁸⁾ that an expedition to carry off detailed excavations in “Genghis Khan City”, had been planned by the Japanese Archeological Society to take place in 1937. Grochowski was invited to participate in this undertaking. This unfortunately never happened: Grochowski died in 1937, the same year a Sino-Japanese war broke out and the Japanese Kuangtung Army started to build fortifications in the areas bordering with Soviet Russia where the ruins were found.

It is clear from his description of “Genghis Khan City” in the previously mentioned book that it was built by a people maintaining a settled style of life, to protect them against attacks from their enemies, supposedly the nomadic tribes who would roam with their herds of horses and sheep. It was surrounded

⁶⁾ It is usually divided into: Northern Wei (385–534), Eastern Wei (535–550) and Southern Wei (535–580).

⁷⁾ Grochowski (1928).

⁸⁾ Dated 26.VI.1936. The title of the newspaper was missing.

with high square earthen walls (about 600 meters on each side) with four massive gates on each side and stone dungeons at each corner.

There is an interesting detail – wrote the author – that when building the northwestern section of the wall to join it with the southwestern dungeon, they encountered a kind of round basement, 85,3 meters in diameter. This obstacle forced the builders of the western part of the wall to pass by the newly-found complex of buildings and this resulted in a crooked line of the wall.⁹⁾

We can see this crooked line on the plan drawn by Grochowski. He carried out his excavations mainly in two places: in the central part of the city, where he found foundations of a walled palace or temple and around the stone basement close to the western wall. No further information about the results of these excavations followed, except some remarks on coins found in both places. The oldest excavated coins were Chinese from the Tang Dynasty, or more specifically from the reign of Emperor Tang Gaozu (618–649)¹⁰⁾. According to Grochowski: “The youngest or the latest coins belonged to the period of the Tartar [that is Mongolian – EK] Liao Dunasty, namely being cast under the rule of Shizong Emperor in 1188 A.D.”¹¹⁾ This must be an error. Grochowski consulted the Lockhart Collection Coin Catalogue issued in 1916. According to the latest Chinese publications, Emperor Shizong of the Liao Dynasty ruled in 947–950. If so, then the age of Grochowski’s bronze figure could be of a much earlier date than the name of the ruined city suggests.

During the Tang Dynasty in China, the territories on both sides of the Argun River were inhabited by Bohaians, who were later conquered by Khitans. They were called Qidan by the Chinese and in the early European orientalist literature their name was corrupted into Khitan (Kitanowie in Polish, Kidani in Russian). They were people of the steppes attributed to Mongolian origin whose ancestors, known to the Chinese as Xianbei (Xianbi) were already in power in the North China, where they established their own powerful Wei Dynasty (385–550). The Khitans inhabited the steppes north of the Great Wall, mainly the territories of the present day Inner Mongolia.¹²⁾ They resigned from their nomadic life and gradually settled down around the middle of the first millennium A.D. and besides husbandry and hunting occupied themselves in crafts-

⁹⁾ Grochowski (1928: 123–125).

¹⁰⁾ Chinese coins were in common use in Bohai (VII-X c.) and Liao states.

¹¹⁾ Grochowski (1928:125).

¹²⁾ The administrative division of the North and North-East China was changed several times during the last centuries. When Grochowski carried his excavations, the majority of these territories belonged to Manchuria. See note 2.

manship and agriculture albeit in a limited way. The establishment of the Wei Dynasty pushed them closer to Chinese culture and many Khitans found themselves within the limits of China after her unification under the Sui Dynasty (581–618). The Khitans were formerly shamanists, but abandoned their old religion and turned to Tantric or esoteric Buddhism (however some of them became Nestorian Christians).¹³⁾ Multi-headed and multi-armed statues of bodhisattvas were typical of the Buddhist sculpture of this school.¹⁴⁾ They adopted their esoteric Buddhism directly from Tibet, where it became the state religion in 755. Grochowski's bronze figure was cast in accordance with the tradition of esoteric Buddhism. It could be identified as an "eleven-headed Guanyin"; though additional heads of bodhisattvas form a kind of crown on her head. She holds a jug in her left hand and a Buddhist rosary in the right. A flying belt (*piaodaizi*) is thrown over her shoulders and her trunk-like body is covered with a narrow-sleeved gown adorned with a four-stringed chaplet. Similar three-stringed adornment can be seen over the lower part of her gown. Such an abundance of jewellery – heavy beads of pearls, corals, turquoises and amber were traditionally used to adorn the festive female costumes in Tibet and in Mongolia. All this seemed to indicate that the figure of the goddess was modelled after some earlier type, because this kind of female dress was worn also during the reign of Northern Wei Dynasty in China. The deity is standing barefooted on a sacred lotus flower pedestal commonly destined for bodhisattvas in the Buddhist tradition. This lotus flower pedestal requires particular attention as its shape and particular details could be helpful for dating the figure. It consists of three parts: the upper part is a typical early lotus throne, which consists of twenty petals directed upwards; the middle part has stylised petals (or leaves, as some authors suppose) and the lower one resembles an octagonal Khitan tomb chamber, described by Torii.¹⁵⁾ Torii drew the reader's attention to the fact that in Khitan tradition, octagonal forms of tomb chambers closely resemble those of a Mongolian or Turkish tents.¹⁶⁾ On this lowest pedestal we can see eight horizontal elongated niches obtained during process of

¹³⁾ Torii (1942: 61) Torii dug out some metal and stone Nestorian crosses and a chalice and was convinced that on one of carvings there was a scene showing little Jesus in a cradle (p. 59). Grochowski too pointed the reader's attention to the shape of the main building in "Genghis Khan City" – it was built to form a cross on the plan.

¹⁴⁾ Fahr-Becker (1999: 179).

¹⁵⁾ Torii (1942: 3–10).

¹⁶⁾ Torii (1942: 8, 96).

casting with four pairs of dragons inside – a very strange complement to the Buddhist lotus flower throne.

For all these reasons I am convinced that the gilded figure of Guanyin excavated by Grochowski was cast in the 10th or 11th century A.D. somewhere in Manchuria or in Inner Mongolia, on the territories inhabited by the Khitans and not imported by them from China. It was designed by a local artist and its workmanship, particularly engraving and finishing before gilding, seems to be too poor to have been imported from China. Of course the figure could just as well have been made by a Chinese artist living on the territories conquered by Khitans.¹⁷⁾ We do not have too many objects to compare, apart from bronze mirrors,¹⁸⁾ but fortunately I found a very similar figure suitable for the confirmation of my conclusions. It was in 1987 that a second edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Far Eastern Myths* was published in the Soviet Union by Sovietskaya Encyklopedia Publications in which I found an entry on Guangyin.¹⁹⁾ There was a photograph of the bronze figure of Guanyin which was very similar, or better to say, nearly identical to that excavated by Grochowski in “Genghis Khan City”. A very short description informed that it was a “Sculpture of Guanyin. Gilded bronze, casting. 11th century. Moscow, the Museum of Arts of the Peoples of the East. The similarity of the two was striking with the exception of facial expressions and the finishing of both figures. The details of the garment and its decoration were much better finished on the figure from the Moscow museum. Evidently both pieces were designed by the same artist, though cast from different moulds.

I wish to add that within the period of one century which passed from the time of Grochowski’s first expedition to “Genghis Khan City” in 1916, there were two successful excavations only, which throw more light on the Khitans and on the history of their vast kingdom.²⁰⁾ The first was carried on in 1986 when the tomb of princess Chenguo was unearthed in the western part of Liaoning Province,²¹⁾ and the second one in 2002, in the present Inner Mongolia.²²⁾

¹⁷⁾ These territories included Youzhou that is today’s Beijing.

¹⁸⁾ In the 20th century a multitude of bronze mirrors were excavated in Manchuria and in Eastern Siberia, and there are many works comparing locally made and imported ones. See:

¹⁹⁾ Tokariev (1987: 338, 339).

²⁰⁾ Not counting here Japanese excavations of Ryuzo Torii, who unfortunately found all the tombs he had described robbed a long time before.

²¹⁾ More in: Kajdańska, Kajdański (2007: 368–380).

²²⁾ Both sites were in the former Manchuria. See notes 2 and 12.

After this second finding, the interest in the history of the Liao Kingdom of the Khitans in China itself and among the word art researchers became more evident:

They ruled a vast area in northern China for 209 years at their prime but left few relics that have survived until today– wrote one of Beijing’s newspapers.²³⁾

Grochowski’s bronze figure was one of them.

My second story touches an even more exciting and mysterious figure of Guanyin which was unlike all other representations of that goddess I had seen during those many years of my life in China. This bronze figure belonged to a private person and all I came to know was that it had been dug out or found by a Chinese peasant in the first half of the 20th century, somewhere in North China, may be in Manchuria, and nothing was known about its antiquity. Harbin was a very peculiar place which, according to Grochowski, was built at the crossings of the little known trade routes belonging to the side branches of the Great Silk Route (the Chinese call this branch “Grassland Silk Road” nowadays). He wrote about one of such branches leading in the past through the area of the New City, the district of Harbin, where my school and my university had their seats:

During the 19th century the [historical – EK] conditions meant that the grounds on which Harbin was built, that is the right side of Sungari River, belonged to Girin (Jilin) Province, and were a part of Ashihe county. The left bank of Sungari River... belonged to Mongolian duchy of Northern Gorlos. We have no proof that any human settlements ever existed there, but we can affirm with certainty that the important trade route from the West to the East and *vice versa* passed there. [...] ²⁴⁾

This route was very important and was used probably through a full millennium. As a proof we have coins from different times found here in the great quantities. The oldest European are Roman from the times of Emperor Hadrian (117 till 138 A.D). The sites where ancient coins are found most often are: the high river terrace on which stands the monument of Hsu²⁵⁾ at the edge of New

²³⁾ China Daily 2003, These relics of the Liao Dynasty were already shown at an exhibition in the University Art. Museum in Tokio in 2012.

²⁴⁾ Grochowski explained further that the initial Mongolian name of the place was “Halabin” which meant “a passage across the river”.

²⁵⁾ Hsu Jingcheng was the ambassador of China in Russia and the honorary president of the Chinese Eastern Railway. He was killed by the rebels during the Boxer Revolution in 1901 being sawn through with a wooden saw.

City... and the valley of Majiagou stream, where we have now the Forest Nursery.²⁶⁾

Close to the valley of Majiagou the North-East University – my first *Alma Mater* – was situated and not far from that place there was a huge building of Harbin Historical and Ethnographical Museum²⁷⁾ established by the Manchuria Research Society. Grochowski was one of the founders of the museum and at the age of fourteen I was the youngest volunteer in its Ethnographical Section.

And now returning to the bronze figure of Guanyin. It was sketched and photographed by myself during one of my stays in China in the 1950s. I was asked to identify the object and to estimate its date. It was clear to me that this was a Buddhist female goddess with her elongated ears and a “precious pearl” in her hands (*baozhu* in Chinese, *hoju* in Japanese), standing on a base in a shape of a lotus flower. I was convinced that the figure represented Guanyin, but was surprised with the style of her costume and hair-dress which was quite dissimilar to all representations of that goddess I had seen before in different museums and private collections in China. First of all, I knew that the Chinese Guanyin was associated with Avalokiteswara, the most popular of all Buddhist bodhisattvas. Avalokiteswara was originally a male deity in India and, according to most writers, not earlier than in the period of the Song Dynasty these representations started to change in China (as well as in Korea and Japan) and sculptors and painters began to present him as a female. Giles for example was of the opinion that “down to the early part of the 12th century, Kuan Yin was represented as a man”²⁸⁾ But the well-known Russian and Soviet sinologist, W.M. Alekseyev was of the opinion that Avalokitesvara had been transformed into a female goddess – Guanyin much earlier, in the middle of the 6 century A.D. and that after the great monastery had been built on the Putou Island where, according to the popular belief, she lived, Guanyin started to be a favourite subject of artists and her cult spread over the whole country.²⁹⁾

My investigations concerning the age of this Guanyin figure brought me to the conclusion that it had been cast during the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589 A.D.), that is much earlier than the majority of European authors place the conversion of Avalokitesvara into a female goddess.

²⁶⁾ Grochowski (1928: 11).

²⁷⁾ Now the Provincial Museum of the Heilongjiang Province.

²⁸⁾ Cit. after Williams (2006: 242).

²⁹⁾ Alekseyev (1966: 142).

It is already recognised that the Wei people were mostly arduous Buddhists. They were good sculptors and founders of bronze figures and left many Buddhist works of art which can be admired in Dunhuang Grottoes of Thousand Buddhas and in the famous caves in Yungang and Longmen. They dominated the Hexi Corridor, one of the most important sections of the Silk Road, through which Buddhist monks and craftsman, as well as various Western products found their way into China.

I found several details on the figure, which pointed out at the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534 A.D.) as a possible time of its creation. At first, I directed my attention to the strange style of the hair, not found on the representations of Guanyin I had seen before. It was a female hair-dress which the Chinese authors call *shuancanji* (this term can be translated into English as “double silkworm hair-dress”). This style was developed during the Wei and Sui Dynasties and was abandoned by Tangs, who preferred more fashionable styles of hair-dress with more elaborated high buns, decorated with jewels, feathers and huge bouquets of flowers at the top.

Secondly, the whole attire of the deity was very similar to that worn at that period in China. In particular I was surprised by the cut of the gown with large falling sleeves and the *juyi* motives³⁰⁾ on the scroll decoration on sleeves and on the bordering of the gown falling down to the lotus pedestal.

Thirdly, I found that the body of the figure had that particular trunk-like character which was common to representations of the Buddhist deities in the 5th – 7th centuries in China, Korea and Japan. Such trunk-like images of Guanyin are representative to the Nara period in Japan (for example Yumedono Kwanon and Kudara Kwannon in Horyu-ji Museum, Nara).³¹⁾

Fourthly, I refer to a very important information from the Chinese book on the history of costume in China³²⁾ that in the times of Wei Dynasty a kind of adornment called *piaodaizi* (“flying belts” or “wind bands”) was introduced and that these flying belts were fashionable at the courts of South and North Dynasties, at the court of Wei Dynasty above all. One particular design, named *jianjiao yanwei* (swallow-tail with sharp edges),³³⁾ was in fact a narrow shawl

³⁰⁾ *Juyi* was originally a kind of sceptre, but is also a name of a decorative motif used frequently as an ornament or order design on clothing, porcelain, etc. and it bears a resemblance to the bat of good augury.

³¹⁾ Lee (1973: 150, 151).

³²⁾ Hua Mei (1988: 27, 28).

³³⁾ The Polish-English dictionary translates Polish term „jaskółczy ogon” as dovetail, but the correct translation from Chinese should be “swallow tail”.

with sharp edges is thrown over the figure's shoulders. Similar swallow-tails can be found on the previously mentioned Kudara Kwannon (mid-7th century A.D.).

Fifthly, the figure wears a *yunjian* over her shoulders being cut in a shape of clouds (hence the Chinese name for this part of a dress – *yunjian* which means “cloudy shoulders” or as it could be translated – “cloud tippet”). In the Chinese dictionary of fashion³⁴ there is a mention that “cloud tippet” was originally a part of ancient minority people costume in North China. It was worn both by men and women of the higher class of the society in the North of China and was developed during the period of Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589). This was a time when the Northern Wei Dynasty ruled in the North China where *yunjian* originated. In its developed form, “cloud tippets” can be found on Dunhuang frescoes. It is rarely seen on the paintings of Tang and Song Dynasties but became again a part of the court dress during the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368).

Finally, a very strong argument confirming that the figure was cast in that early period can be found in her shoes. Unlike most representations on which Guanyin is shown barefooted, this one has her feet shoed with a particular kind of a footwear called *yuntouxie* or “cloud-headed shoes”, considered to be of a “barbarian” or more specifically Turkish origin. This kind of shoes are often seen on pottery figurines of the Tang Dynasty but the only pair of original Tang brocade shoes were surprisingly excavated during the cultural revolution in Turfan and show then at an exhibition of archeological finds. I was living that time in Beijing and remember that his pair was well preserved due to the very dry climate in Xinjiang.

I mentioned the most important details proving the early provenience of this bronze figure of Guanyin. It can be added that she stands on a quite rare eight petalled lotus flower base, called by the Chinese *babanlianhua*. I found that very few Mercy Goddess illustrations on such eight-petalled lotus flower pedestals, which originated in the early period of Buddhism in China, can be found in books on Chinese Buddhist art (more are found in Korean and Japanese art publications).³⁵ My additional remark concerns the “precious pearl”. Like on the photo of a Japanese Kudara Kwannon (7th c. A.D.)³⁶ it is without tongues of flames, though these were common on later representations.

³⁴) *Zhongguo Fushi Dadian* (2000: 4).

³⁵) See Lee (1973: 146, 158).

³⁶) Lee (1973: 150).

Thus, if I'm right, the described Guanyin figure should be dated to the 5th or 6th century A.D. and consequently its appearance confirms that the time when she became represented as a female was at least a century earlier than has been mostly supposed.

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Fig. 1. Kazimierz Grochowski. The photo was taken in San Francisco in 1912 when he travelled through California and Alaska to study American methods of gold prospecting. From the archives of engineer Grochowski's family

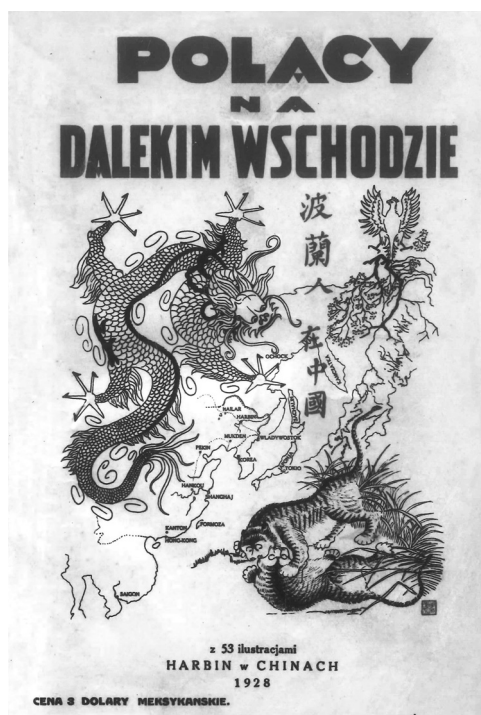


Fig. 2. The title page of Grochowski's book *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*. From the author's collection



Fig. 3. A small map showing the site of „Genghis Khan city” and routes of Grochowski’s archeological expeditions in 1916 and in 1924. Drawn by the author

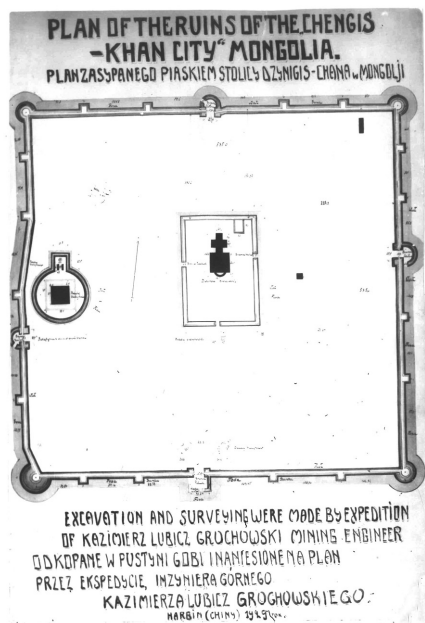


Fig. 4. „Plan of the ruins of the „Genghis Khan city” drawn by Grochowski. First published in Harbin in 1928. His is a copy from the original preserved in the National Library, Warsaw



Fig. 5. The figure of the Guanyin goddess excavated by Grochowski in the ruins of „Genghis Khan city”. Courtesy of the Museum of Independence, Warsaw. (For comparison I attach the photo of the figure from Moscow museum

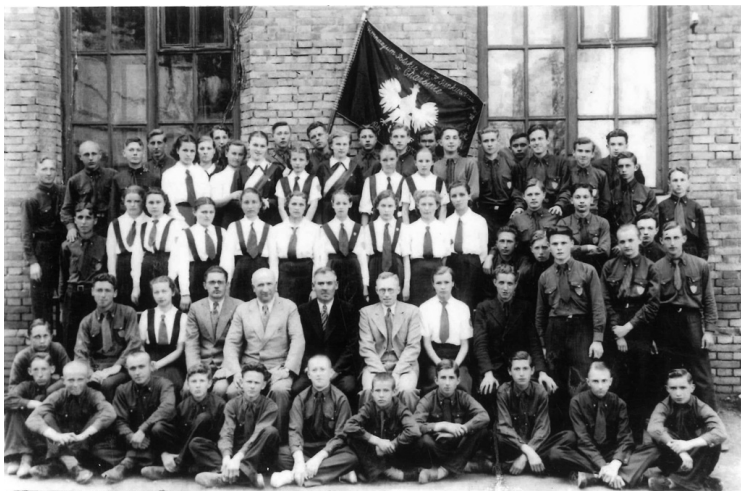


Fig. 6. Pupils and teachers of the Polish Gymnasium in Harbin in 1935. Directly under the eagle on the banner in the highest row – Grochowski's younger son Marian. The author in sitting fourth from the left in the first row



Fig. 7. Former Museum of Manchuria Research Society in Harbin. Now the Provincial Museum of Heilongjiang Province. Grochowski handed over most of his findings to this museum. Photo by the author

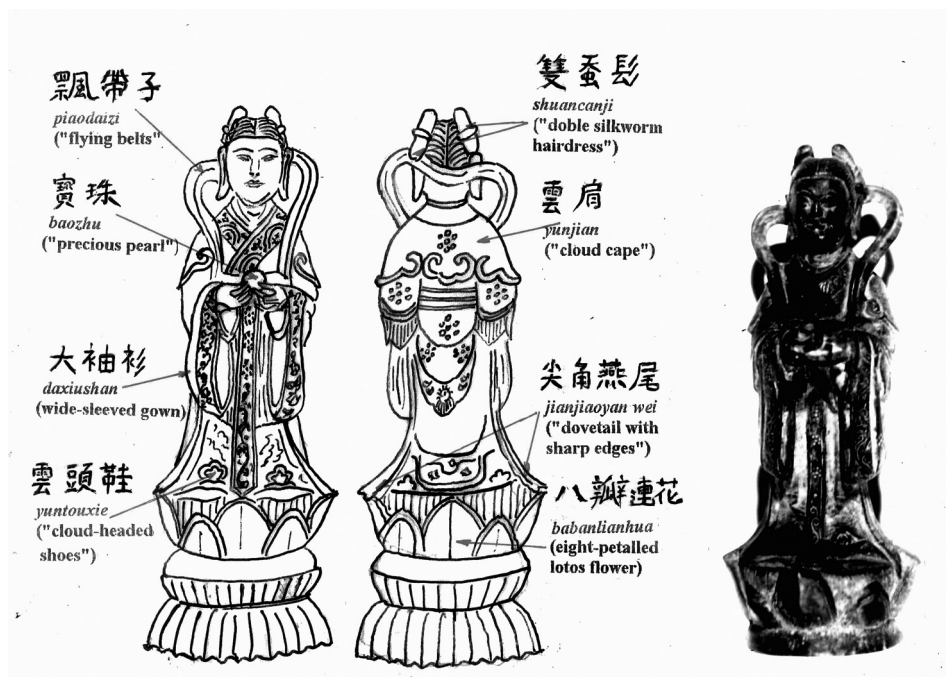


Fig. 8. Guanyin goddess bronze figure as sketched by the author years ago, with the names of different parts of her costume and of other elements of the figure. Right: photo of the figure by the author as well