

ONCE AGAIN ON KHITAN WORDS IN CHINESE – KHITAN MIXED VERSES

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The present paper deals with identification of the Khitan words preserved in Late Middle Chinese transcription in mixed language verses from the QIDAN GUO ZHI. I argue that the only cogent way for identifying these Khitan words correctly is using the up-to-date version of Middle Chinese reconstruction, and not viewing them through the anachronistic prism of Modern and/or Early Mandarin readings of Chinese characters. On this basis I provide critical assessment of certain identifications proposed by my predecessors as well as several new identifications.

Key words: Khitan, Late Middle Chinese, reconstruction, mixed language verses.

The major sources on the Khitan language are Khitan inscriptions in Khitan small script. Unfortunately, these inscriptions remain only partially deciphered and very poorly understood, in spite of the fact that a number publications on the Khitan inscriptions and the Khitan small script have appeared during the last nineteen years since the publication of the seminal work by the Khitan research group (Qinge'ertai et al. 1985). In addition to these main sources on the Khitan language, there are others that received much less attention from scholars: Khitan glosses in Chinese transcription from Chinese chronicles *Liao shi* (遼史), *Liao shi shi yi* (遼史拾遺), and *Qidan guo zhi* (契丹國志). It is partially due to the nature of the material itself, since majority of these glosses represent titles or proper names. However, not all Khitan glosses attested in these chronicles are limited to titles or proper names. In this article I will attempt to reanalyse Khitan words preserved in the Chinese–Khitan mixed verses.¹

Below I provide the story about 余靖 (Yu Jing) together with his Chinese–Khitan mixed verse poem on the basis of the *Qidan guo zhi*, as the *Shihua* text by Liu Bin, which Franke considers to be the oldest (Franke 1976, p. 176) is not available to

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¹ Tradition of writing Chinese mixed verse poems is well attested in other parts of the “Altaic” world, e.g. in Manchu tradition (Wadley 1991), and in Japanese tradition (Vovin 2002).

me at the moment (Khitan words in Chinese transcription are underlined and their Chinese translations are given, as in the original, in the smaller size script):²

余靖尙書使契丹爲北語詩契丹愛之再往益親余詩
云夜筵設罷侈盛也臣拜洗受賜也兩朝厥荷通好也情幹勒
厚重也微臣雅魯拜舞也祝苦統福佑也聖壽鐵擺嵩高也俱可
心弋無極也國主舉大杯謂余曰能道此余爲卿飲復舉之
國主大笑遂爲酉壽觴

“The head of the Construction Ministry Yu Jing while being an ambassador to Khitan composed a poem in the Khitan [lit. Northern] language. [Therefore] Khitans liked him, and [when] he came again [to them, they] were increasingly friendly. Yu’s poem said: ‘The night banquet is plentiful; [your] retainer receives gifts/favors; [our] dynasties/courts are in friendly relations; [our/their] feelings are liberal/nice; [I,] the lowly retainer, bow (in a dance?); [I] wish/pray [for] [your] happiness/bliss; let [your] holy life be the highest/majestic; and have no limit.’ The head of the Khitan state raised the big goblet and told Yu: ‘Because [you] could compose it, I will drink for you.’ Raising again his big goblet, the head of the Khitan state laughed heartily and emptied his goblet.” (*Qidan guo zhi* XXIV.201).

The analysis of Chinese transcriptions of Khitan words in this story (and another one, which I will also provide below) as well as attempts of their etymological identification have been done several times, starting with the pioneering work by the famous Japanese historian and linguist Shiratori Kurakichi (1912). In spite of the fact being a pioneer in this enterprise, and working solely from the modern reading of the Chinese characters, Shiratori managed to make a successful identification of one Khitan word (#6 in the list below). Shiratori must be also given a credit that he was quite conservative in his etymologising attempt, and essentially made mistakes in two other cases where anyone was almost destined to err on the basis of knowledge of both Central Asian and Chinese philology and linguistics at that time. Another attempt was made by Otagi Matsuo, almost 50 years later (Otagi 1961). Most of Otagi’s identifications are on the borderline with science fiction and can be easily ignored, although he did identify more or less correctly one word in the second poem. The next in chronological line is an article by Herbert Franke (1976), whose greatest contribution is the excellent philological analysis of the poems in question, and identification of transcriptional variants. Franke has also provided justified criticism of Shiratori and especially of Otagi’s work, as well as two other successful identifications of Khitan words in poem #2.

However, all previous research on Chinese transcriptions of these words suffers from a major setback: anachronistic approach to Chinese historical phonology.

² I have corrected the textual variants of Khitan words in *Qidan guo zhi*, replacing the corrupted transcriptions with those that I consider to be primary. Rationale for my solutions which are mostly based on phonological typology will be given below in the commentaries on the individual Khitan words.

Both Shiratori and Otagi are dealing with modern Mandarin readings, which are, of course, out of question for the period of the tenth–twelfth centuries. Even Franke, who does much better than his predecessors because he attempts to use Old Mandarin readings, is not completely free from this anachronism: Old Mandarin readings of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries that he used in his 1976 article are too late for Chinese transcriptions of Khitan. We should use Late Middle Chinese (LMC) readings of the eighth–ninth centuries instead, because Sinoxenic-based³ writing systems tend to be based either entirely on contemporary reading systems (this case is rare and is probably represented only by LMC-based *man'yōgana* orthography in the Japanese chronicle *Nihonshoki* (日本書紀 “Annals of Japan”, 720 C. E.), or on one or two systems of Chinese readings that chronologically predate the period when this particular system of writing was in use: e.g., Early Middle Chinese (EMC)-based *man'yōgana* (萬葉仮名) orthography in the Japanese chronicle *Kojiki* (古事記 “Ancient matters”, 712 C. E.), poetic anthology *Man'yōshū* (萬葉集 “Collection of ten thousand leaves”, ca. 759 C. E.), and other Old Japanese texts also included some elements based on Late Old Chinese. The same is true of Old Korean writing system *hyangchal* (鄕札) used to record the texts of *hyangga* (鄕歌) poems in late sixth–early tenth centuries: it is also EMC-based with some elements from Late Old Chinese. It is, however, quite impossible for any given Sinoxenic writing system to be based on a system of readings of Chinese characters that *postdates* such a writing system.

Before proceeding to an analysis of Chinese transcription of Khitan words found in the first poem provided above, it is necessary to outline several other theoretical prerequisites of this analysis in addition to the major theoretical prerequisite that has just been discussed.

a) The most likely timeframe for the readings of Chinese characters employed for the transcription of the Khitan words in the above poem is mid–to late Tang or early Song at the latest, although the latter seems unlikely.

b) The most likely local variety of Late Middle Chinese underlying these transcriptions is then North-Western Chinese dialect spoken in the Chang'an capital. We would not expect that Kaifeng dialect in early Song would replace Chang'an dialect instantaneously as the language of prestige, so the Chang'an variety probably was used as a colloquial standard for some time during early Song.

c) Two most striking features of Chang'an-based LMC standard was the denasalisation of initial nasals *m-*, *n-* *ṇ-*, and *ŋ-* > *^mb-*, *ⁿd-*, *^ṇz-* and *^ŋg-* and fricativisation of final *-t* > *-r* respectively. The latter feature, as the reader will see below, is especially crucial for proper reconstruction of Khitan. We are all indebted to Professor Barnabás Csongor, whom we are honouring in this book, who was one of the first linguists to discover and to describe this feature of LMC, based on Uighur and Tibetan transcriptions of Chinese, as well as of Sino-Korean readings (Csongor 1953, pp. 92–93; Csongor 1960, p. 119). Following Marc Miyake's proposal, I label this final conso-

³ “Sinoxenic” is a convenient term introduced by Marc Miyake (1999) to denote any Chinese-based writing system that uses Chinese characters phonetically to render a non-Chinese language.

nant of Chinese transcriptions of Khitan as *-R* (Miyake 1996), that reflects its ubiquitous role in rendering possible syllable-final Khitan */-t/*, */-r/*, and */-ŋ/*.

d) I believe that the Khitan language had only two series of stops, voiced and voiceless. I do not intend to go into the details here, but the evidence from different kinds of sources seems to support this point of view. It is problematic, however, how these stops were mapped by LMC transcriptions, since LMC has three series of stops: voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, and voiceless with voiced aspiration. Miyake suggested that the first is reflecting voiced, while both aspirated are reflecting voiceless consonants in Khitan (Miyake 1996, p. 16). The same position (although not explicitly stated) seems to be shared by the Qidan research group (Qinge'ertai et al. 1985). There is, however, evidence to the contrary that I have discussed elsewhere (Vovin, forthcoming). I will treat henceforth both LMC voiceless unaspirated and voiceless aspirated as reflecting Khitan voiceless and LMC voiceless with voiced aspiration as reflecting Khitan voiced consonants.

e) Since the relationship between Khitan and other Mongolic languages is quite distant, or at least any other attested Mongolic language is closer to any other Mongolic language than any of them to Khitan, we should not expect that we could find any word attested in Khitan in other Mongolic languages. Quite to the contrary, we should expect quite a number of Khitan words *not attested* in other Mongolic languages.

f) On the other hand, we should expect to find at least some Khitan words as loanwords in Jurchen, Manchu, or even other Tungusic languages, because Jurchen were the power in the steppe that replaced Khitan, and we do know that Khitan script and language were used by Jurchen in at least early years of the Jin dynasty, as witnessed by the famous Langjun inscription of 1134. Jurchen data are limited, but it is not incomprehensible that Manchu or other Tungusic languages could borrow those words from Jurchen, which just did not survive in our extant materials on Jurchen.

g) It also should not be surprising that a number of loanwords from a language that preceded Khitan as a major steppe power should be found in Khitan itself. Since Turks preceded Khitan as a dominant power in the steppe, one would expect that at least some of these loanwords would be from Old Turkic. Also, we might expect that some loans from Late Middle Chinese could also be detected in Khitan.

Now let me turn to Khitan words found in the first poem under discussion:

1. 設罷 'plentiful' (LMC⁴ šaR p̄ɦa:j). I reconstruct Khitan *sarbai. Cf. WM *sarbai*- 'to stretch out to one's full length, to extend, to spread' (Lessing 1995, p. 675).
2. 拜洗 'receives favors/gifts' (LMC pa:j sij). I reconstruct Khitan *pasi. There are no likely cognates in other Mongolic languages, nor could I find any similar-looking possible loanwords from Khitan in Manchu-Tungusic languages.

⁴ In most cases the Late Middle Chinese reconstruction here follows Pulleyblank (1991), with necessary corrections taken according Northwest Middle Chinese reconstruction by Coblin (1994).

3. 厥荷 ‘in friendly relations’ (LMC k^uaR xɦa). I reconstruct Khitan *katxa. Cf. Ewen *katak* ‘friend’ and Neghidal *katixa* ‘id.’ (Cincius 1975, p. 384). Both Ewen and Neghidal words are apparent loanwords: they are isolated in Manchu-Tungusic and in addition they cannot be brought to the same archetype as it is not possible to establish regular phonetic correspondences between them that would reflect the same Proto-Manchu-Tungusic archetype.
4. 幹勒、幹勒、幹堇 ‘liberal’ (LMC kan lək, ʔwat lək, kan k/ghin or kan k/ghin). The variant ʔwat lək with the initial [ʔwa] may have a non-“Altaic” look (initial [wa] is found only in Manchu-Tungusic and Japonic⁵), so it is probably better treated as a scribal error. The tentative Khitan reconstructions for remaining variants are *kanli(k) or *kanKi/in, but, unfortunately, like in the case of #2 above, there are no likely cognates in other Mongolic languages, nor could I find any similar-looking possible loanwords from Khitan in Manchu-Tungusic languages.
5. 雅魯、稚魯 ‘bow and dance’ (LMC ɲja: luə, tri luə). The left elements could be easily confused by a scribe using cursive “grass style” writing (Chin. 草書 cǎoshū). Because the second variant has a retroflex initial /tr-/ , not found in any “Altaic” languages, I opt for the first variant, and reconstruct Khitan *nialu. Cf. WM *nalu-* ‘to bend over, to incline’ (Lessing 1995, p. 562).
6. 若統、苦統 ‘blessing’ (LMC ^hziak t^həwŋ, k^huə t^həwŋ). The first variant has a very un-“Altaic” prenasalised initial [^hz], so it probably can be disregarded as a scribal corruption of the second variant which is easy to make not only in the cursive “grass style”, but also in the regular style (Chin. 楷書 kǎishū). The second variant can be reconstructed as *kutun. Already Shiratori compared it with WM *qutuy* ‘bliss’, ‘benediction’, which he spelled as *khutuk*, Manchu *hūtori* ‘happiness’ (misspelled by Shiratori as *hūtori*), and Turkic *qut* ‘happiness, bliss’ (1912, p. 1250). One can also add Ewenki *kutu*, *kuta* or *kotu* ‘happiness’ (depending on a dialect, (Cincius 1975, p. 440), Khalkha Mongolian *xymaz* ‘happiness, well-being’, as well as the reflexes of this word in various modern Mongolic languages: Darkhat *xutag*, Buriat *xutag*, Kharchin *xutag*, etc. (Sun 1990, p. 393). Undoubtedly, all these words, including the Khitan *kutun, represent direct or indirect loanwords going back to Old Turkic *qut* ‘happiness, bliss’ (DTS 1969, p. 471; Clauson 1972, p. 594).
7. 鐵擺 ‘mountain-high, majestic’ (LMC thiaR pa:j). I reconstruct Khitan *tarbai. Shiratori compares this word with Manchu *cob* [*seme*] ‘appearing suddenly’, Mongolic *dobu* ‘hill’, ‘mound’, found in various Mongolic dialects, and Turkic *tepe* ‘summit’, ‘top’ (Shiratori 1912, pp. 1250–1251). Needless to say, all these words do not even have a loanword connection: there is no regularity in phonetic correspondences; thus, e.g. Manchu *c-* does not correspond to Mongolic *d-* or Turkic *t-*. Therefore, the Khitan word can be *potentially* identified only with one of those words. However, I believe that it is not the case, as there are two serious problems. First, none of the “Altaic” words shows any

⁵ Also in limited number of cases in native words in Korean, but these cases are all secondary, e.g. /wa/ ‘coming and’, < o-a, a gerund of the verb o- ‘to come’.

traces of the *-r-* consonant, found in the Khitan word. Second, both Manchu and Mongolic word exhibit a mid back rounded vowel, while the Khitan word has a low back unrounded vowel. Third, the Manchu word *cob* is onomatopoeic, appearing only in combination with the following gerund *seme* of the verb *se-* ‘to say’, as most of Manchu onomatopoeia does; and, in addition, its semantics has no connection with the meaning the Khitan word. Finally, the oldest attestations of the Turkic word indicate the form *töpü*, with a mid front rounded vowel in the first syllable, while the forms *tepe* and *depe* with a mid front unrounded vowels are apparently much more recent (Clauson 1972, p. 436; DTS 1969, p. 580).

8. 可忒 ‘without limit’ (LMC *kha thæk*). I reconstruct Khitan **katik*. There are no likely cognates in other Mongolic languages, nor could I find any similar-looking possible loanwords from Khitan in Manchu-Tungusic languages.

Now, let us turn our attention to the second story in the Qidan guo zhi, that also has Chinese–Khitan mixed verses. It is about Diao Yue, who also served as an ambassador to the Khitan.⁶

勻約使契丹爲北語詩云押燕移璃畢移璃畢官名如中國執政看房賀跋支賀跋支如執政防閣餞行三匹裂匹裂似小木罌以木爲之加黃漆密賜十貔狸形如鼠而大穴居食穀梁嗜肉北朝爲珍膳味如豚肉而脆

“Diao Yue, while being ambassador to Khitan, composed a poem in the Khitan [lit. Northern] language. [It] said: ‘Ruling over the feast is **elbiR* (*elbiR* is a title name. It is like Chinese chancellor). Looking after the chambers is **xabaRci* (*xabaRci* is like [the person] who guards the chambers of a chancellor). [As a farewell present they] granted three **phjiRliaR* (*phjiRliaR* looks like small wooden drinking cup made of wood with addition of yellow lacquer). [They also] secretly gave ten **phjili*’ (*phjili* is like a rat who lives in a big burrow. [It] eats grain and millet, but likes meat [as well]. Khitans [lit. Northern dynasty] consider [it] a delicacy. [Its meat] is like crispy pork)” (*Qidan guo zhi* XXIV.201).

1. 移璃畢 Khitan title, equivalent to Chinese 執政 (*zhízhèng*) ‘chancellor’ (LMC *ie li pjiR*). I reconstruct Khitan **elbiR*. I believe that Franke provided a correct identification of this Khitan word with Old Turkic *el beg-i* ‘bureaucrat’ (Franke 1976, p. 179), and I have nothing more to add to this etymology: Khitan **elbiR* is an apparent loanword from Old Turkic.
2. 賀跋支 ‘title of the person who guards the chambers of the chancellor’ (LMC *xña pfuaR tsj*). I reconstruct Khitan **xabaRci*. There seems to be a consensus that this Khitan word is another loanword from Turkic. The source appears to be Old Turkic *qabayčī* or *qabayčī* ‘door-keeper’, ‘guard’ (Franke 1976, p. 179; Kuz’menkov 1997, p. 88).

⁶ This story supplies the explanations of Khitan words in contrast to the first story where only translations were given. These explanations are provided in parentheses in a smaller font size.

3. 匹裂 ‘drinking cup’ (LMC phjiR liaR). Franke reconstructs Khitan *pile, and given the fact that any Mongolian word with an initial *p*- must be a late loanword, he appropriately criticises Otagi for comparing this word with Written Mongolian *pila* ‘plate’, ‘dish’ (Lessing 1995, p. 649). I believe that Franke is also right assuming that Written Mongolian *pila* ‘plate’, ‘dish’ was borrowed from Manchu *fila* ‘plate’, ‘saucer’ (Franke 1976, p. 179). However, his statement that “there can hardly be any doubt that this Khitan word *pile is of Tungusic origin” (Franke 1976, p. 179) is likely to run into several problems. Let us examine all available Tungusic evidence first: Solon *ilaa*, Oroch *pilææ* ‘plate’; Udihe *pilai* ‘shallow plate’, Ulcha *pili(n-)* ‘plate’, Nanai *pilia*, Kili *falga* ‘plate’, ‘bowl’; Manchu *fila* ‘plate’, ‘saucer’ (Cincius 1975, p. 303), Jurchen *fila* ‘plate’ (Kane 1989, p. 249). We can observe a number of irregular correspondences here (e.g. in Udihe an initial *x*- and not *p*- would be expected; Kili /a/ does not correspond to /i/ in other languages, Kili -*lg*- does not correspond to -*l*- in other languages, etc.). All these irregularities imply that it is not possible to reconstruct a common Manchu-Tungusic archetype for this word. If this is the case, we must be dealing with loanwords into Manchu-Tungusic languages from some other source. I believe that the likeliest source of these Manchu-Tungusic forms is the above Khitan word that I reconstruct as *piRliaR. The Kili form *falga* (? < *pigla, ? < *pilag) as well as vowel length in both Solon and Oroch forms are likely to correspond to the original -R (?[-ʏ]) in the Khitan form. Thus, the whole history of this vocabulary item seems to be more complex than Franke suggested: the word was borrowed from Khitan into Manchu-Tungusic languages, including Manchu, and from the latter it was borrowed by Mongolian.
4. 獭狸 ‘steppe marmot’ (LMC phji li). Franke correctly indicates that the Chinese explanation leaves no room for doubt that this Khitan word denotes a steppe marmot, and reconstructs Khitan *p’ili (Franke 1976, p. 179). Given the voiced nature of aspiration of LMC /pʰi/, I reconstruct Khitan *bili according to the principle of mapping of Khitan reflexes of voiceless/voiced consonants onto LMC system, which were already discussed above. Given the absence of the *r:l* contrast in LMC, the LMC transcription could as well render Khitan *biri. To the best of my knowledge, the etymology of this Khitan word remains obscure. Many Inner Asian languages use Mongolian word *tarbagan* ‘steppe marmot’, and as far as I know the word *bili or *biri is not attested anywhere except Khitan.

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