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Сборник, в который вошли статьи отечественных и зарубежных ученых, посвящен 80-летию известного российского востоковеда, доктора исторических наук, профессора Е.И. Кычанова. Проблематика сборника задана основными доминантами многолетнего исследовательского творчества юбиляра, который, являясь в первую очередь тангутоведом и опираясь на широчайшую источниковедческую базу, блестяще разработал многие актуальные проблемы истории государственности, права, этногенеза, письменного наследия народов Китая и Центральной Азии. Большинство авторов статей постарались показать, как вопросы, поставленные в свое время в работах Е.И. Кычанова, получили дальнейшее развитие в науке.

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Some Thoughts Concerning the Authentication of Khitan Small Script Epitaphic Texts

Recent years have brought to daylight a considerable number of previously unknown epitaphic documents in the two Khitan scripts — the Khitan large script and the Khitan small script. A preliminary summary of the new discoveries was published just a few years ago by the Inner Mongolian scholars Wu Yingzhe, Buyandelger and Jiruhe (2009), but the situation changes rapidly as important new material is being discovered on an almost annual basis. At the same time, there has been a surge of new literature on the Khitan scripts and documents. In particular, rapid progress has been made in the decipherment of the Khitan small script. An important summary of the current state of knowledge was published by Daniel Kane (2009).

The publication of two freshly discovered Khitan small script epitaphic documents by Wu Yingzhe and myself (2010) may be seen as a part of the current wave of Khitan script and language studies. Our aim was to make available two documents, which we named “Xiao Dilu” (1114) and “Yelü Xiangwen” (1091). Both documents are now preserved at the Museum of Inner Mongolia University, Huhhot, which also possesses other, still unpublished, documents. Similar new finds are stored in other museums, both public and private, in various parts of northern China. With our book we also initiated a series called “Corpus Scriptorum Chitanorum” which, we hope, will ultimately help make available the total corpus of Khitan documents in the two scripts, both newly discovered and previously known.

It has not come as a surprise that our publication has begun an exceptionally lively discussion about the problem of authentication of Khitan texts. In several papers, the eminent Chinese specialist in Khitan studies, Professor Liu Fengzhu (2011abc), has maintained that the two documents published by us — and probably several other Khitan epitaphic documents kept in other collections — are recent “forgeries” rather than original pieces of Khitan writing. Liu Fengzhu’s arguments

have been countered by both Wu Yingzhe (2011) and myself (2011b), and our views have been supported by others, notably Nie Hongyin (2011). In fact, there is no doubt that Liu Fengzhu is mistaken in his basic claim: the two inscriptions published by us are, without a doubt, authentic inscriptions from the Liao period.

Even so, the topic of forgeries in Chinese epitaphic and other ancient script material is important. In anticipation of discussion, we also took up this problem briefly in our book.¹ The general background of the issue lies in the liberal attitude towards authorship and copyright that has always prevailed in Chinese culture. The phenomenon has ancient roots, as summarized by Craig Clunas (1990, 1992), but it was stimulated by the rapidly growing international demand for Chinese antiquities in the early 20th century. Already in the 1920s and '30s, Chinese “antiquity” shops were full of recently produced items, as has been vividly described by the Swedish specialist Orvar Karlbeck (1957).

Forgeries of ancient texts became current when Western scholars started the hunt for manuscripts and murals in Dunhuang and other grottos on the Silk Road. A particularly well known case is the forgery of Brahmi texts on paper by Islam Akhun, an Uighur entrepreneur in the field of forgery in the early 20th c. The fakes prepared by him and his colleagues for Western collectors even included codex-form books block-printed in a fantasy script.² One might think that modern scholars would not be fooled by such “primitive” attempts at deception, but we have to remember that, among other things, successful forgeries always involve a psychological aspect.

It is also necessary to understand the difference between forged textual documents and forged pieces of art. Forging art may be seen — and has always been seen in China — as a more or less honest activity, since it multiplies the fruits of artistic production and brings them within reach of a larger audience. The same is, to some extent, true of forged “antiquities,” but here the forger’s objectives are more closely concerned with economic profit. As far as texts in exotic scripts — manuscripts, books, stelae, and epitaphs — are concerned, the economic aspect is decisive, as such texts are rarely produced for other purposes than outright deception, an activity that requires the presence of a market for the forged products. This makes the topic raised by Liu Fengzhu relevant also to Khitan small script studies.

It has to be noted that the Khitan small script is today in a rather special position among the ancient scripts of China: it is relatively amply documented and relatively well known, but nevertheless obscure enough to stimulate interest in both the intellectual and commercial sense. Since new discoveries of Khitan small script documents are not very uncommon, it is also, in principle, possible to forge new texts without attracting too much attention. Let us therefore consider once again how a Khitan epitaphic text can be authenticated, and why even such an eminent specialist as Liu Fengzhu can be mistaken when he regards authentic documents as forgeries.

¹ Wu Yingzhe and Janhunen 2010, pp. 32–34.

² For illustrations, cf. Whitfield and Sims-Williams 2004, pp. 135, 219, 304.

It is not difficult to list some central criteria that should be considered when a newly discovered epitaphic text is to be authenticated. These include, most importantly, the following:

1. Technical examination. The technical study of epitaphs is still an open field. There is no systematic cooperation between specialists in ancient scripts and those in petrology, chemistry, and archaeological dating, especially in China. There has never been a technical study of any single Khitan epitaphic document. The proper technical examination of an ancient inscription would typically involve team work between a wide range of specialists, including natural scientists and archaeologists. In this respect, the recent publication of the Tyr stelae from the Ming period by the Russian team including V.Ts. Golovachev, A.L. Ivliev, A.M. Pevnov and P.O. Rykin (2011) is a good model for future research, though in the case of the Tyr stelae there was, of course, no question about the authenticity of the inscriptions.

However, in many cases, a careful visual examination of the epitaph, including the type and quality of the stone used, of the stone surface, and of the engraved characters, will give a good basis for judgement. In our case, we conducted a careful study of the stones and compared them with all other available Khitan epitaphic stones in other collections, and as a result we found our material completely compatible with other authentic epitaphic documents. It is interesting to note that Liu Fengzhu has not seen our epitaphs, which are open to free examination at the Museum of Inner Mongolia University. This suggests that he does not recognize the importance of visual and technical study, but focuses, rather, on other issues.

2. Aesthetic examination. When we are dealing with objects and texts produced in the Chinese tradition of aesthetic culture, it is important to examine their aesthetic qualities. This is, of course, a field in which subjective judgment plays an important role, and a field in which visual experience cannot be replaced by theoretical study. In the case of texts in the Khitan scripts this means, in particular, that the calligraphy has to be credible. A modern forger, however skillful he may be in other respects, is unlikely to get the calligraphic details right: he will either distort the forms when writing the individual characters, or he will adopt a strictly mechanical approach and omit all the calligraphic variation that gives a text its aesthetic dimension.

In this respect, the two epitaphic texts published by us comply perfectly with the picture we already have from other Khitan texts. As can be seen from the rubbings published in our book, the calligraphy in both “Xiao Dilu” (1114) and “Yelü Xiangwen” (1091) reveals a creative approach that can only have been achieved by original calligraphers working in Liao times. Moreover, the calligraphic style is rather different in the two texts, which, of course, reveals the fact that they were produced by different hands.

3. Palaeographic examination. Instead of aesthetic qualities, Liu Fengzhu is mainly concerned with palaeographic details, that is, he is trying to identify “incor-

rect” characters and spellings, which, as he thinks, would confirm that the “forger” has not been fully versed in the art of Khitan writing. This is an approach that involves a rather serious methodological mistake, in that any attempt to identify textual “mistakes” in a previously unknown inscription is bound to be based on a preconceived idea of what a “mistake” is. In fact, this approach is simply not applicable to a script and a language whose total range of variation is still unknown to us.

We should recognize that we still have very few — less than 40 — epitaphic texts in the Khitan small script. Moreover, compared with the epitaphic material, other sources on the Khitan small script (mainly epigraphic texts on mirrors, coins, and pottery, as well as some graffiti) are negligible. Each text, including those discovered several decades ago, includes unique and unexpected features that are not in line with the rest of the corpus. In this situation, it is only natural that our two texts should also contain examples of such features. These features should not, however, be taken as evidence against the authenticity of the texts themselves. Rather, they should be seen as challenges for future work on Khitan.

4. Historical examination. Each one of the epitaphic texts in the Khitan small script is an important source of historical, ethnographical, and geographical data concerning persons, genealogies, tribes, places, customs and historical events of the Liao period. In this respect, the two texts published by us are in line with our previous experience, in that they contain many previously unknown historical and geographical details, confirming, at the same time, many details known from other sources.

Again, Professor Liu — a recognized authority on Liao history — sees problems in points where information given by the new texts deviates from what he would expect on the basis of his earlier knowledge. However, such deviations should not be seen as evidence against the authenticity of the texts themselves but, rather, as fresh information that augments our knowledge of the Liao period. Both “Xiao Dilu” and “Yelü Xiangwen” are epitaphs of previously unknown persons, but information supplied by the texts allows us to place these persons in a context. As we note in our book, a complete gazetteer of personal and place names, as well as of historical events, of the Liao period, has not yet been compiled. Every new text, including the two published by us, adds information to the extant database.

5. Linguistic examination. Specialists in the Khitan small script are today in a fortunate position, as the writing system is to a considerable extent deciphered, which allows the underlying language to be approached. Although far from comprehensive, our knowledge of the Khitan language allows us to establish a large number of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, which, in turn, makes it possible to understand and translate long passages of Khitan text.³ It seems that a historian like Liu Fengzhu cannot fully realize that the linguistic framework is completely beyond the range of a forger.

³ Janhunen 2011b.

In the case of “Xiao Dilu” and “Yelü Xiangwen,” it is clear that the two texts are by all criteria linguistically coherent entities that are in complete agreement with what is known of Khitan grammar and lexicon. Moreover, the two texts also contain many previously unattested words and phrases, some of which can be “read,” while others cannot. There are even examples of proverbs — something that even the most erudite forger would not be able to create. Finally, “Xiao Dilu” contains a poem, much of which cannot yet be translated, but which shows a formal regularity that a forger could not have possibly invented. Indeed, Khitan small script documents of the types represented by “Xiao Dilu” and “Yelü Xiangwen” are impossible to forge, for the forger would have to be familiar with the Khitan language at a native level.

6. The pragmatic aspect. Finally, we have to consider the circumstances under which forgeries are produced. Professional forgers are typically excellent craftsmen, well informed of different materials and techniques. It is true that modern forgers tend to turn to machines where earlier craftsmen worked by hand, but in the Chinese context handicraft is still surprisingly alive, and there are master forgers who can produce even the highest quality of work with no easily detectable difference as compared with the work of ancient craftsmen.

Forgers are, however, rarely educated in the literary sense, meaning that they would be unable to produce credible historical calligraphy in a script that they do not fully know. Still less can they be expected to be profoundly familiar with the facts of history, palaeography, and linguistics. The production of an even superficially successful forgery would require the cooperation of several specialists, including a historian, a calligrapher, a linguist, and a craftsman. Such teams simply do not exist in the restricted circles of Khitan specialists. Apart from Liu Fengzhu himself, there are only a handful of persons in China sufficiently well versed in the Khitan small script to be able to produce any kind of coherent text in the Khitan language. Certainly none of these persons has had anything to do with “Xiao Dilu” and “Yelü Xiangwen,” which are, hence, original Khitan small script documents.

As it is, we do have knowledge of several forged texts in the Khitan *large* script. These are, in principle, “easy” to forge since the script is still undeciphered and there is no database with which a new text could easily be compared. These forgeries are, on the other hand, easy to detect by technical and aesthetic criteria. There have also been attempts at forging Khitan small script texts, especially in small scale (seals, paizi, tablets, coins), but the texts in these are typically either copies of extant texts (taken from published works, often with mistakes) or easily detectable products of fantasy. The fact is that the forger is always after easy money, and he would have no interest in investing several years of study to create a product of a “higher” quality. That would simply not be economically profitable enough.

We have to keep in mind that forgery business is closely connected with trade in real antiquities. As far as Khitan small script epitaphic texts are concerned, the profitable business today is still concerned with originals. In areas with Liao period

tombs there must still be thousands of undetected tombs. Many of these tombs, though not all, contain epitaphic texts, some of which are in the Khitan small script. It is no surprise that the number of newly discovered Khitan small script epitaphic texts has been growing constantly since the 1980s. Many of the areas with Liao period tombs, typically located on peripheral mountain sides, are now occupied by gardens, fields, roads, temples, and tourist resorts. Even without intentional “grave robbing,” the rapid development has led to the discovery of many new inscriptions, which gradually change hands from the original discoverers, often peasants, to local authorities and dealers, and finally to museums.

However, to avoid misunderstandings and false claims in the future, it is essential to develop technical methods of dating epitaphs. There are today reliable methods for the dating of pottery (thermoluminescence), wooden objects (dendrochronology), and objects made of other organic materials (radio carbon dating). Metal and stone objects, which are extensively forged, can often be authenticated by visual examination by an experienced eye, but the technical tools for dating them are still poorly developed. For epitaphs the situation is even worse. It would be important to create a line of research combining the experience from epitaphic studies with the scientific knowledge of fields such as petrology and chemistry.

A concrete task for the philologists and linguists working on Khitan small script epitaphic documents is to establish a contact with technical expertise on petrological, chemical, and archaeological dating. It is necessary to create a petrological taxonomy of the stones used for the epitaphs and to identify their source localities. More work is also needed on chemical and microscopical analysis of texts engraved on stone surfaces: quite certainly, it will be possible to develop techniques for distinguishing inscriptions made a thousand years ago from those made recently. Although such technical evidence is superfluous when we are dealing with well-formed texts in the Khitan language, it will be a useful tool when we have to convince critics who are unable to see the relevance of other types of evidence.

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