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RESEARCH ON THE PRESENTATION OF PERSONALITIES AND  
SKILLS OF EPITAPH OWNERS IN KHITAN SMALL SCRIPT  
EPITAPHS (I)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Epitaphs, a product of ancient Chinese burial systems, possess fixed structures and compositional conventions, documenting the deceased's name, year of death, and life events. Typically consisting of three components—the opening (title and author attribution), the main body (narratives of lineage and life events, supplemented by rhymed eulogies for mourning or praise), and the conclusion (recording the writer, engraver, and date of composition)—they serve as standardized commemorative texts. Influenced by Han culture, Khitan-script epitaphs bear striking similarities to their Chinese counterparts in both form and content. While existing decipherment efforts have yielded progress in understanding the owner's genealogy and basic textual structure, research on the deceased's personal details—particularly descriptions of personalities and skills—remains limited, with associated compositional conventions yet to be clarified. Focusing on the Khitan small-script *Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong*, this paper elaborates on the stylistic conventions for depicting the epitaph owner in Khitan small-script epitaphs and interprets relevant vocabulary. This pioneering analysis addresses a gap in current scholarship.

**Key words:** personalities and skills, Khitan small script epitaph, compositional conventions

## I. Introduction

The Khitan script was once used in the Liao Dynasty in history. There are two kinds of Khitan script, which are Khitan large script and Khitan small script. With the fall of the Liao Dynasty, the Khitan script also became a dead script. Since the rediscovery of Khitan script documents in 1922, the study of the Khitan script has now had a history of 100 years. Both the Khitan large script and the Khitan small script have not been completely deciphered yet.

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The extant Khitan script materials are predominantly inscriptions, with epitaphs being the most abundant among them. So far, there are more than 40 pieces of inscriptions in Khitan small script and a total of more than 30 pieces of inscriptions in Khitan large script and paper documents found and published.

Epitaph is the product of the continuous development of the ancient Chinese burial system. It has a fixed form and a specific style of writing, mainly recording the deceased's name, year of death, and life stories.

An epitaph consists of several parts, including the beginning part, the main part and the ending part. The beginning part includes the title of the epitaph and the author who writes it. The first part of the main body is the narrative text (xu wen 序文 in Chinese), which records the deceased's family lineage, name, title, life experiences etc. The second part is the mingwen 铭文, which mostly uses rhymed verses to express mourning and praise for the deceased. The ending part includes the names of the writer, the engraver, and the engraving date of the epitaph.

The Khitan people were influenced by the Han people in aspects such as writing, literature, art, and philosophy. The Han people's funeral culture has also had a significant impact on that of the Khitan people. The forms and contents of epitaphs in Khitan script are quite similar to those epitaphs in Chinese. An epitaph in Khitan script also consists of the beginning part, the main part and the ending part.

## **II. Presentation of Personalities and Skills of Epitaph Owners in Khitan Small Script Epitaphs**

At present, certain progress has been made in the research of deciphering epitaphs in Khitan script. A relatively large amount of content regarding the genealogy of the epitaph's owner can be deciphered. About the writing format of the epitaphs, some understanding has been gained. In general, the first two or three lines of the Khitan epitaph is the title of the epitaph and the writer of the epitaph. It is the beginning part of the epitaph. The part after that is the narrative text of the main part. It describes the marriages, offspring and life stories of several generations of the ancestors of the epitaph owner.

According to the current interpretation achievements, we can accurately identify and smoothly interpret the ranking of the children of each generation. It can be clearly seen in the epitaphs in Khitan script that the ordinal numbers (with masculine and feminine genders) are used to mark the ranking of the children.(Jishi, 1996)

However, the decipherable content about the epitaph's owner himself is limited, which often records the deceased's personalities and skills. The writing format in this regard remains unclear. In this paper, starting from the *Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong* in Khitan small script, the author try to explain the writing format of the epitaph's owner part in Khitan small script in detail, and at the same time, interpret the vocabulary in small script involved in it.

The content from Line 39 to Line 41 of the *Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong* in Khitan small script portrays the personalities of the epitaph owner Xiao Zhonggong. The writing format for depicting the personalities of the epitaph owner is uniquely distinctive. In these three lines, there are five sentences, all concluding with the identical phrase 衣古 叙北 尺狗 ci-eu k-li<sub>2</sub>-û-ji<sub>2</sub>, which means “with (have)” and “call/say (consider)”. Preceding this phrase in each sentence are two words that describe the epitaph owner's personalities, ten words in total. The specific content is as follows:

**Line 39:**

几尺公 丰平立出 业平夕狗 衣古北 公矢当 衣焚在 业尺化 几尺凡 沙 屋平立丰  
 ku-û-er hul-l-ha-án p-ul-uh-ji<sub>2</sub> ci-ge<sub>2</sub>-li<sub>2</sub> n-de-én ci-ue-ra p-û-ud ulu MANAGE-l-ha-ai  
 人 余 並 人 未 知  
 man and man not manage

北为夹 佃狗 刃平当矢 夕火化公北 夯亦当 芬火 夕火化公当 □ 中几全<sup>3</sup> 衣化当 衣古  
 or-a-an sui-ji<sub>2</sub> ir-l-én-de h-ui-ri-d-li e<sub>2</sub> ün-én cu-dú h-ui-ri-ge<sub>2</sub>-én-□ bir-g-s ci-ri-én ci-eu  
 生 至 這 運? <sup>4</sup> 極 至  
 born arrived this luck extreme arrived

叔北尺狗 史令 为本 衣关公母伏 及少 令仕公北 因母业列丰 夕火全公尘 九夷伏列  
 k-li<sub>2</sub>-û-ji<sub>2</sub> go-t a-ar ci-i-is-d-b-ñ u-un t-mu-d-li<sub>2</sub> bod b-áng-hu-ai h-s-ge<sub>2</sub>-te<sub>1</sub> tou-li-ñ-hu  
 謂 家於 孝 身  
 said home filial piety body

曲公 异为 北衣 在丰平立丰 夕火 丹奕 公业 母庚平立丰 九夷 公东外 令生 夕火全平尺伏

<sup>3</sup> The Khitan small script with outer frames in the text are the key words analyzed in this section of the article.

<sup>4</sup> The question mark (?) indicates that this interpretation is not definitive.

go-er REGION-a or-ci ra-l-ó-ul-ha-ai sh-ia lu<sub>3</sub>-úr d-p b-ur<sub>2</sub>-l-ha-al g-úr n-ad-bot t-abu h-s-l-û-ñ

家 疆 善 國 捺鉢

home border kind country Nabo

bod ai-ci d-od-ha-ar p-úr-i nai gú-u-un dor h-ui-ri-ge2-én-er 77-

身官吏之禮至篤

body official rite reach earnest

**Line 40:**

ci-i-is-d-b-ñ ci-eu k-li,-û-ji, ucu- m-u nai hor-u-un-u d-p ku-û-ul-ge,-li, n-iuk-ji,

# 孝 謂 小 大 官 民 友

filial piety said small big official people friend

nai-d <sup>2</sup>da-<sup>2</sup>aju s-<sup>2</sup>ra-<sup>2</sup>ir-<sup>2</sup>en g-<sup>2</sup>en-<sup>2</sup>û-<sup>2</sup>úr eu-<sup>2</sup>ul-<sup>2</sup>ge-<sup>2</sup>én-<sup>2</sup>er dor-<sup>2</sup>d-<sup>2</sup>b-<sup>2</sup>ñ n-<sup>2</sup>ai-<sup>2</sup>ci-<sup>2</sup>én-<sup>2</sup> ci-<sup>2</sup>eu k-<sup>2</sup>li-<sup>2</sup>û-<sup>2</sup>ji-<sup>2</sup> 79

官 哀 悅 謂

officials brotherly love said

今生弓立弓乃火平立平火为出反火乃火火化否北火 杂爻女爻生弓爻列幽否升火

t-abu-al-ha-al es au-ul-ha-ai iú-a-án u-un es h-ui-ri-ge<sub>2</sub>-li<sub>2</sub> ui ci-ie-271-i al-ir<sub>2</sub> hu-üen-is-ó-úr

未 改 未 至 事

not promote not reach affair

又欠而谷北 矢亥亥土平谷当谷 𠂇 屋列冬村 朶土 叔北尺狗 朶九 朶才勿

m-qó-od-d-li<sub>2</sub> de-u-úr eu-ul-ge<sub>2</sub> -én-er dor MANAGE-hu-as-en ci-eu k-li<sub>2</sub>-û-ji<sub>2</sub> us<sub>2</sub>-g ci-ia-ko

## 禮 謂 字

rite said writing

辛未半火当火业亥未有火半列火 来土 来火北丹乃火未火 无长升火

ai-ci-l-ge, -én ui p-úr-s-en al-l-hu-an ci-eu ci-ge, -li, b-am h-s-ge, -ud tau-su-ó-ui

事子嗣之

## personality offsprings and

**Line 41:**

Following the five structurally consistent sentences that recount the personalities of the epitaph's owner, the final sentence of this paragraph summarizes the ten personalities of the epitaph owner, that is, 七 固 有 中 几 伞 衣 化 当 北 灯 州 衣 关 孝 公 伏 乞 公 丹 衣 与 乞 屋 列 冬 方 午 列 百 丈 佗 尖 伞 衣 与 几 nem bod-en bir-g-s ci-ri-én 77-po-ucu ci-i-is-d-b-ñ dor-d-b-ñ n-ai-ci-én, dor MANAGE-hu-er SIX-l-hu (all-hu) em-110 ab ui-s ci-eu ku. 七 nem means “one” while 固有 bod-en means “of body”, and 七 固 有 means “of one body” (yi shen一身 in Chinese). 佗 ab means “ten”, 尖 伞 ui-s means “affairs” (personalities), and 衣 与 ci-eu means “with”, 几 ku means “man”. 佗 尖 伞 衣 与 ab ui-s ci-eu ku means “the man with ten personalities”. Of these ten personality-related terms, four have been deciphered: 北 灯 州 77-po-ucu corresponds to the Chinese character 篤 du, signifying “earnest”; 衣 关 孝 公 伏 ci-i-is-d-b-ñ corresponds to 孝 xiao, meaning “filial piety”; 公 丹 衣 与 n-ai-ci-én, maps to 悌 ti, denoting “brotherly respect”; and 乞 dor aligns with 禮 li, standing for “rite”.

<sup>5</sup> In CWJ, this word is recorded as 屋列𠂇 MANAGE-hu-er. By repeatedly examining and studying the rubbings and comparing this word with the same word appearing in Line 40 of the epitaph and other epitaphs, the author determines that the glyph at the end should be 𠂇 as, and thus revises it to 屋列𠂇 MANAGE-hu-as.

<sup>6</sup> In CWJ, this word is recorded as 夬 午 𢃤 SIX-l-hu. By examining the rubbings and comparing this word with the same word appearing in Line 40 and Line 46 of the epitaph, the author determines that the first glyph should be 𢃤 al, and thus revises it to 𢃤 午 𢃤 al-l-hu.

In the currently published Khitan small script documents, many epitaphs follow a relatively fixed format when describing the personalities of the deceased. Through detailed decipherment of existing materials, the author of this paper has identified—for the first time—the compositional conventions governing such descriptions in Khitan small script epitaphs, which are presented here for the first time.

### III. Interpretation of the Words Describing Personalities

The main part of the epitaph in Chinese records in detail the tomb owner's life, deeds, personalities, and other information. It is usually divided into the following sections: the first section states the tomb owner's family background and life, which will traces the origin of the tomb owner's ancestors (such as ancestral home, official background of the family), and records basic information about the tomb owner, including birth and death years, courtesy names, alias, and birth order. Then it narrates the tomb owner's life experiences in chronological order, including career in the imperial examinations, official career (appointments and removals, political achievements), marriage and family (information about spouses and children), etc. The third section is the conclusion (ending), which briefly describes the funeral arrangements after the tomb owner's death, or expresses mourning and commemoration for the tomb owner. Sometimes, it introduces a rhymed text (epigraph) with the phrase “Inscription says” (銘曰 ming yue).

The second section is one of the core contents of the epitaph, which states the personalities and evaluation of the tomb owner (Section of “Praising Virtues”). Through specific examples or general descriptions, it praises the tomb owner's personalities (such as filial piety 孝悌 xiao ti, incorruptibility 清廉 qinglian, loyalty and bravery 忠勇 zhong yong, kindness 仁厚 ren hou), talents and skills (such as literary talent, martial arts, ability in governance), etc. For example, 王之于國忠也，於家孝也，于民惠也，于官廉也，於人信也，而五德兼備，貴處人臣之極，天之報施不為薄也。 (The prince was loyal to the state, filial to his family, benevolent to the people, incorruptible in officialdom, and trustworthy to others. Endowed with these five virtues, he attained the highest rank among officials, which is a testament that heaven's rewards are by no means meager.) (Extracted from *The Epitaph of Yelü Renxian* 耶律仁先墓誌銘 Yelü Renxian Mu zhi ming)

In Chinese epitaphs, words expressing personalities such as loyalty 忠 zhong, filial piety 孝 xiao, respectfulness 恭 gong, reverence 敬 jing, bravery 勇 yong, incorruptible 廉 lian, and trustworthy 信 xin often appear to praise the tomb owner. By comparing it with Liao-dynasty epitaphs in Chinese, the author, in the series of papers, will seek

to decipher the remaining term — those denoting personalities recorded *The Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong* in Khitan small script — other than the four words 扈努州 77-po-ucu, 朮父委公 朮伏 ci-i-is-d-b-ñ, 公牛朮与 n-ai-ci-én, and 朮 dor already deciphered, following the compositional conventions of Khitan epitaphs identified in this study.

The first term describing the personality of the epitaph's owner is 𢂔九𠂔 bir-g-s, whose root is presumably the word 𢂔九 bir-g, as appears in *The Epitaph of Xiao Chala Xianggong* in Khitan small script.

Through a comparison between the Chinese and Khitan versions of *The Epitaph of Xiao Chala Xianggong*, the meaning of this term can be deciphered. The word 𢂔九 bir-g appears in the following sentence in Line 17-18 of Cha in Khitan small script:

𢂔列出半公 犬 又及 令金公 又 杰 欠 𢂔九 𢂔矢 义 克公 犬 半 犬 欠 朮 生 不 半 文 𢂔九  
b-hu-án ai-d dur<sup>o</sup> m-o t-em<sub>2</sub>-er m-oi<sub>2</sub>-qó bir-g dor-de h-d<sub>3</sub>-ge-er l-iú-ung ci-eu to-on l-ie-én shī  
孩子 男 四 長 特末 禮 隴 州 團 練 使  
Children male four the eldest Temo rite Long zhou Tuanlian shi

令金半公𢂔九 业半其𢂔九 又为夫公 朮冬为 朮公 为半 (Cha 17-18)<sup>7</sup>

t-em<sub>2</sub>-l-ge-y dor p-ai-si-en sh-a-rí-d ci-as-a ci-er a-ai  
封 印 牌司之 郎君 政 在  
Confer seal tally department Langjun administrative be

This part corresponds to the following sentence in Line 23-24 of the Chinese version of Cha:

子男四長曰特末，隴州團練使、牌印郎君。押班端慤，克家有才致。(Cha in Chinese)

(They had four sons: The eldest, named Temo, held the positions of Longzhou Tuanlianshi and Paiyin Langjun. As a court official in charge of arranging the order of court attendants, he was upright and sincere, and possessed the talent and ability to uphold the family honor.)

<sup>7</sup> In the following example sentences, abbreviations paired with numbers in parentheses denote the source epitaph and its relevant lines. For example, “Cha 17-18” refers to lines 17-18 of the *Epitaph of Xiao Chala Xianggong*.

并列出 半 穴 犬 又 及 令 金 公  $b\text{-}hu\text{-}án$  ai-d dur<sup>o</sup> m-o t-em<sub>2</sub>-er corresponds to 子 男四長曰特末, while 半 犬 太 木 火 生 不 半 文 旁 兮  $l\text{-iú-ung}$  ci-eu to-on l-ie-ên shi corresponds to 隘州團練使, 兮 业 半 亾 木 又 为 兮 公 dor p-ai-si-en sh-a-rí-d ci-as-a to 牌印郎君. The part of 又 太 欠 中 几 兮 矢 火 无 公 公  $m\text{-oi}_2\text{-qó}$  bir-g dor-de h-d<sub>3</sub>-ge-er following the person's name Temo, may describe this person's character. The part may correspond to 押班端慤, and 又 太 欠 中 几  $m\text{-oi}_2\text{-qó}$  bir-g may correspond to the Chinese word 端慤 duan que, which means upright and sincere. 中 几 bir-g may correspond to 慤 que, whose etymology may share the same origin as ~~boroyjiiyun~~ boroyjiyun that means “simple” or “plain” in Mongolian, which is similar to it both in pronunciation and meaning.

The following are examples of the word 𢂔儿 bir-g that appear in the currently discovered Khitan small script epitaphs.

1. 华容公 始凡 雨夊 丙文 奉夊 可 付刃夊凡 为本 **出凡** 本化公 可忝矢 夬夊 (Xu 40)  
l-ge-er us-g dai-úr em-ie ra-iú bai b-ir-iú-shi a-ar bir-g ci-ri-er bai-is-de h-ui-ci  
字 (書) 下 至  
writing under reach

Based on the context, the words 中𠂇bir-g, 衣化𠂇 ci-ri-er and 可忝矢 bai-is-de in the aforementioned sentences all denote personalities. The word 衣化𠂇 ci-ri-er was previously recorded as 衣化𠂇 ci-ud-er in the CWJ (2017)<sup>8</sup>; however, after examining the rubbing, the author concludes that it should be 衣化𠂇 ci-ri-er, and hereby makes this correction. The two personality-denoting terms 中𠂇bir-g and 衣化𠂇 ci-ri-er frequently appear together (as will also be seen in the following examples).

2.契丹國之孝子  
qid-i g-úr-en ci-i-is-d-b-ir<sub>2</sub> sh-em<sub>2</sub>-qú bir-g ta<sub>2</sub>-ir<sub>2</sub>-l-ge<sub>2</sub>-er hu-a-al-pa dor-a-ar qú<sup>x</sup>-a-dol-án abu  
契丹 國之 孝 善 懿  
Khian state's filial piety kind sincere

𠂇 卜 𠂇 𠂇 𠂇 𠂇 (Zhi 4)

<sup>8</sup> CWJ: Chinggeltei& Wu Yingzhe &Jiruhe.(2017). Qìdān xiǎozì zài yánjiū [Further Research on Khitan Small Script]. Neimenggu: Nèi Měnggǔ Dàxué Chūbùnshè [Inner Mongolia University Publishing House].

or-l-b-ñ tai ui

烏魯本 太尉

Uluben Grand Commandant

This sentence describes the personalities of Uluben Taiwei. Terms such as 杵关秀公 孟爻 ci-i-is-d-b-ir<sub>2</sub>, 父金夾 sh-em<sub>2</sub>-qú, 中九 bir-g, 仍爻中公 ta<sub>2</sub>-ir<sub>2</sub>-l-ge<sub>2</sub>-er, 列為子正 hu-a-al-pa, 爭為子 dor-a-ar, and 丈為屏出 qú<sup>x</sup>-a-dol-án all denote personalities. 杵关秀公 孟爻 ci-i-is-d-b-ir<sub>2</sub> signifies filial piety, 父金夾 sh-em<sub>2</sub>-qú represents kindness, and 中九 bir-g can be deciphered “sincere”. Given the context, the interpretation of this word’s meaning makes sense.

3. 杵关秀公中 仍爻列 亾化公 孟爻 亾升化中 仕爻弱列 父冬余 有 亾爻矣<sup>9</sup> 坐  
ci-i-is-d-bir ta-u-en hu-ud-er b-qo hu<sub>2</sub>-u-ud-bir mu-u-ji-en m-as-qu deu s-u-si tel  
孝 章之 第三 子 仁 聖之 長 弟  
Xiao Zhang’s the third son Ren Sheng’s elder brother  
爭火 𠂔列 亾公 孟爻 及北 中九 杵化公 (Tai 9-10)  
dor-ud MANAGE-hu em-er b-ó-o-or bir-g ci-ri-er

憲

upright and sincere

This part is taken from *Eulogy for the Late Imperial Grand Uncle*, describes the lineage and personalities of the epitaph’s owner. It can be translated as “The third son of Emperor Xiaozhang<sup>10</sup>, the eldest younger brother of Emperor Rensheng<sup>11</sup>, whose nature is...”. All terms following the word 亾爻矣 s-u-si “nature” denote the personalities of the epitaph owners. Here, 中九 bir-g appears again alongside 杵化公 ci-ri-er—interpreting 中九 bir-g as “upright and sincere” also makes sense.

<sup>9</sup> The last glyph of this word was incorrectly recorded as 爻 (243), which denotes “heaven” in the electronic transcriptions of previous studies. It is not the 爻 (243) but another glyph with a very similar form. The rubbing is as follows:  Based on the usage of this glyph in word formation, it may be a variant glyph of the glyph 爻 (293), and is thus tentatively recorded as 爻 here. The author of this paper interprets the meaning of 亾爻矣 s-u-si as “nature” or “innate quality”. A detailed account of this interpretative analysis will be elaborated in subsequent articles.

<sup>10</sup> Emperor Xiao zhang 孝章皇帝 refers to Yelü Zongzhen 耶律宗真, Emperor Xing zong of Liao 遼興宗.

<sup>11</sup> Emperor Rensheng 仁聖皇帝 refers to Yelü Hongji, Emperor Daozong of Liao 遼道宗.

In the Khitan small script epitaph Zhong, the term **中凡全** bir-g-s — a form derived from **中凡** bir-g with the suffix **全** s — appears as a word denoting personalities. Hereinafter, we shall examine the meaning of this term within the context of sentences in Khitan small script.

1. **凡矣尙 小尙 又 朮尙当** **中凡全** 业丙左当 列帀立半 王半 (Dao 16)

g-úr-en ui-en GREAT ci-mu-én bir-g-s p-23-ra-én hu-od-ha-ai pa-ar

国之 事之 大 懇

Country's affair great upright and sincere

**凡矣尙 小尙** g-úr-en ui-en signifies “the affairs of the state (country)”. **又** translates to “great”, while the subsequent terms—**朮尙当** ci-mu-én, **中凡全** bir-g-s, **业丙左当** p-23-ra-én, **列帀立半** hu-od-ha-ai, and **王半** pa-ar—all denote personal qualities. In this context, the author argues that **朮尙当** ci-mu-én and the aforementioned **朮化当** ci-ri-én (**朮化** ci-ri-er) are variant forms of the same word, and they regularly co-occur with **中凡全** bir-g-s (**中凡** bir-g). Moreover, **中凡全** bir-g-s corresponds to the Chinese character **愇** que, which conveys the meaning of “upright and sincere”.

2. **朮关忝公尙伏半几尺必为半尺矣见公关与** **朮关忝公帀立半** 公司夷庄令 万文左及  
ci-i-is-d-b-ñ ai ku-û-un a-ai u-úr sh-111-i-én<sub>2</sub> ci-i-is d-od-ha-ar n-iuk-úr MANAGE-t y-ie-ra-u  
孝 父 人 之 親 友 知 興<sup>12</sup>  
filial piety father man's relative friend manage prosperous

**公半朮与 丙公 令欠为冬 亦与** **中凡全** (Zhong 28)

n-ai-ci-én<sub>2</sub> em-er t-qó-a-as ün-én<sub>2</sub> bir-g-s

悌 懇

brotherly respect upright and sincere

Among the already deciphered words in this sentence, there are **朮关忝公尙伏** ci-i-is-d-b-ñ “filial piety” and **公半朮与** n-ai-ci-én<sub>2</sub> “brotherly respect” which denote personalities, each of which echoed by corresponding words such as **半** ai “father”, **朮关忝** ci-i-is “relative” and **公司夷** n-iuk-úr “friend”. In this context, interpreting **中凡全** bir-g-s here as **愇** que—a term representing the personalities of being upright and sincere—stands to reason.

<sup>12</sup> As recorded in Liao Shi·Guoyu Jie 《遼史·國語解》 [Explanations of National Languages in the History of Liao], Yeluwan Xingwang ye 耶魯碗興旺也 “Yeluwan signifies prosperity”. The author interprets **万文左及** y-ie-ra-u as xing 興 “prosperous” based on its pronunciation.

3. 才左令住公北 **中九全** 柏及当公牛牛车几长乃梦符伏业只化几层爻为 (Zhong 31)  
 ia-ra t-mu-d-li<sub>2</sub> bir-g-s ci-u-én-er l-iau-ra ku-su es 292-b-ñ p-û-ud ku MANAGE-u-ji<sub>2</sub>  
 懿 未 人 知  
 upright and sincere not man manage

Too few words in this sentence have been deciphered, making it impossible to determine whether the interpretation of **中九全** bir-g-s as 懿 que “upright and sincere” in this context is reasonable.

4. 九尖志 佃关牛爻类 北灯州 令欠为毛列艾升及内乃百万化关才左夷爻  
 g-ui ong sui-i s-u-si 77-po-ucu t-qó-a nem hu-aju-ó-o-ón es y-eu-ud-i ia-ra 50-u  
 國王 生性 篤 一 非  
 Prince born personality earnest one not

列赤赤 全金丙 令交爻及 令住公北 **中九全** 兮公舟牛爻化关令九关 (Zhong 35)  
 hu-she-e<sub>2</sub> d-em<sub>2</sub>-y t-gú-ji<sub>2</sub>-ir<sub>2</sub> t-mu-d-li<sub>2</sub> bir-g-s dor-d-b-iú-er har<sub>3</sub>-ri-i t-or-i  
 封  
 confer

In this sentence, **九尖** g-ui **志** ong is a transliteration of the Chinese term 國王 guo wang, which means “prince” here. **佃关** sui-i denotes “to be born” while **牛爻类** s-u-si signifies “nature” or “inborn disposition”. What follows **牛爻类** s-u-si is a description of the epitaph owner’s personalities, with the deciphered term **北灯州** 77-po-ucu corresponding to 篤 du, meaning “earnest” or “devout”. Drawing on a close examination of already-published epitaphs in Khitan small script, it is plausible that the subsequent terms **中九全** bir-g-s, **兮公舟牛爻** dor-d-b-iú-er, and **化关** har<sub>3</sub>-ri-i also refer to personal qualities. **中九全** bir-g-s interpreted as 懿 que “upright and sincere” in this context is reasonable.

5. 孝关赤公舟伏禹百万交平列天穴见金交包百孝有尤爻 **中九全** 业列艾万爻关  
 ci-i-is-d-b-ñ jau y-au-ul-hu-an nai sh-em<sub>2</sub>-qú gor em-ci-en om-úr bir-g-s áng hu-aju y-ie-i  
 孝 百 道之 首 善 三 道之 元 懿  
 filial piety hundred virtues’ foremost kindness three cardinal guides origin upright and sincere  
 □**爻** **九** **全** (Zhi 7)  
 □-au-ô<sub>2</sub>-úr-ir<sub>2</sub>

In this sentence, the phrase 𣎵关忝公付伏 𠩺百刃平列夹穴 ci-i-is-d-b-ñ jau y-au-ul-hu-an nai translates to “Filial piety is the foremost of all virtues,” while 𠩺金夾包百𣎵付尤夾 sh-em<sub>2</sub>-qú gor em-ci-en om-úr corresponds to “Kindness is the origin of the three cardinal guides.” These expressions depict two of the epitaph owner’s personalities: filial piety and kindness. The subsequent sentence, beginning with 𠩺九全 bir-g-s—a term denoting yet another of the owner’s character traits—follows the same structural pattern, serving as a parallel description of the personalities. In this context, interpreting 𠩺九全 bir-g-s as 懿 que, meaning “upright and sincere” is reasonable.

6. 困公付全內欠夾付	𣎵化当公	不𣎵平付才金平付	付伏
bod-er 231 s-ón-qó-dz-ci	u-un	bir-g-s	ci-ri-én d-ju-ir-er
身以		懿	德?
body		upright and sincere	virtue
			luck

付百内当公 (Xian 19)

b-23-ra-én-er

忠<sup>13</sup>

loyalty

In this sentence, starting from 𠩺九全 bir-g-s, the terms such as 𣎵化当 ci-ri-én, 公丙刃公 d-ju-ir-er, 不𣎵 xa-she, 平付 ul-en, 才金平 ia-LUCK<sub>2</sub>-ai, 付伏 342-b-ñ, and 付百内当公 b-23-ra-én-er may all refer to a person’s moral characters. Among them, 公丙刃公 d-ju-ir-er may corresponds to 德 “virtue”, 才金平 ia-LUCK<sub>2</sub>-ai to 福 fu “luck” and 付百内当公 b-23-ra-én-er to 忠 zhong “loyalty”. Here, 𠩺九全 bir-g-s, which can be interpreted as “upright and sincere”, like in the previous examples, appears together with 𣎵化当 ci-ri-én, indicating moral character.

7. 全杏天关穴可公半杏方及全各付肉付及及子夫又列业矢	苗中	𣎵九全	𣎵天当
s-uni DAY-i nai bai-d-l-ge <sub>2</sub> -al-ir s-eng-un	305-en o-o-l <sub>2</sub>	116-xua hu-áng-de	343-bir bir-g-s ci-ir <sub>2</sub> -én
夜 日 官		詳穩	懿
Night day officer		Xiangwen	upright and sincere

<sup>13</sup> Sulongga. (2021). xīnfāxiàn qìdān dàzì xiāo chéngē biéxū mùzhímíng yánjiū [A study on newly found Epitaph of Xiao Chenge Biexu in Khitan large script]. Nèi Měnggǔ Dàxué [Inner Mongolia University].

罗北公百女艾全至半列业农其劣业及子符又百孙半六尖化公又扎矢九平尺尖  
na<sub>1</sub>-li<sub>2</sub>-ge-y SIX MONTH-s giu-ai hu-áng-ci sī tu p-o-l<sub>2</sub>-b-ir y-lu<sub>3</sub> ai h-ui-ri-ge-ir or-de tou-ul-û-ui

六月任 司徒 成 半 年 至  
Six months be Situ became half year reached

公关勾令劣主业及全 (Xiang 24)

n-i-gu t-le kei p-o-ri<sub>5</sub>

女古 南 勉 成為

Nügu southern Ke became

This sentence describes the promotion of the epitaph's owner. In this part, 列业农 hu-áng-de may mean “on the frontier”; 酉中 343-bir, 中九全 bir-g-s, and 衣爻当 ci-ir<sub>2</sub>-én should be three terms referring to moral characters; 罗北公百 na1-li<sub>2</sub>-ge-y is presumably a verb; 女艾全 SIX MONTH-s denotes “six months”; 至半 giu-ai means “to take up the post”; 列业农 其劣 hu-áng-ci sī tu may refer to “Frontier Situ”; and 业及子符又 p-o-l-b-ir indicates “to become”. This part can thus be interpreted as “The Xiangwen (a official title) conducted himself (in such a manner) on the frontier; after serving for six months, he was promoted to ‘Frontier Situ’.” The word 中九全 bir-g-s here appears together with the word 衣爻当 ci-ir<sub>2</sub>-én, which is the different spelling form of 衣化当 ci-ri-én.<sup>14</sup> In this context, interpreting 中九全 bir-g-s as “upright and sincere” is reasonable.

#### IV. Conclusion

By comparing epitaphs in Khitan small script with epitaphs in Chinese, this paper systematically summarizes, for the first time, the descriptive conventions concerning the personalities and skills of the epitaph owner in epitaphs in Khitan small script. Meanwhile, through the comparison between epitaphs in Chinese and epitaphs in Khitan small script, it attempts to interpret the term 中九全 bir-g-s (中九 bir-g) in *Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong* in Khitan small script, which denotes the personalities of the epitaph owner.

In the detailed interpretation of words expressing the epitaph owner's personalities in Khitan small script epitaphs, the study finds that 衣化当, 衣仕当, and 衣爻当 are actually different spellings of the same word. The glyph 衣, 仕, and 爻 have similar

<sup>14</sup> Both 爻 and 𠥑 are pronounced ri and are often used interchangeably in the spelling of Khitan small script.

pronunciation ri. In addition, it is concluded that 𠂔𠂔 s-u-si means “nature” or “innate quality” and is often placed before words expressing personalities.

There are altogether ten words expressing the epitaph owner's personalities in the *Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong*, namely 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, 𠂔𠂔, and 𠂔𠂔. Among them, four words—*𠂔𠂔*, *𠂔𠂔*, *𠂔𠂔*, and *𠂔𠂔*—have been interpreted. This paper interprets *𠂔𠂔* as 懇 que, which means “sincere and honest”, and explores its Mongolian cognates. The author holds that *𠂔𠂔* corresponds to the Chinese character 正 zheng “upright”, *𠂔𠂔* to 恭 gong “respectful”, *𠂔𠂔* to 智 zhi “wise”, *𠂔𠂔* to 勇 yong “brave”, and *𠂔𠂔* to 賢 xian “virtuous”. As for the other five words expressing personalities in Khitan small script, their interpretation will be completed gradually in subsequent series of papers.

It can be seen from the comparison between Khitan small-script epitaphs and Chinese epitaphs that this research method can not only decipher the Khitan words that have not been interpreted in academic circles, but also clearly reveal the profound influence of the Central Plains Han culture—especially the funeral culture—on the Khitan people. Khitan-script epitaphs are basically consistent with Chinese epitaphs not only in writing methods and stylistic formats, but also in the vocabulary and stylistic norms used to evaluate and describe the deceased's personalities and skills.

This study is not only of great value to the research on Khitan scripts, but also provides precious first-hand materials for the study of exchanges, communication and integration among ethnic groups in the history of China.

## Abbreviations

### The name of the epitaph in Khitan small script

Cha: Xiao Chala Xianggong Muzhiming 蕭查刺相公墓誌銘 (Epitaph of Xiao Chala Xianggong )

Dao: Daozong Huangdi Aice 道宗皇帝哀冊 (Eulogy for Emperpr Daozong)

Tai: Gu Tai Shuzu aice 故太叔祖哀冊 (Eulogy for the Late Imperial Grand Uncle)

Xian: Xianwu Jiangjun Baligong Muzhiming 顯武將軍拔里公墓志銘 (Epitaph of General Xianwu Bali gong)

Xiang: Yelü Xiangwen Muzhi 耶律詳穩墓誌 (Epitaph of Yelü Xiangwen)

Xu: Liaoguo Xuwang Muzhi 遼國許王墓誌 (Epitaph of the Prince Xu of Liao)

Zhi: Yelü Zhixian Taiwei Muzhiming 耶律智先太尉墓志銘 (Epitaph of Yelü Zhixian Taiwei )

Zhong: Yue Guowang Xiaozhonggong Muzhiming 越国王蕭仲恭墓志銘 (Epitaph of Xiao Zhonggong Prince Yue)

#### The name of the epitaph in Chinese

Cha in Chinese: Xiao Chala Xianggong Muzhiming 蕭查刺相公墓誌銘 (Epitaph of Xiao Chala Xianggong in Chinese)

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