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A STUDY ON TWO GRAPHEMES IN KHITAN LARGE SCRIPT¹

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Abstract: This paper explores the Khitan large script graphemes 𐰚 mas and 𐰚 gim₂ by adopting methods such as comparative studies of Khitan large and small script. It is proposed that in Khitan language, some adjectives ending with the consonants /g/ or /d/ use the suffix -n to express the plural meaning, which is consistent with the usage of the adjective suffix -n in Middle Mongolian. The author also observes that the Khitan large script 𐰚 gim₂ and its corresponding Khitan small script 𐰚 𐰚 g-m can be used as ethnic words in addition to representing the Chinese loanword “jin (金)”.

Key words: Khitan large script, Khitan small script, grapheme

I. Introduction

Since 1935, when Yamashita Taizō discovered and published the first Khitan large script material, The *Jing'an Temple Stele* 大辽大横帐兰陵郡夫人建静安寺碑, the research on Khitan large script has begun. After entering the new century, the research on Khitan large script has made remarkable achievements, and the comparative study of Khitan large and small script has become more prosperous. However, there are still many problems in the research on the form, pronunciation and meaning of Khitan large script. Scholars hold different opinions on the interpretation of the pronunciation and meaning of some Khitan large script words, which need further verification.

Therefore, this paper discusses the graphemes 𐰚 mas and 𐰚 gim₂ in Khitan large script and analyzes their usage, aiming to contribute its modest efforts to improving the interpretation level of Khitan script on the basis of previous studies.

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II. 𐰚 mas

An analysis of the usage and phonetic reconstruction of this grapheme shows that it appears in words such as 𐰚 𐰣 (𐰚 𐰣, 𐰚 𐰣)⁴ mas-qó (Liu 5), 𐰚 𐰤 mas-qú (Xi 7), 𐰚 𐰣 𐰤 mas-qó-ñ₂ (Gong 22), and 𐰚 𐰥 mas-□ (Chang 26).

The discussion shall first focus on the commonly occurring words 𐰚 𐰣 mas-qó and 𐰚 𐰤 mas-qú.

Regarding the two words 𐰚 𐰣 mas-qó and 𐰚 𐰤 mas-qú, Liu Fengzhu (2014: p432) interprets their meanings as “the first one, the eldest” and points out that the former is exclusively used for males, while the latter is specially for females.


Academic circles have long discussed the expressions of “the first, the eldest” in Khitan small script. Wang Hongli (1986: 66) proposes that 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qu (𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qó) and 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ô-qú mean “the chief, the first”. Aisin Gioro Ulhicun (2004c) suggests that 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-s₂-qó denotes “the chief, the first”. Aisin Gioro Ulhicun (2003) points out that 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qu is the masculine singular form, and 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ô-qú is the feminine singular form. Wu Yingzhe (2007a: 171) indicates that in Khitan small script, the expressions for the masculine “the first, the eldest” include 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qu, 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qó, and 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-s₂-qó; those for the feminine “the first, the eldest” are 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ô-qú and 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ui-qú. Moreover, in Wu Yingzhe (2022: 119), a further analysis of the meanings of these words is conducted. He proposes that the suffixes 𐰥 qó, 𐰥 qu, and 𐰥 qú in these words are adjective suffixes. By referring to Middle Mongolian, he judges that these words are the adjective forms of “great” 𐰚 𐰥 m-o, rather than the ordinal form of “one”, and their meanings should be “the eldest” instead of “the first”.

Liu Fengzhu (2014: 393) assumes that the Khitan large script 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-si-qú means “the eldest”, while Jiruhe (2017: 140) further proposes that the Khitan large script 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-si-qú is equivalent to the Khitan small script 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qú, that is, it denotes the feminine “the eldest”.

On the basis of previous studies, Qilimu'er (2019: 51) holds that in Khitan small script, the expressions for the masculine “the eldest” include 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qu, 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qó, 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-s₂-qó, and 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-hu; those for the feminine “the eldest” are 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ui-qú, 𐰚 𐰥 𐰥 m-ô-qú, and 𐰚 𐰤 𐰥 m-as-qú. She also points out that the large script grapheme 𐰚 mas is used in both masculine and feminine words. In Khitan small script, however, the only stem that appears in both masculine and feminine words meaning “the eldest” is 𐰚 𐰤 m-as. Based on this, she infers that the Khitan large script 𐰚 mas is equivalent to the Khitan small script 𐰚 𐰤 m-as with the pronunciation of /mas/.

⁴ The characters 𐰣, 𐰣, and 𐰣 are variant characters.

Nevertheless, Sulongga (2021: p30) sorts out the research on words such as “great” and “the eldest” in Khitan large and small script, and points out that the word appearing in the 5th line of Hui is not 𐰇𐰺𐰍 m-as-qú but 𐰇𐰏𐰍 m-ui-qú⁵. Therefore, the word 𐰇𐰺𐰍 m-as-qú does not exist in the existing Khitan small script. As a result, the premises on which the conclusions of Jiruhe (2017) and Qilimu’er (2019) are based have changed and need to be re-examined.

After reviewing the aforementioned studies and conducting a re-examination, this study verified that the word appearing in Hui 5 is , which seems to differ from both 𐰽𐰺𐰍 m-as-qú and 𐰽𐰺𐰍 m-ui-qú. Therefore, we holds that further research can be conducted on the corresponding Khitan small script of the Khitan large script grapheme 𐰽 mas from other perspectives.

First, mention should be made of the number harmony in Khitan adjectives. In his paper, Ōtake Masami examined the gender and number harmony in Khitan adjectives. Building on previous knowledge that 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 m-as-qó, 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 m-as-qu, and 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 m-sz-qó denote the masculine singular “the eldest”, and 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 m-ô-qú denotes the feminine singular “the eldest”, the paper proposes that 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰏𐰤 m-as-qó-ñ is the plural form of “the eldest”.

Then we may examine the Khitan large script grapheme 𐰚mas through another word 𐰚 𐰝 𐰚 mas-qó-ñ, which appears in Gong2:

皿 匣 几 田 芥 晃 芥 工 俚 帛 丌 帛 廷 牀 亡 帛 云 祭 而 匹
 ger qa₂ mas-qó-ñ₂ sai-ñ₂-ir₂ □ □ hed □ □ y □ □ eul siauqú dai/haru-ol₂
 家 可 汗 御 医 奉
戈 传 列 (Gong 22)
 xe-te₂-i

As pointed out in Ōtake Masami’s (2016) paper mentioned above, the plural form of “the eldest” in Khitan small script, 𐰇𐰺𐰏𐰤 𐰇𐰺𐰏 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *m-as-qó-ñ*, is formed by adding the suffix 𐰇 *ñ* to the masculine “the eldest” 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *m-as-qó*. Similarly, the Khitan large script 𐰇𐰺𐰏 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *mas-qó-ñ₂* is formed by adding 𐰇 *ñ₂* to 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *mas-qó*. It is known that the Khitan large script 𐰇 *ñ₂* is equivalent to the Khitan small script 𐰇 *ñ*, which indicates that 𐰇𐰺𐰏 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *mas-qó-ñ₂* should be the form of 𐰇𐰺𐰏 *mas-qó* with the plural suffix 𐰇 *ñ*, added. From this, it can also be inferred that the Khitan large script

⁵ In previous scholars' studies, the word 又冬又 is noted to appear only in line 5 of Hui.

𐰚 𐰣 mas-qó should indeed correspond to the Khitan small script 𐰚𐰣𐰆 m-as-qó. Moreover, since the Khitan large script 𐰚 𐰣 𐰆 mas-qó-ñ₂ corresponds to the Khitan small script 𐰚𐰣𐰆𐰇 m-as-qó-ñ, which is the plural form of the adjective “the eldest”, the Khitan large script 𐰚 mas should indeed correspond to the Khitan small script 𐰚𐰆 m-as.

In addition, the author also intends to discuss the Khitan adjective suffix 伏 ñ. As mentioned above, the plural form of the adjective “the eldest” is 𐰚𐰣𐰆𐰇 m-as-qó-ñ. Besides this word, Ōtake Masami also identified some other adjectives with 伏 ñ as the plural suffix in his paper (Ōtake Masami’s 2016) , as shown in the table below:



Meaning	M a s c u l i n e singular form	Feminine singular form	Plural form
the eldest (长)	𐰚𐰣𐰆 m-as-qó 𐰚𐰣𐰇 m-as-qu 𐰚𐰆𐰇 m-s ₂ -qó	𐰚𐰆𐰇 m-ô-qú	𐰚𐰣𐰆𐰇 m-as-qó-ñ
young (少)	𐰚𐰇 uni-qu 𐰚𐰆 uni-qó	𐰚𐰇𐰆	𐰚𐰇𐰇 uni-qu-ñ 𐰚𐰆𐰇 uni-qó-ñ
previous (前、先)	𐰚𐰇𐰆 ca-203	𐰚𐰇𐰆 ci-ia-299	𐰚𐰇𐰇 ca-203-ñ
ancestor (上)	𐰚𐰇 u-ud ₃	𐰚𐰇 iú-50	𐰚𐰇𐰇 u-ud ₃ -ñ
middle (中)	𐰚𐰇 dau-dû	𐰚𐰇 d-iau-dû	𐰚𐰇𐰇 dau-dû-ñ
inner(内)	𐰚𐰇 ji-d	𐰚𐰇 284-d ₃	𐰚𐰇𐰇 ji-d-ñ
outer (外)	𐰚𐰇 p-û-ud ₃ 𐰚𐰇 b-u-ud ₃ 𐰚𐰇 b-û-ud ₃	𐰚𐰇 b-compose ₂ -50 𐰚𐰇 p-compose ₂ -50	𐰚𐰇𐰇 p-û-ud ₃ -ñ 𐰚𐰇𐰇 b-û-ud ₃ -ñ
white (白)	𐰚 siu	𐰚 siu°	𐰚𐰇 siu-ñ
south (南)	𐰚 t-le		𐰚𐰇 t-le-ñ

Based on the above table, the following conclusions can be drawn: ① Adjectives in Khitan language strictly follow gender and number harmony. ② It can be known from their plural forms that the plural forms of adjectives are often formed by adding affixes to masculine adjectives. ③ In Khitan, it is quite common to add the suffix -n (伏 ñ) after adjectives to express the plural meaning.

In the research on Middle Mongolian, there has been controversy in academic circles regarding the usage and meaning of the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian, particularly over whether it expresses plural meaning. Some scholars, such as A.Вобровников,

A.Д.Руднев and Choijinjab 确精扎布, argue that the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian can indicate plural meaning. However, other scholars like Санжеев Г.Д. hold that the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian does not convey plural meaning (Gardi 嘎日迪2022).

Choijinjab 确精扎布(2022) statistically analyzed the usage of the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian and concluded that “in Middle Mongolian, the noun suffix -n had already begun to gradually lose its plural meaning, but the -n suffix at the end of some adjectives (-tu/-tai/-tan⁶; -duta'n/-duta'ui/-duta'un⁷; -qu/-qui/-qun⁸) still retained the plural meaning.”

It is mentioned in Hasbagan 哈斯巴干 (1996: 200) that in the number harmony of Middle Mongolian adjectives, some adjectives ending with -qu/-gü would take the suffix -n when forming their plural forms. For example:  ma'ün kö'üd;  šili'ün berinet ökid, etc.

In the above examples of Khitan small script, the glyph 欠 qó (余 qu) at the end of the adjectives 又冬欠 m-as-qó and 杏欠uni-qó (杏余uni-qu) are pronounced as /g~gu/ and /g~gə/, which is close to the pronunciation of the Mongolian suffix -qu. Moreover, the glyph at the end of adjectives such as 又化 u-ud₃, 又分 dau-dû, 弱分 ji-d, 止又化 p-û-ud₃, 丹又化 b-u-ud₃, and 丹又化b-û-ud₃ all contain the consonant d, which is similar to the pronunciation of the Middle Mongolian suffix -tu. When these adjectives are transformed into their plural forms, the suffix -n is often added at the end, which is consistent with the phenomenon in Middle Mongolian where -tu corresponds to -tan and -qu corresponds to -qun.

In other words, according to current research findings, Khitan belongs to the Mongolic languages and should retain the characteristics of Early Mongolian. Therefore, the fact that Khitan expresses the plural meaning of adjectives by adding the suffix -n can also indirectly prove that the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian can convey the plural meaning.

To sum up, the large script grapheme 𐰚mas often appears in the two words 𐰚 𐰢mas-qó and 𐰚 𐰢𐰣mas-qú, which denote “the eldest”, and also in the word 𐰚 𐰢 𐰣mas-qó-ñ₂. The Khitan large script 𐰚 𐰢 𐰣mas-qó-ñ₂ is equivalent to the Khitan small script 又冬欠伏 m-as-qó-ñ, serving as the plural form of the adjective “the eldest”. The large script grapheme 𐰚mas corresponds to the Khitan small script 又冬

⁶ In Middle Mongolian, -tu/-tai/-tan are a set of adjectival suffixes. Among them, -tu is the masculine singular form, -tai is the feminine singular form, and -tan is the plural form.

⁷ In Middle Mongolian, -duta'n/-duta'ui/-duta'un are a set of adjectival suffixes. Among them, -duta'n is the masculine singular form, -duta'ui is the feminine singular form, and -duta'un is the plural form.

⁸ In Middle Mongolian, -qu/-qui/-qun are a set of adjectival suffixes. Among them, -qu is the masculine singular form, -qui is the feminine singular form, and -qun is the plural form.

m-as, so 𐰚mas can indeed be reconstructed with the pronunciation mas.

In addition, building on previous studies, the author further proposes that some adjectives in Khitan with consonants /g/ or /d/ at the end often take the suffix -n when forming their plural forms, which is consistent with the number harmony phenomenon of adjectives in Middle Mongolian. There has been controversy in Middle Mongolian research over whether the suffix -n expresses plural meaning. The phenomenon that Khitan adjectives take the suffix -n to indicate plural meaning may provide some collateral evidence for the view that the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian can convey plural meaning.

III. 𐰚 gim₂

This grapheme appears in two forms, 𐰚 and 𐰚, in inscriptions. The difference between these two forms lies in the distinction between a “dot” and a “horizontal stroke”. Such a difference between dots and horizontal strokes is one of the common causes of variant characters in Khitan large script, as seen in pairs like 𐰚 and 𐰚, 𐰚 and 𐰚, 𐰚 and 𐰚, etc.

Judging from the usage of this large script grapheme, it mostly appears in Chinese loanwords denoting official titles, representing “Jin(金)”⁹, such as: 𐰚 吾 初 生 将 景 脊 gim₂ ngiú □ tud-ang siang gūn₂-en 金吾卫上将军之 (Chang 9), 𐰚 𐰚 昇 先 𐰚 gim₂ cieu-un tuqó₂ shī₂ 金州之度使 (Chang 16), 𐰚 𐰚 吾 so gim₂ ngiú 左金吾 (Pao 7), 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 gim₂ sī cauang lu₂ tai pu 金紫崇禄太傅 (Ming 20), 𐰚 子 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 gim₂ zī cau-ang lu₂ dai₂ pu 金紫崇禄大夫 (Qi 2), etc.

In addition, apart from Chinese loanwords denoting official titles, the large script grapheme 𐰚 gim₂ also appears in the following examples:

(1) 山 脊 何 □ 王 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 (Chen 27)

har₂-en qa-□ ong min gim₂-i gim₂ ô-pu₂

山之 王 墓

(2) 山 脊 何 安 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 𐰚 (Zhun 34)

har₂-en qa-□ six □ na-as-beñ gim₂-de ô-pu₂

山之 安息

Judging from the context and their positions, in the two examples mentioned above, 𐰚 gim₂ and 𐰚 𐰚 gim₂-de seem to appear in the content related to funeral

⁹ The view was first put forward by Liu Fengzhu (1996).

affairs. The Khitan large script 𐰇 gim₂ is equivalent to the Khitan small script 𐰪 𐰺 g-m¹⁰. By consulting Khitan small script documents, it can be found that the Khitan small script 𐰪 𐰺 g-m, similar to the Khitan large script 𐰇 gim₂ in usage, not only appears in Chinese loanwords denoting official titles but also in the part describing funeral matters:

- (1) 今有 **凡爻** 今艾 伏欠闲 今泰泰来 公公帀有 公左 伏中只火 及子立丰
s-en g-m t-aju ñ-qó-du₂ t-ge₂-e₂-ci n-ô-od-en n-ra ñ-l-û-ui o-l₂-ha-ai
阿信 穴于 故 配偶之 墓 启 闭?
力冬立为出 方 叔比只弱(Zhi 21-22)
na-as-ha-a-án dor k-li₂-û-ji
祔 礼 谓
(2) 爻当 火今有 今爻泰金 辰 今丙刃 **凡爻** 今火 伏余闲 火 方中立为丰
ir₂-én h-s-en t-ir₂-ge-em₂ har₃ t-iu-ir g-m t-ud ñ-qu-du₂ ui al-l-ha-a-ar
今 山 穴于 事
凡火 来火 为安 为丰(Tu 17)
g-ung ci-iú deu-úr a-ar
公 主 同
(3) 艾欠化 为方列 爻泰中今 辰有 **凡爻** 弱有 爻来来 因中泰来
aju-uh-ud₃ a-al-hu ir₂-ge₂-l-s har₃-en g-m ji-en sh-an-ci bod-l-e₂-ci
诸翁 山之 中
爻雨 曲令 穴立丰 及子为艾(Qing 20)
m-in go-t da₃-ha-ar o-l₂-a-aju
墓 室 掩闭
(4) □□□□ □□ **凡爻** 弱有 空火 伏余子 □ □□(Hui29)
g-m ji-en d-ud ñ-qu-l₂
金 中 穴

¹⁰ The view was first put forward by Liu Fengzhu & Wang Yunlong (2004).

From the above examples, it can be seen that the Khitan large script 𐰇gim₂ and the Khitan small script 𐰇𐰏 g-m, in addition to representing the Chinese loanword “jin (金)”, may have other meanings and should be able to be used as ethnic words.

IV. Conclusion

This study discusses the Khitan large script graphemes 𐰇 mas and 𐰇gim₂ and puts forward some own humble views: First, building on previous studies, this study proposes that in Khitan, some adjectives ending with the consonants g or d would take the suffix 𐰇 ñ when forming their plural forms. This is consistent with the case of the adjective suffix -n in Middle Mongolian, and such a phenomenon may provide some collateral evidence for the view that the suffix -n in Middle Mongolian can express plural meaning. In addition, this study observes that the Khitan large script 𐰇gim₂ and its corresponding Khitan small script 𐰇𐰏 g-m, apart from representing the Chinese loanword “jin (金)”, also appear in the content related to funeral affairs and can be used as ethnic words.

Abbreviations and Full Names of Khitan Large Script Materials

Liu: *Epitaph of Taishi Yelü Liuyin* in Khitan Large Script

Xi: *Epitaph of Deputy Military Governor of the Great Horizontal Tents* in Khitan Large Script

Chang: *Epitaph of Yelü Changyun Taishi* in Khitan Large Script

Gong: *Epitaph of Princess Yongning Jun* in Khitan Large Script

Pao: *Epitaph of Late Northern Chancellor Xiaogong* in Khitan Large Script

Ming: *Inscription on the Tombstone of the Late Grand Preceptor* in Khitan Large Script

Qi: *Epitaph of Yelü Qi Yuyue* in Khitan Large Script

Chen: *Epitaph of Xiao Chen'ge Biexu* in Khitan Large Script

Zhun: *Epitaph of Changgun Yelü Zhun of Great Liao* in Khitan Large Script

Abbreviations and Full Names of Khitan Small Script Materials

Zhi: *Epitaph of Yelü Zhixian Taiwei* in Khitan Small Script

Tu: *Epitaph of Tuguci Shangshu* in Khitan Small Script

Qing: *Epitaph of General Xiaotaishan and Princess Yongqing* in Khitan Small Script

Hui: *Epitaph of Xiao Huilian Langjun* in Khitan Small Script

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