


# Diplomatic Relations on the Tang Frontier: Pugu Yitu Tomb Inscription

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## Abstract

The Tang period (618–907) stands out as one of the most important chapters of the history of early Inner Asia, where bilateral diplomatic interactions on the Chinese – Inner Asian frontier reached a high point. Since its establishment, the Tang pursued close relations with the neighboring Türk Qaghanate and various other Turkic and Mongolic speaking groups in the Inner Asian steppes. These relations, sometimes friendly, other times hostile, were to a great extent recorded in the official histories, a genre of historical writing that was systematized with the establishment of Historiography Office at the Tang court. As political texts written with particular agendas, official histories present certain limitations. Recent archaeological research in both China and Inner Asia provide a different line of evidence for the study of diplomatic relations between China and Inner Asia. This paper aims to discuss the history of Pugu, a Turkic speaking Inner Asian group who had submitted to the Tang in the seventh century, through an analysis of the tomb inscription of Pugu Yitu, then leader of the Pugu, and an army general and court official of the Tang.

## Keywords

Tang, Pugu, China - Inner Asia Relations, tomb inscriptions

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The socio-political history of China cannot be thought of as separate from that of Inner Asia. Since the beginning of imperial history and the state sponsored history writing in the Central Plains of China, peoples of the northern frontier, the most familiar other, were constantly depicted within a duality driven political discourse that is rooted in the “Confucian evaluative binary views of the ‘civilized’ and ‘barbarous’ (Linduff et al. 2017: 16)”. Accordingly, “the northern frontier has always been characterized by a set of dual oppositions - between pastoral and settled people (steppe and sown), between nomadic tribes and Chinese states, between an urban civilization and a warlike uncivilized society (Di Cosmo, 2002: 2). In the official histories of various Chinese states, stereotypical euphemisms with respect to Inner Asians such as “not having fixed abode” 居無恒所, “moving in search

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of water and pasture” 隨水草流移 or “wearing hair down and buttoning robes from right to left” 被髮左衽 were oftentimes cited to perpetuate the political rhetoric that demarcated the steppe and the sown. While the discourse has been prevalent in the official histories, in reality the network of relationships between the two sides of the Great Wall was rather complex. Owen Lattimore referred to the Inner Asian frontier of China as “one of the most absolute frontiers in the history of the world” that separated the nomad from the sedentary, the pastoralist from the agriculturalist. Nevertheless, a frontier is also a meeting zone for those who are distinguished from each other via the exact same qualities that brought them together in the frontier. That is to say, China’s Inner Asian frontier did not only separate China from Inner Asia but it also served as China’s gateway into Inner Asia and vice versa. This is significantly true for the early mediaeval period where the China – Inner Asia relations reached a new phase with the Tang expansion into the north of Gobi in 647, the twenty-first year of Tang Taizong Li Shimin’s 貞觀Zhenguan reign period. Having originated from Longxi 隴西狄道 (today in Gansu province), the Li 李 family of the Tang had served for the Western Wei, Northern Zhou and finally the Sui by holding posts in the army and governance, which allowed them to closely interact with Inner Asians in various capacities (JTS 1:1). As a matter of fact, the Great Tang regime that Li Yuan 李淵 had proclaimed in 618 soon started to be credited with “the formation of an international culture ... resulting from contact with peoples and cultures outside China that were melted into a unitary whole” (Iwami, 2008: 41). The motivation behind the cosmopolitan ideal of the Tang is perhaps best expressed in Tang Taizong’s own words:

自古皆貴中華，賤夷狄。朕獨愛之如一。故其種落皆依朕如父母。

Since the ancient times, all [emperors] valued the [Chinese] *Zhonghua* [but] looked down on the [northern barbarians] *Yi Di*. Only I viewed them equally. That is the reason why they look upon me as their parent (ZZTJ 198: 6247; Pan, 1997: 182).

The *Yi Di* that Tang Taizong mentions here are categorical names for Inner Asians that we come across frequently in the Chinese sources, which from time to time refer to various Oghuz tribes and others under the Türk rule in the Mongolian Plateau. In the year 627, having been struck by a harsh winter and a subsequent famine, the Ashinas ruling elites of the Türk Qaghanate lost control of the region and the subject Oghuz tribes. Thereupon, the Uighur 回紇, Pugu 僕固, and other political groups in the Mongolian Plateau allied themselves to Tang Taizong, whom they called 天可汗 *Teŋri Qaghan* (XTS 2:31), to revolt against the Ashinas under the leadership of Sir Tarduš 薛延陀. For about three years until the defeat of the Türk 頡利 *Illig Qaghan* by the Tang forces, the Sir Tarduš maintained their rule in the north of Gobi in a nominally vassal position vis-à-vis the Tang, and subsequently exerted control over the entire Mongolian Plateau. In 646, though, thirteen Oghuz tribes led by the Uighurs sent an envoy with the following message to the Tang to complain about the Sir Tarduš rule, and to fully submit to the Tang:

延陀不侍大國，以自取亡，其下駭鳥散，不知所知。今各有分地，願歸命天子，請置唐官。

[Xue] Yantuo (Sir Tarduš) did not serve the great state. They destroyed themselves. They were scared like scattered flocks of birds. They did not know what to do. Today, each has their own land. We came to the Son of Heaven to ask for Tang offices (XTS 217A: 6112).

As a response to this message, the Tang court did not lose much time to annex these Oghuz tribes into the Tang governance via semi-autonomous administrative regions called *jimifuzhou* (羈縻府州). Jimi units were divided into command areas (*dudufu*, 都督府), prefectures (*zhou*, 州), and counties (*xian*, 縣). A Jimi (羈縻), or “loose reign” (Yang, 1968: 32), was a semi-autonomous

region where local rulers held their original posts but were administratively connected to the central authority of the Tang government (Liu, 1998: 17–24). In the twenty-first year of Zhenguan (647) the Tang established six command areas and seven prefectures to place the thirteen Oghuz tribes in. The command areas and the tribes located in each one are as follows: Uighurs in Hanhai 瀚海, Telengüt 多濫葛 in Yanran 燕然, Pugu in Jinwei 金微, Bayarqu 拔野古 in Youling 幽陵, Tongra 同羅 in Guilin 龜林, Sigit 思結 in Lushan 廬山 (THY 73, 1312). In this same year, the Tang also opened a road from Chang'an in China into Qarabalgasun in Mongolia to facilitate trade and transportation per Uighurs' request. The name given to this road was quite representative of the new turn of diplomatic relations in the region: 參天可汗道 The Road to Pay Respect to Tenri Qaghan (ibid). Sixty-six stations were constructed along the road to maintain security of the road and provide food and lodging for the passengers, a majority of whom were either merchants or tribute missions. It is recorded that among all the things that an envoy travelling along the Tenri Qaghan Road could purchase, horses, meat and wine were the most popular ones (XTS 217A: 6113).<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that the road has contributed a great deal to the advancement of tributary relations between the Tang and the newly established Oghuz loose-reigns in the steppes (Moriyasu, 2018: 289).

Tribute is a form of diplomatic relations established between two regimes, sometimes but not necessarily always, standing in a hierarchical position vis-à-vis each other. Tribute is the total of material goods or money paid for showing respect or subordination to a powerful group or state. The traditional view suggests that tributary relations originate from a concern for security and the desire to limit Inner Asian raids for plunder in the frontier area to protect the inner regions. Although security was an important reason that strengthened China's tributary ideology, it should be kept in mind that tribute can also imply an alliance made between multiple parties to secure trade agreements. Economic relations secured through tribute routes were also a considerable aspect of China's Inner Asia policy. Chinese courts were rich and prosperous, yet there were plenty of materials that could not be produced within China. Horse and fur were among the commodities that Chinese courts depended on from Inner Asians (see Beckwith, 1991). As Denis Sinor (1990:10) elaborates "with the horse, the steppe-nomads possessed not only a commodity which was not only of steady use-value and high, though fluctuating, exchange-value, but which was also indispensable in war". Although Chinese people were also capable of breeding horses, they needed Inner Asians' help for getting powerful and fast horses.

Diplomatic relations across the Inner Asian frontiers of China have been facilitated through a variety of policies from the early dynastic history of China onwards. One such policy is *heqin* 和親 (lit. peace – kinship), a form of marriage alliance, to enhance diplomatic relations, end war or to secure peace between two ruling regimes. From time to time, rulers practiced *heqin* as a preventive strategy to avoid conflicts. Establishing a *heqin* agreement with a strong external ally could occasionally bring advantage to one against their political rivals in an internal turmoil. The interactions across the frontier were not always all that peaceful. As a matter of fact, Chinese states did not see Inner Asians as a monolithic group. Peoples on the Inner Asian steppes were bound to each other through kinship and/or political ties; however, there were still dissidences or hostilities, depending on the diverse interests prevalent among them. That applies to various political actors in China, as well. Both the Chinese and Inner Asians strove to provoke conflicts on the other side to keep each other divided. For the Chinese side, this was achieved with the *yiyi zhiyi* 以夷制夷 (lit. using barbarians to subdue barbarians) policies (Rossabi, 1975, 19–20). A successful execution of this policy can be credited to the Sui Emperor Wen (581–604) who induced various forms of conflict among the Türk elites by "joining forces with those who were located far away from the Sui to attack those who were near, and by allying themselves with the weakest to attack the strongest to turn them all against each other" per the Sui official Zhangsun Sheng's suggestion (SS 51:1331).

Employing Inner Asian generals in Chinese armies to fight against fellow Inner Asians can also be seen as an extension of this policy. The equivalent of these policies on the Inner Asian side was employed by the Türk Qaghanate through employing Han to subdue Han *yihan zhihan* 以漢制漢 “employ Han to subdue Han (Lin 1988:270–272 cited in Drompp 2007: 183–184).

Historical sources provide an account of the diplomatic relations between the Tang and the Oghuz tribes under Tang overlordship in the post-Türk Mongolian Plateau to a great extent. However, Chinese official histories are political texts that were written for perusal of next generation court officials to set an example for administrative purposes. Recent archaeological research in the steppes of Inner Asia offers a key to a holistic understanding of social, historical, and economic processes in the history of the region. For the time period in question in this article, one such example comes from the Shoron Dov tomb and the enclosed tomb inscription belonging to a Pugu chieftain, Yitu, in Mongolia.

### The Pugu Yitu Inscription<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 2009, a joint research group of Mongolian and Russian archeologists led by A. Ochir from Mongolia and S. V. Danilov from Russia found a tomb dating back to the seventh century near the Shoroon Bumbagar site, in the Zaamar district of Töv province in Mongolia. The tomb was full of instruments of war, such as armors, figurines depicting humans, horses and various animals, and the Pugu Yitu tomb inscription (fig.1).



Fig. 1. Pugu Yitu Tomb Inscription.

All findings are now preserved at the Zanabazar museum in Ulaanbaatar. Tang emperor Gaozong erected the tomb inscription for the commander Pugu Yitu (仆固乙突). This stone inscription (75x75cm) consists of 28 columns; each of them contains 31 characters. As Chinese official records lack information about Pugu Yitu, the inscription fills a significant gap in terms of the history of the Pugu tribe of Oghuz. Particularly relevant is the information it provides about the lineage of Pugu Huairen, which include Pugu leaders until Huairen, the original location of the Pugu headquarters, and the main posts and duties that Pugu Yitu had undertaken in the Tang administration.

According to the inscription (see appendix 1), Pugu Yitu was born in 634. In his grandfathers' wake, he served the Tang from a very early age. Being loyal to the emperor and having adopted Chinese customs, he was highly appreciated and generously promoted. Pugu Yitu's father, Sifu<sup>3</sup> (思匍), and grandfather Qaran Bayan (歌滥拔延) also served the Tang. Yitu succeeded to his father's post and was promoted to higher positions due to his service. The New Book of Tang mentions Iri Chor Beg 乙李噶拔 as Pugu Huairen's father and Qaran Bayan as Iri Chor Beg's father (XTS 224: 6365). According to the inscription, Yitu died in 678 at the age of forty-four. Pugu Huairen died in 765 after suppressing the An Lushan rebellion. Yitu's father Si Beg is never mentioned in other sources, while the information on Huairen's lineage is also inconsistent. There is not any information about Yitu in the official histories of China however Yang Fuxue argues that one of the sixty-one statues of foreign envoys at Tang Gaozong's mausoleum, Qianling, belongs to Pugu Yitu (Yang, 2014: 80). In the biography of Pugu Huairen preserved in the Old Book of Tang, Huairen is presented as Qaran Bayan's great-grandson (曾孙), while later on he is said to be the grandson of Qaran Bayan (JTS 121: 3477–3496). When the Pugu submitted to the Tang in 647, Qaran Bayan was given the post of governor, *dudu*, of the Jinwei region (XTS 217: 6140). According to this information, Huairen and Yitu would either be cousins or simply unrelated to each other. As a matter of fact, Huairen's genealogy in the Old Book of Tang could have been constructed in order to legitimize his relation to the Tang court as a valid member of the Pugu and direct descendant of Qaran Bayan.

Yitu was buried on the northern edge of the Tuul River in the Bulgan province of Töv aimag, in Mongolia. The area is bordered by the Khogno Khan Mountain on the south, and the Zaamar Mountains on the north. Based on the information on Pugu's homeland given in Yitu's inscription, a more precise location of the Jinwei command area can therefore be identified. Previously, researchers tended to situate the Pugu in the Henti Province, nearby Onon River. The Shoron Dov tomb of Pugu Yitu changed this information (Yang, 2014: 78).

The inscription was dedicated to Yitu for his loyalty to the Tang emperor and the court, and for his accomplishments in the Tang army. Yitu's career is detailed throughout the text. Yitu's personal history contains clues and resemblances to other Inner Asian generals and officials serving various Chinese administrations. In the text, Yitu's loyalty and characteristic features are said to have been inherited from his ancestors.

If one were to peruse (relevant) historical records, one would see that every generation of this tribe has this kind of outstanding leader (who are both respectful in the steppes and loyal to the court in the south).

Acknowledgement of his loyalty and filial piety is not only given in relation to his direct ancestors; previous Inner Asian generals and officials were mentioned with similar virtues.

[Yitu's ancestors] bore a particular resemblance to Midi of the Han dynasty in their practice of filial piety.

Jin Midi (金密低, 134–86 BC) was a Han official of Xiongnu origin who had been taken to the Han court at an early age and served in high-level posts, just like Yitu later did. Midi was promoted

to several posts as he accomplished his duties, and he was awarded the Han surname “gold” (金, *jin*) as a particular honor. His story illustrates the Chinese view of Inner Asians allying with Chinese states.

Yitu’s military skills and victories are also highly valued in the inscription:

[Yitu] was a valiant boy who already demonstrated outstanding skills at archery and riding. Before he was ten years old, he was shooting birds and he was [also] praised by masters of this art.

Honorable (Yitu) marched in the front line. He directly attacked the enemies’ stronghold. He triumphed effortlessly.

After the ceremony, he joined the Tang armies both marching to the east to suppress the Mohe and to the west fighting against Tibet. He fulfilled his duty perfectly in all his activities.

The Tang government recognized his achievements and they were huge in total.

In 657, when Ashina Helu, the Ishbara Qaghan of the Western Türks revolted, Yitu served in the army that subjugated him. His effort in this war was greatly valued by the Tang emperor Gaozong, and Yitu was awarded the vice commander of the left militant guard and the titles of Dynasty-founding Duke of Linzhong County and Right Militant Guard General in Chief. He was further distinguished by being invited to participate in the Feng Shan (封禪) sacrifices in 664-665. This was a particularly notable honor as Feng Shan was the most important ritual ceremony in the political culture of Chinese states. Through these rituals the ruler proved that he had received the Mandate of Heaven and that he legitimately bore Heaven’s appointment (Wechsler, 1985: 170). Yitu fulfilled an important duty in this unique ceremony. But Yitu was not only given posts for his accomplishments. He was also awarded with land and serfs of his own:

[...] but was also given the title of the Supreme Pillar of State [and] the Dynasty-Founding Duke of Linzhong County. His provisions were equal to [the amount for which] 1000 serfs [could have provided service].

According to the inscription, Yitu swiftly rose into the higher ranks and soon attained the highest levels held by officials of Han origin. His life is presented as a success story and an example for other Inner Asians. According to official histories construed in the Chinese courts, traveler accounts, and tomb inscriptions erected for Inner Asians, the peoples of the steppes became civilized and distinguished by establishing bonds and alliances with the Chinese government. While Inner Asians became culturally civilized, they were expected to keep their naturally advanced skills in horse-riding and archery, along with characteristic features such as being fearless, fierce, and loyal, all for the benefit of the Chinese rulers. Yitu’s tomb inscription provides meaningful evidence of the image of Inner Asians in China and of the relationship established between the two sides.

## The Pugu

The Pugu were a subgroup of the Oghuz. The Oghuz were mentioned in early Chinese accounts under the names of Dingling 丁零, Dili 狄歷, Tele 特勒, *Chile* 敕勒, 直勒 *Gaoche* 高車, and Tiele 鐵勒 (Pulleyblank, 1990: 22, Duan, 1998: 35–40, Barenghi, 2018: 27). Pulleyblank (1990) refers to these groups as “the Turkish speaking people before the Turks. According to the Book of Wei, “northerners called them Chile, while the Chinese called them Gaoche or Dingling (WS 103: 2307). As a matter of fact, all of these names, except for Gaoche, are different transcriptions of the

word *tegreg*, what these peoples called themselves in their own language. Whereas Gaoche (high carts) is a Chinese rendering of this word. First in 546, then throughout the seventh century, references to Toquzoghuz appeared in the form of Jiu Xing 九姓 (Pulleyblank, 1990: 21–23). Generally, from their first administrative appearance onwards, the Turkic peoples had formed political confederations “consisting of fixed numbers of families with one being supreme and supplying the leader”.<sup>4</sup> According to Edwin Pulleyblank (1956: 42), this kind of organization was not based on a purely ethnic division as the actual composition of the unit could change due to internal political developments. Sometimes the internal conflicts gave way to certain factions of the confederation seeking assistance from an outside entity. Likewise, the Pugu, a member of the outer circle of the Oghuz/Tiele, sent a diplomatic mission to the Tang to seek assistance against the Türk in 629. The Pugu submitted to the Tang court with the other Oghuz tribes in the Fall of the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Reign of Zhenguan, the era of Tang emperor Taizong (646). Like all other chieftains in different regions, they were given the post of *dudu* (都督, supervisor-in-chief, or governor) of the Jinwei command area (ZZTJ 198: 6238–6240) and were included in the Jimi system. Qaran Bayan is cited among the chieftains who had submitted to the Tang court, and he was assigned to the Jinwei command area at this time (XTS 224A: 6365). One year after their submission to the Tang court in 646, Oghuz groups were organized into six area commands and seven prefectures (ZZTJ 198: 6238–6241). The Book of Sui (49: 1879) had counted Pugu originally among the Oghuz tribes in the north of the Tula (Tuul) River. Since then, the Pugu had been very well known for their skills in breeding horses. It is also known that they were selling horses and sending fur to the Chinese courts as tributes, like most of the Tiele tribes did.

After their submission, the Pugu served under the Tang. In 650, the Huihe and Pugu tribes aided the Tang army in a military campaign against the Ashinas Chebi Kaghan (車鼻可汗) and defeated his troops in the north of the Altai (ZZTJ 199: 6265–6266). It is at this juncture that the Pugu Yitu inscription provides additional information for the interim period of 630–680. In 685, Pugu from the Hexi region combined forces with Tongra and revolted against the Tang (ZZTJ 203: 6435). The revolt was crushed by the Tang army and the Tang government moved a number of those who were involved in the rebellion to Juyan region in today’s Inner Mongolia (Duan, 1988: 482–488). After Qapaghan Qaghan (迁善可汗) of the Eastern Türk Qaghanate rose to power, he launched a campaign against the Oghuz groups, including Pugu, which had been revolting since 707, and subdued them in 712 (Duan, 1988: 505–511). After that, there is not much information on the Pugu in official sources until the An-Shi rebellion in 755. The north-eastern frontier commander of the Tang, An Lushan, initiated a rebellion which lasted after his death in 757 until 763. Although the rebellion was finally suppressed with the help of the Uighur Qaghanate, it was considered to be a major breakdown in the Tang administration, preparing the way for the collapse of the Tang rule. During the rebellion, a general of Pugu descent, Pugu Huaïen (僕固懷恩), showed great assistance in leading the army and carried out negotiations with the Uighurs (Skaff, 2012: 275). The New Book of Tang presents a detailed biography of Pugu Huaïen and his aid in repressing An Lushan’s rebellion (XTS J224 LZ199). Although Pugu Huaïen served in the Tang army against An Lushan’s forces, he was eventually accused of betraying the Tang and executed in 765 (ZZTJ 224: 7208). Clearly, the Pugu had lost their importance as a political ally for the Tang court; yet in reward to Pugu Huaïen’s service to the Tang army, his daughter was raised by the government and allowed to live in the court after her father was executed (Skaff, 2012: 95–96).

The history of the Pugu and their interactions with the Tang court provides a significant example in Sino-Inner Asian diplomatic relations representing several patterns such as political assistance, military aid, submission, political status of the group after submission, and revolts. Compatible with their tradition, the political entities of the Inner Asian steppes preserved and valued flexibility

in their own administrative practices as well as in their bonds with the Chinese authorities. The Pugu, being a part of the Tiele Confederation, alternatively came under the rule of the Türk and the Tang due to political necessities. While sources on the history of the Pugu are limited to Chinese official histories, the Pugu Yitu tombstone found in Mongolia in 2009 provides additional information that invites us to rethink and revise our knowledge about this group.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I offered a perspective into Sino-Inner Asian interactions in the seventh-century Inner Asia through a study of the Pugu Yitu tomb inscription, with cross-references to official historical records of China. As opposed to the mainstream narrative presented in the official histories, the relations across the Great Wall have always been in the form of a diplomatic play rather than a clash of cultures. The story of Pugu Yitu reflects a pattern in regard to the political culture in between China and Inner Asia; pragmatic allegiances and shifting alliances. While Chinese states institutionalized several policies to keep Inner Asians at an arm's length, Inner Asian political leaders and marshalls, like Yitu, found their way into Chinese governance whenever they saw the advantage in it. In that sense, Pugu Yitu tomb inscription also provides an angle into diplomacy as seen from the other side of the wall.

## Notes

1. The New Book of Tang account gives the number of sixty-eight for the stations along this road. One thing that should be noted with respect to the New Book of Tang account is that it does not name the road as 參天可汗道. Instead, the name we are provided with is 參天至尊道 The Road to Pay Respect and Venerate Teṅri (Heaven). Other official histories do not mention the road with Taizong's new title, Teṅri Qaghan, either.
2. Professor Ushio Azuma has recently published a Japanese translation of the inscription in his article on 'Turkish Ulaan Khurm Mural Tomb of Mongolian Plateau', see Azuma (2013).
3. Professor Isenbike Togan brought to my attention that the second character (*fū* 匐) is used for the Türk administrative title "bek" in Tang era documents. Pulleyblank (1991) also reconstructs the Early Middle Chinese (EMC) pronunciation of the character as "buwk" or "bək". Yet the first character (*si* 思) creates a bit of an ambiguity here. As the EMC pronunciation of the character is "sɿ" or "si" (Pulleyblank, 1991), these two characters together might as well form a name, a title, or a name and a title.
4. I quote from Christopher P. Atwood's unpublished manuscript *The Tribal Mirage*, p. 5.

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## Appendix

### The Text and Translation of Pugu Yitu Tomb Inscription

大唐故右驍衛大將軍金微州都督上柱國中縣開國公僕固府君墓誌銘並序公諱乙突,朔野金山人,蓋鐵勤之別部也。原夫石紐開基,金峰列構,疏枝布葉,擁 / □塞而推雄,茂族豪宗,跨龍城而表盛。亦有日碑純孝,泣畫像於漢宮,日逐輸忠, / 委□□於鑾邳。求諸史謀,代有人焉。祖歌濫拔延,皇朝左武衛大將軍、金 / 微州都督。父思匄,繼襲金微州都督。並志識開敏,早歸皇化,覘風請謁,匪 / 獨美於奇肱,候日虔誠,本自知於稽顙。公幼而驍勇,便習馳射,彎弧挺妙,得自乘 / 羊之年,矯箭抽奇,見賞射雕之手及父歿傳嗣,遂授本部都督,統率部落,遵奉 / 聲教回首面內,傾心盡節俄以賀魯背誕,方事長羈,爰命熊羆之軍克剿犬羊之 / 眾。公迺先鳴制勝,直踐寇庭,無勞拔幟之謀,即取塞旗之效。策勳敘績,方寵懋官, / 詔授右武衛郎將,尋授護軍,封林中縣開國子,俄除左武衛大將軍。至麟德二年,鑾駕將巡岱岳,既言從塞北,非有滯周南,遂以汗馬之勞,預奉射牛之禮。服既榮 / 於飾玉,職且貴於銜珠,厚秩載隆,貞心逾勵。及東征鞞鞞,西討吐蕃,

並效忠勤，亟 / 摧凶醜。哀錄功績，前後居多，尋除右驍衛大將軍，依舊都督，加上柱國，林中縣開 / 國公，食邑一千戶。頻加寵授，載踐崇班，邁彼氈裘之鄉，參茲纓冕之列。光膺啟國，既錫茅土。之封，趨步升朝，且曳桃花之綬。方謂高情壯志，媿金石而同堅， / 豈圖脆質小年，與風露而俱殞。奄辭白日，長歸玄夜以儀鳳三年二月廿九日遘 / 疾，終於部落。春秋卅有四。 / 天子悼惜久之，敕朝散大夫、守都水使者天山郡開國公麴昭，監護弔祭， / 賻物三百段，錦袍、金裝帶、弓箭、胡祿鞍、韉等各一具，凡厥喪葬，並令官給，并為立 / 碑。即以其年歲次戊寅八月九日朔十八日壬寅，永窆於顯礪原，禮也。生死長乖， / 哀榮畢備，深沉苦霧，方結慘於松塋，颺[風+日]悲風，獨含悽於薤鐸。

對祁連而可像，寄口勒而有詞，述德表功，迺為銘曰： /

西峙蔥山，北臨蒲海，土風是繫，英傑攸在。

葉貫箭鋒，花分騎彩，孫謀有裕，祖襲無改。

束髮來儀，腰鞬入侍，天德斯溥，人胥以洎。

獻款畢同，輸忠靡異，臨危效節，致果為毅。

疇庸啟邑，疏爵命官，從軍擁旆，拜將登壇。

赫弈光顯，榮名可觀，方奉明時，遽歸幽窆。

壯志何在，瓌容共惜，鶴隴俄封，雞田罷跡。

月落無曉，雲來自昏，鳥切響於鴻塞，人銜悲於雁門，庶清塵而不泯，紀玄石而長存。

On the epitaph of the Former Right General-in-chief, the Governor of the Jinwei Prefecture Command Area of the Great Tang, the Supreme Pillar of the State, the dynasty-founding Duke of Linzhong County, the Lord of the administration of Pugu, the Honorable late (personally named) Yitu.

[Yitu] is from the Altai Mountains on the northern steppes. His tribe belongs to a faction of the Tiele.

His ancestors established themselves in Shiniu. They were elected (as the chief) in the gathering (which was held) at the top of the Altai. After the death of the founding ancestors, the prosperity of the clan persisted; they maintained their authority in the northern frontier, gathered (at)... And their power was maintained across the Inner Asian and Northern steppes.

They bore a particular resemblance to Midi of the Han dynasty in their practice of filial piety, they emulated their manners, they came to the south and served at the Han court. He was commended to the emperor for his loyalty. He 委□□ to the emperor.

If one were to peruse (relevant) historical records, one would see that every generation of this tribe has this kind of outstanding leaders (who are both respectful in the steppes and loyal to the court in the south).

His grandfather Gelan Bayan was the Left Guard General-in-chief at the imperial court and the supervisor in chief of the Jinwei region. After his grandfather's death, his father Si Beg (also) inherited the post of Governor in the Jinwei Command Area. Both (of them) were skillful in administration, both were very wise; both submitted to the Tang with continuing loyalty. They immediately subjected themselves to the benevolent rule of the Emperor. Following the auspicious wind [i.e., taking the right path] they pledged their allegiance to the emperor. Northerners as they were, they demonstrated exceeding loyalty to the Emperor and they fulfilled their duties with much success.

He was a valiant boy who already demonstrated outstanding skills at archery and riding. Before he was ten years old, he was shooting birds and he was (also) praised by masters of these arts.

After his father's death, he inherited his post and he was given the title of Governor of the region. He was the chief of his tribe. He always obeyed the imperial orders and showed his loyalty to the Tang court.

Not long after his inheritance of the post, [Ashina] Helu revolted. The [Tang] court sent military forces to suppress the revolt. The [Tang] army was like bears; the rebels were like dogs and sheep. Yitu joined the [Tang] army,

And the Honorable [Yitu] marched on the front line. He directly attacked the enemies' stronghold. He triumphed effortlessly.

On his return, the emperor distinguished him. The Tang court appreciated his victory and appointed him to be the Vice-commander of the Right Militant Guard. Soon, the emperor rewarded him with the titles of Dynasty-Founding Duke of the Linzhong county and of General-in-chief of the Right Militant Guard.

When the Imperial Carriage went on a [royal] tour to Daiyue [Mount Tai] in the second year of Linde [Reign year of Tang Gaozong, 664 – 665], he came to Zhounan [Luoyang] from the northern frontier. Because of his merits at war, [he was granted the opportunity] to participate in the ceremony of offering oxen [sacrificed] by shooting [arrows].

[During the ceremony] he wore the [ceremonial] dress ornamented with jade and undertook a very important duty. The emperor showed him benevolent generosity in recognition of his wholehearted devotion. He was honored with an important and honorable position in the ceremony.

After the ceremony, he joined the Tang armies both marching to the East to suppress the Mohe and to the West fighting against Tibet. He fulfilled his duty perfectly in all his activities.

[The Tang] government recognized his achievements and they were huge in total. In order to reward his significant achievements, he was not only given the title of General-in-chief of the Right Guard but was also appointed as the Supreme Pillar of the State [and] Dynasty-founding Duke of the Linzhong county. His provisions were equal to (the amount for which) 1000 serfs (could have provided service).

The emperor favored him and he was promoted fast. He rose through the ranks so quickly that there was no one else at his position. He finally became as important as the other (high position) court officials.

He was rewarded with the title of Dynasty Founding Duke of Qiguo (along) with [being allocated] fief. He rose to [higher] posts in the court.

[We hoped that] people like him, whose strength was comparable to that of metal and rock, would live long. [We never expected] such a person to pass away like the blowing wind or like the dew (falling off of the leaves). In the end he bade a farewell to the daylight and passed into the dark night for good.

He fell ill on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Yifeng reign (678). He died amongst his people at the age of 44.

The Son of Heaven mourned his death for a long time. He ordered Quzhao, the Grand Master for Closing Court, the Commissioner of the Waterways, the Dynasty- Founding Duke of Tianshan Prefecture, to organize and lead the funerary rites. He (Quzhao) brought (the emperor's gifts which are) 300 rolls (of silk) to the funeral. (The emperor) gave a silk embroidered dress, a golden belt, a bow and arrow, a bow case, a saddle, and a blanket for covering the saddle (to be buried with the deceased).

His funeral and his grave were provided by the court. A tombstone (with an inscription) was erected on his tomb.

The first day of this month [in 678], from the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of Wuyin year until RenYin (year), (for almost) eighteen days, his body was buried in Jielun plateau [in Bulgan aimag] according to the classical rites.

Life cannot be reconciled with death. Forever he is gone, yet we remain alive. He was so greatly honored, so dearly appreciated that he ascended to the highest rank that he could ever reach. [The people] planted a lot of pine trees around his tomb, which are lingering as the wind blows sadly. Deep and thick fog lingered over the tomb, around the pine trees. His grave was in the shadow of these trees. The sad wind carried the eulogy of people.

[We] erected numerous monuments with words engraved on them [on top of his tomb]. A rhyme was also composed in memory of his virtues and accomplishments:

From the Pamir Mountains in the west to Lake Baikal in the north, there have been [many] heroes who came forth [from among those people] bearing their authentic tradition.

He was [so] gifted in archery [that] his arrows [could] pierce through leaves, [he was] so talented in horse riding that flowers would linger under his horses' feet. Their descendants still live in prosperity, having inherited their ancestors' heroic characters.

He came to serve at the court [lit. put his hair up per the rites and wore the military belt]. Even before he inherited his father's position, he enjoyed a close relationship with the emperor.

He always fought with unflinching courage and never evaded his duty. He dedicated his service solely to the emperor and to the court. His loyalty was proved over and over again in dangerous situations.

The emperor rewarded him with serfs, titles and offices. He joined the Tang army to serve the Tang court and was given the post of a general. [Thus] he gained power [and authority].

Highly considered by the people, he was known to every household. He served the emperor and was charged with many duties when he suddenly passed away.

Where are his ambitions now? People are saddened by his death, nostalgic about his beautiful countenance. The field where his tomb is found is a place graced by the appearance of no visitors, but that of wandering cranes.

Since he passed away, the moon set only to bring prolonged darkness unlit by sunshine, filled by gloomy clouds. Even the birds on the northern frontier sang songs of bereavement. People in the Yanmen Pass were deeply grieved for him. We put the inscription in his tomb and we hope that in future people will find it and commemorate him. He will not be forgotten.