

COMPETING NARRATIVES BETWEEN NOMADIC PEOPLE AND THEIR
SEDENTARY NEIGHBOURS

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The Tomb of Pugu Yitu (635–678) in Mongolia: Tang-Turkic Diplomacy and Ritual

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Studies of Tang Dynasty (618–907) foreign relations with Inner Asia have typically focused on openly hostile or tense interactions with contemporary nomadic powers, particularly the Türks and Uighurs of the Mongolian and Inner Mongolian steppe. In contrast, this paper highlights diplomatic communications and cultural exchanges between China and Mongolia. The paper was inspired by the discovery of a remarkable tomb in Mongolia in 2009 constructed and furnished in the style common during the Tang. As Map 1 demonstrates, the site is located approximately 150 kilometers west of modern Ulaanbaatar and 2.5 kilometers north of the Tuul River (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 16–17; Arden-Wong 2014: 12–13; Yatsenko 2014). Among the burial objects in the tomb was a Chinese-language epitaph carved on limestone. The epitaph revealed the tomb was the final resting place of Pugu Yitu 僕固乙突 (635–678) who was the leader of the Pugu tribe that belonged to the Tiele Confederation, which later would be led by the Uighurs (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 96–126; Feng Sixue 2014; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014; Luo Xin 2011; Yang Fuxue 2014). Another tomb of similar design, but lacking an epitaph, is situated about eleven kilometers further west on the opposite bank of the Tuul River near the ruins of the city of Ulaan Khermiin in Bayannuur District of Bulgan province (Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013: 14–15; Arden-Wong 2014: 12–13; Yatsenko 2014). To distinguish the two, I will follow a recent article that refers to the burial without an epitaph as the Bayannuur tomb (Erdenebold, Park et al. 2016).¹

The epitaph is an amazing find because it is the only dated 7th-century textual source that has been discovered in Mongolia, and sheds light on the little-known period of history between the First Türk (552–630) and Second Türk (682–742) Empires. Modern western scholarship has almost nothing to say about the history of Mongolia in the middle of the 7th century (Sinor 1990; Litvinsky 1996; Golden 1992: 157). The traditional histories claim that the Tang Dynasty exerted suzerainty over the Pugu and other vassals in Mongolia under emperors Taizong

¹ There has been confusion about the names. The local people call both tombs “Shoroon Bumbagar.” The Russian co-excavators have adopted a different nomenclature, referring to Pugu Yitu’s tomb as Shoroon Dov and the Bayannuur tomb as Shoroon Bumbagar (Arden-Wong 2014: 11–13; Yatsenko 2014: 13, 19, 23).

(r. 627–649) and his son Gaozong (r. 649–683), but only offer brief accounts. The Pugu, comprising 30,000 tents and 10,000 soldiers (XTS 217b: 6140; TD 199: 5466), were one of seven tribes that consistently belonged to the Tiele Confederation under the authority of the Türks until 630, the Sir-Yantuo to 646, and the Uighur thereafter.

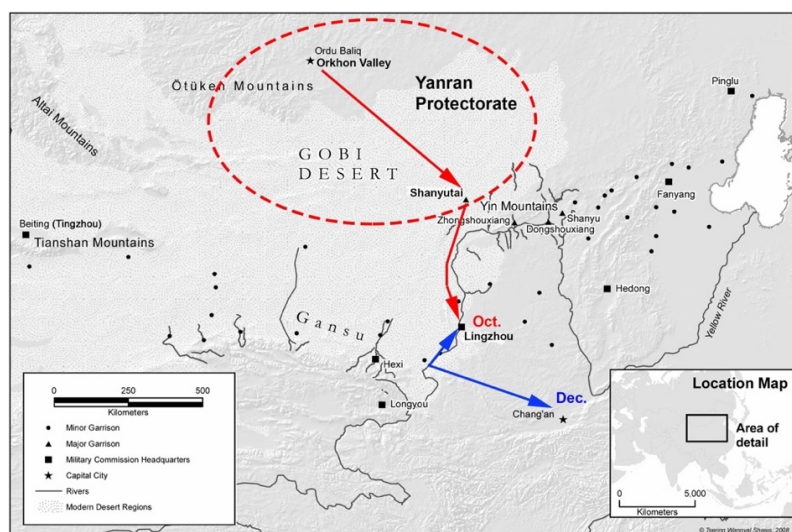


Map 1: Tang-Style Tombs in Central Mongolia

The language of the epitaph is stereotypically condescending in depicting Pugu Yitu, his lineage and people, as loyal natives of the “northern wilderness (*shuoye* 朔野) of the Golden [Altai] Mountains (Jinshan 金山).” Evidently, the family members and tribespeople were not expected to read the epitaph. Nevertheless, placing the epitaph in the context of the wider historical record, and the tomb and its burial goods demonstrates that the alliance was not one sided, and involved cultural compromises. Consequently, this paper tries to make a broader methodological point that it is advisable to read epitaph text and tomb artifacts together to gain a deeper understanding of the identity and beliefs of the deceased and his/her kin.

An Alliance Built on War and Ritual

The Tiele Confederation, including the Pugu, rose to power in Mongolia after participating in a successful revolt against the Türks in 627. The Sir-Yantuo became the leading tribe of the confederation (JTS 195: 5195; XTS 217a: 6111; ZZTJ 192: 6045, 6049). Although the alliance succeeded in ending Türk power, there appear to have been simmering internal disputes between the Sir-Yantuo and its subordinate Tiele tribes even before their defeat of the Türks. With Tang aid, the Uighurs and Pugu overthrew Sir-Yantuo rule in 646 and sent several thousand dignitaries to Lingzhou where Taizong arrived in late October 646 (see Map 2). The alliance between the Tiele Confederation and the Tang Dynasty was negotiated and sealed during a gathering in Tang territory lasting several months. Taizong established indirect Tang jurisdiction over the Tiele in Yanran Protectorate (Yanran *duhufu* 燕然都護府). Among the highest-ranking dignitaries was Pugu Yitu's grandfather who is mentioned in the epitaph and received historical sources as Suo Beg (Suo fu 娑訶) *Eltäbär Qaran Bayan* (*silifa* Gelanbayan 俟利發哥濫拔延) whom Taizong appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of Jinwei Prefecture 金微州都督 and General-in-Chief of the Right Militant Guard 右武衛大將軍. The former title recognized his leadership of the Pugu in Yanran Protectorate, while the latter gave him a high official rank in the Tang system as second in command of an honorary guard unit in the capital (JTS 121: 3477; XTS 217b: 6140; TD 199: 5467). The excavated epitaph from Mongolia has a nearly perfect match for these titles (Luo Xin 2011: 58; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 16).



Map 2: Travels of Tiele Chiefs to Negotiate with Taizong in 646

The substance of the alliance was a series of wars listed in the Table. Though never explicitly connected to the alliance in received historical sources, these wars provide persuasive evidence that attacks against mutual enemies served as the foundation of the political relationship from 648 to 657, and then intermittently until 670. Pugu Yitu's epitaph provides new and exciting evidence that military and diplomatic relations endured after 661 when the Tang sources run dry.

Year	Named Campaign Participants	No. of Troops	Target of Campaign	Sources
646	Tang, Uighur, Pugu, Tongra	?	Sir-Yantuo	JTS 194a: 5165; XTS 215a: 6041; ZZTJ 198: 6236–6238, 199: 6265–6, 6271–6272
648	13 Tiele tribes, Türks, Tibetans, Tuyuhun	100,000+	Kucha	JTS 109: 3289, 198: 5303; XTS 110: 4114, 221b: 6231; ZZTJ 198: 6250–1
650	Uighur, Pugu	?	Türk Chebi Qaghan	JTS 194a: 5165; XTS 215a: 6041; ZZTJ 199: 6265–6, 6271–6272
651	Uighur, Tang	50,000 Uighur, 30,000 Tang	W. Türks	ZZTJ 199: 6274–5; JTS 194b: 5186, 195: 5197; XTS 110: 4119, 215b: 6061
655	Uighur, Tang	?	Koguryō	JTS 195: 5197
657	Uighur, Tang, Pugu Yitu	10,000+	W. Türks	Pugu Yitu's Epitaph; JTS 83: 2778, 195: 5197; XTS 111: 4137; ZZTJ 200: 6301
667?	Pugu Yitu	?	Malgal (Mohe 靺鞨)	Pugu Yitu's Epitaph
670?	Pugu Yitu	?	Tibet	Pugu Yitu's Epitaph

Table: Tang-Tiele Joint Campaigns

New Insights from Pugu Yitu's Epitaph

The epitaph also provides insights into the conduct of ritualistic diplomacy during his lifetime. Pugu Yitu's father, Si Beg (Si *fu* 思匐), is not mentioned in the received historical sources and only receives a brief mention in the epitaph having a personal audience with a Tang emperor, most likely Gaozong. Later, when Si Beg died in an unknown year, Pugu Yitu must have been in his early twenties. In

addition to fighting in wars, the epitaph provides definitive evidence that Pugu Yitu inherited the title of his grandfather and father, and like them visited the Tang Empire. In Yitu's case, he attended Emperor Gaozong's Feng and Shan sacrifices from late 665 to early 666, perhaps the grandest extended ceremonial event of 7th-century Eastern Eurasia. The rhetoric of the epitaph depicts Pugu Yitu as a vassal bearing tribute:

In the second year of Linde (665), the Imperial Carriage [Gaozong] was about to make a tour of Daiyue 岱岳 [Mount Taishan]. [Pugu Yitu] then requested to travel from north of the border, so as not to be kept away from Zhounan 周南 [Luoyang]. He thereupon rode a sweaty horse to exhaustion, to participate by proffering a sacrificial ox for the rites (Luo Xin 2011: 58, 62; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 6, 16).

For the Pugu Yitu and his adherents, the Feng and Shan rites represented the most important display of Tang ritual diplomacy since Taizong's gathering of tribal chiefs in 647.

As Pugu Yitu's military career progressed in the late 660s and early 670s, he was promoted to the highest Tang merit title, Supreme Pillar of the State, 上柱國, rank 2a. His title of nobility was advanced to the fifth highest, Dynasty-Founding Duke of Linzhong County 林中縣開國公, rank 2b (Luo Xin 2011: 58; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 16). Once again, the promotions would have renewed ritualized contacts with Tang court that designated him as a privileged member of the imperial elite.

Death, Funeral and Enshrinement

Pugu Yitu died of natural causes on March 27, 678 at the age of forty-four. His death set the stage for yet another ritual contact between the Tang court and his heirs and adherents. The epitaph claims, "The Son of Heaven [Gaozong] grieved for a long time for him, and decreed that...the Dynasty-founding Duke of Tianshan Commandery [Turfan] (rank 2a), Qu Zhao 麴昭, should supervise the condolence rites (*diaoji* 弔祭)" (Luo Xin 2011: 58; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 17). Gaozong's edict explains how a Tang-style tomb, funeral goods and epitaph came to be situated in Mongolia. Perhaps not coincidentally, the envoy, Qu Zhao, was the nephew of the final king of the oasis state of Gaochang, modern Turfan. After the Tang conquest in 640, the Gaochang high elites were exiled to the capital of Chang'an. Given his family's long-standing connections to Turkic overlords, it is possible that Qu Zhao was chosen for the mission on that basis, and perhaps even spoke Turkic.

The condolence rites were meant to be a show of Tang imperial generosity. The epitaph explicitly mentions that the Tang government bore all funeral expenses. In addition, the family received a standard imperial condolence gift of 300 lengths (*duan* 段) of textiles. Additional luxury gifts by imperial prerogative consisted of

one silk brocade robe, one gold belt, one bow and arrow set, one quiver (*hulu* 胡祿), and one saddle and saddle blanket (*anjian* 鞍韉) (Luo Xin 2011: 58; Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 17). These gifts demonstrate knowledge of Turkic funeral rituals because they are typical of burial goods included in Turkic pit tombs (Erdélyi 1966; Erdélyi, Dorjsüren et al. 1967: 347–356; Jisl 1997: 55–56; Kubarev & Kubarev 2003; Bayarkhuu 2015; Törbat & Odbaatar 2012). The epitaph also claims that a stele was erected on the surface, as was typical of high-ranking officials. The archaeologists did not discover a stele or any of the luxury items. However, the nearby unlooted Bayannuur tomb contained remains of silks and many gold objects including three miniature gold belt sets (Stark 2018; Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013).

The tomb design was typical of the Tang elite. Rising from ground level above the tomb chamber, there was a mound five-to-six meters tall and thirty meters around. The mound was surrounded by an exterior wall 108 by 87 meters. The tomb is typical of shaft-tunnel construction with a total length is about thirty meters. The sloped tunnel has three airshafts with a pair of facing niches under the second shaft. At the end of the ramp, the epitaph stone and cover were placed on the floor of a corridor approximately two meter long. A brick sealing door separated the corridor from the trapezium-shaped, domed chamber situated six meters below the surface. The chamber was 4.25 meters long and wide. The main deviation from standard Tang tomb design was a lack of a coffin platform. Wooden coffin remains were strewn across the chamber floor (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 18–19, 29, 147–148). The ramp and shafts were backfilled after the burial.

Though the burial was typical for a Tang official of Pugu Yitu's rank, he likely was not the highest-ranked Tiele tribal leader to receive such a burial. Pugu's tomb is smaller than the nearby one at Bayannuur, which is about 47 meters long from ramp entrance to rear of chamber. Unlike Pugu's tomb, the Bayannuur burial has murals painted with typical Tang techniques on a layer of thin plaster covering the walls of the passage and chamber (Erdenebold 2013; Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013: 20, 33–48; Arden-Wong 2014: 14, n. 20). Pugu Yitu's epitaph on stone is the only aspect of the tomb that gave his burial a status advantage over the one at Bayannuur.

Pugu Yitu's tomb was looted and in addition to the epitaph, only figurines of clay and wood, wood of a coffin, and a few other burial goods survived. The Bayannuur tomb was unlooted so has more spectacular surviving contents. Given the proximity of the two burial sites and similarities in tomb design and figurines, the tomb at Bayannuur most likely belonged to another Tiele tribal leader who was a Tang vassal in mid-7th century (Arden-Wong 2014: 11–13).

Pugu Yitu's funeral by imperial decree represented an honor reserved for meritorious officials. Administrative regulations stipulated that when the emperor ordered a funeral, the Pottery Office (*zhenguan shu* 甄官署) should manufacture the figurines (*mingqi* 明器) to be deposited in tombs at government expense. Presumably, the Pottery Office was involved in dispatching artisans to Mongolia to oversee construction of the tomb and manufacture of funeral goods because in

addition to objects made from clay, this bureau also manufactured items made from stone and wood, such as engraved steles and wooden figurines for funerals and other ritual occasions (TLD 23: 18b; TD 86: 2328; JTS 44: 1896; XTS 48: 1274).

At least seventy-five terracotta figurines and remains of over forty wooden ones were discovered in the tomb. All are painted. The two niches contained a total of fifty-four standing honor guards and sixteen cavaliers on horses made from clay. The chamber of the tomb contained three standing terracotta Guardian Kings and two sitting tomb-guardian beasts (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 32–75). Due to the arid climate, the chamber also preserved wooden figurines of painted humans, animals, and mythical beasts. The creatures included horses, camels, birds, fish, a dragon and two birdmen (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 79–94). The number of wooden figurines is exceptional, and may be the second-largest extant cache from a Sui-Tang-style tomb.² All male figurines of clay and wood have painted clothing and heads, while the wooden female figurines have clothing made from textiles and painted heads. The textiles, including some with a pearl roundel pattern, are reminiscent of the clothing on female figurines found at Turfan (Xinjiang Weiwuer zizhiqu bowuguan 1975: 82; Yao Shuwen 2009: 22). Some female figurines in the Pugu and Bayannuur tombs have peaked hairstyles common in Chang'an in the mid-7th century. The larger Bayannuur tomb had 130 figurines, once again hinting that the unknown occupant of that burial enjoyed a higher rank or more imperial favor than Pugu Yitu (Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013: 52–149, 198–206; Erdenebold 2013).

Despite the putative involvement of the Pottery Office, the figurines in the tomb are not worthy of the palace workshop, and are more typical of Tang provincial tombs. Terracotta honor guards found in the two side niches were relatively crudely molded, low fired and painted. The use of paint rather than glaze is typical of Chang'an. Painted wooden figurines in the chamber have somewhat better quality, showing more detail. For example, the wooden figurine of a civil official shows greater detail than the clay figurines in niches. The finest surviving figurine is a painted terracotta Guardian King standing on a prostrate bull that is about 90 centimeters tall, but it is not on par with the imperial workshops.³ Although the clay and wood in Pugu's tomb has not been analyzed to determine its provenance, terracotta figurines from the nearby tomb at Bayannuur used local clay.⁴ Presumably, the dispatching of Tang provincial artisans and use of local materials must have limited the caliber of burial items.⁵ The epitaph stone and cover likewise do not represent the best quality Tang craftsmanship. The cover is

2 Wooden figurines are fairly rare due to the relatively damp conditions in China. The over seventy intact wooden figurines in tomb 73TAM206 at Turfan may be the largest find (Yao Shuwen 2009).

3 The guardian king's height is not listed in the excavation report. I measured the figurine through the display case at the Zanabazar Museum, Ulaanbaatar, June 21–23, 2016.

4 Aiuudain Ochir, Personal Communication, June 23, 2016.

5 Annette Juliano, Personal Communication, April 7, 2016.

73.7 by 72 centimeters and roughly beveled. Though carved conventionally in archaic seal script, the cover's calligraphy is mediocre. The cover inscription, following the conventional format, reads: "Entombed Epitaph of the Late His Excellency Pugu, Commander-in-Chief of Jinwei Prefecture of the Great Tang" (Iwami Kiyohiro 2014: 2; Luo Xin 2011: 58; Feng Sixue 2014: 83; Yang Fuxue 2014: 77). The craftsmanship of the stone block likewise is not impressive. The stone is not beveled or decorated and the sides are roughly hewn. The calligraphy of the epitaph is good, but not superb.⁶ Nevertheless, the quantity of gold in the nearby un-robbed tomb at Bayannuur reminds us that there were spectacular aspects of these burials.

Aside from the dates of the funeral, there are no signs of local input into writing the epitaph. The sole focus is Pugu Yitu's career serving the Tang and his relations with the dynasty, including dispatch of an envoy to deliver condolence gifts and carry out the funeral. To the mourning Pugu tribespeople, the epitaph stone most likely was as an impressive funerary object with an unknown message. The exotic funeral must have served as a status symbol, just like the better-known Tang-Turkic rites of the Türk ruler Bilgä Qaghan in 734 and his younger brother and close comrade, Kül Tegin in 731. Tang Xuanzong sent artisans to Mongolia on both occasions to aid in constructing temples and steles to commemorate their lives. Each temple included a statue of the deceased and battle scenes from their lives painted on the walls (JTS 8: 202, 194a: 5176; XTS 215b: 6056; ZZTJ 214: 6809; Pelliot 1929: 234-248). Their steles with Turkic inscriptions boast that the Tabgach [Tang] emperor honored requests to assist in building an "extraordinary mausoleum...decorated with wonderful paintings and sculptures" (Tekin 1968: 263, 281). The ability to command artisans and resources of the Tang Empire was meant to impress their followers.

There are signs that Pugu Yitu's funeral ceremonies, lasting ten days from August 31 to September 9, combined elements of Chinese and Turkic traditions. Tang and Turkic death rites shared practices that would have been familiar to Pugu Yitu's mourners, including sacrifices, feasting, displays of funerary goods and divination to choose the date of funerary rites. The long wait between Pugu's death in March and funeral was not unusual in Tang or Turkic death rites. Construction of an elaborate Tang tomb inevitably delayed burial, and Turkic elites who died in the spring were buried in the fall.⁷ The funeral took place on a day in the Chinese sexagenary cycle that was considered auspicious in the Tang, so the Tang embassy must have played a role in conducting the ceremony.⁸

6 Feng Sixue 2014: 97, pl. 3; Chen 1997; Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 126, 145. Personal observations and measurements, Zanabazar Museum, Ulaanbaatar, June 21-23, 2016. Iwami Kiyohiro (2014: 2) gives measurements slightly different from mine.

7 On Tang imperial rites, see McMullen 1999. On the Türks, see BS 99: 3288; ZS 50: 910; SS 84: 1864; Ecsedy 1984.

8 September 9 was a *renyin* 壬寅 day (39th of cycle), which was one of the five most popular burial dates in Tang Luoyang (Yang 2014).

Nevertheless, Pugu Yitu's tomb includes signs of elite Turkic customs and tastes, and this is even clearer at the undisturbed Bayannuur tomb. Tang sources report that Turkic high elites were cremated along with their favorite horse, and Bayannuur tomb seems to be the first archaeological confirmation of this practice reliably dated to the 6th through 8th centuries.⁹ The tomb chamber at Bayannuur had a coffin containing a coffer wrapped in silk cloth. Inside the coffer were bags with cremated bone fragments and the hoard of gold objects (Erdenebold 2013; Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013: 24, 330).

Another hint of differences in ritual is the lack of ceramic vessels in the Pugu Yitu and Bayannuur tomb chambers. The vast majority of Tang high elite burials included vessels that would have held food and drink carried in the funeral procession. The only vessel at the undisturbed Bayannuur tomb was a single gold cup in the coffin hoard (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 150–151, 264, 287; Erdenebold 2013). The cup echoes Turkic memorial statues in which the deceased normally holds one cup in the right hand containing the water of life (Skaff 2012: 112, 156, fig. 5.3; Stark 2008; Wang & Qi 1995).

Although the vast majority of the clay figurines in Pugu Yitu's tomb seem to be typical of the Tang, one guardian beast may have been tailored to local tastes. Typically, guardian beasts occur in pairs with one having a lion's face and the other a human one. The "human" guardian in Pugu Yitu's tomb is demonic with a hairy face and bushy eyebrows, open mouth with protruding lips and tusks, bulging eyes and an upturned snout (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 76, 157, no. 74, fig. 72). The eyes, nose, open mouth and hairy face are reminiscent of demonic clay mask decorations that have been found at Uighur and Turkic memorial sites.¹⁰ The better-preserved pair of guardians in the Bayannuur tomb has a "human" with an unusual blue face and beak-like mouth, but the same sort of upturned nose and bulging eyes (Ochir, Erdenebold et al. 2013: 149, 256).

It is difficult to determine whether the wooden figurines are unusual because so few survive from the Sui and Tang burials. The figures of females and government officials seem to be based on Tang models, but a few others are unusual. One is a pair of wooden birdmen, both missing heads, which mixed a human torso and arms with a bird's wings and speckled lower body and long tail (Ochir, Danilov et al. 2013: 78, 83–84, 86–87, 150, nos. 99, 112, figs. 94, 107). These could be related to the Buddhist deity, Garuda, which originated in India and takes many forms throughout Asia and can include a human torso and arms, bird-like legs and wings, and a bird or human head (Bunce 1994: 168).

⁹ Archaeologists have only excavated about thirty other Turkic tombs in Mongolia, and all were inhumations (Jan Bemann, Personal Communication, April 26, 2016).

¹⁰ Jisl provides examples from the memorial sites of Kül Tegin (pl. 52) and Tonyukuk (pl. 85) and interprets them as shamanistic demon masks with an apotropaic function (1997: 51).

Canonization

If Tang Gaozong's use of "condolence diplomacy" was meant to renew contacts with the Pugu and create a new generation of Pugu vassals linked to the Tang court, the effort was partially in vain. A series of weather disasters from 679 to 682 sparked a Türk revolt. Türk rebels established a second khanate in 682 and retook control of Mongolia at some time before 690 (JTS 194a: 5166-7; XTS 215a: 6043-5; Sinor & Klyashtorny 1996: 335-6). Nevertheless, Pugu Yitu's memory was preserved at the Tang court for at least several decades. We know this because his statue was included among sixty-four men of foreign origin at Qianling, the tomb complex of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu. Sixty-one headless sculptures survive, but only thirty-six still can be identified, mainly from received sources, where his name was rendered as Pugu Qitu 僕固乞突 with titles of Commander-in-Chief of Jinhui Prefecture (Jinhuizhou 金徽州) and General-in-Chief of the Left Awesome Guard (*zuo weiwei da jiangjun* 左威衛大將軍) (Chen 1980: 189-191; Yang Fuxue 2012: 72; Yang Fuxue 2014: 80). He most likely was included in the statues because Gaozong appointed him and his service to the empire was valued. The dignified and respectful poses of the figures project a visual message that the men depicted in stone were not only subjects of Gaozong and Empress Wu, but were also an important constituency of the empire, reverently supporting their imperial masters in this life and the next one.

Conclusion

Pugu Yitu's career and the wider history of Tiele relations with the Tang illustrate how ritualized diplomacy contributed to Tang imperial expansion and cultural exchanges in Eurasia. Political elites travelling between the Tang Empire and Mongolia participated in ceremonial meetings that periodically reknit the elite connections that were important sinews of empire. Pugu Yitu was among those who participated in the Tang emperor Gaozong's Feng and Shang Rites, one of the six times that it was performed in imperial Chinese history. In return, Tang diplomats travelled northward for smaller-scale rituals taking place in Mongolia, such as Pugu Yitu's funeral ceremony. Lasting nine days at Tang expense, the funeral must have been a spectacular affair that impressed Pugu Yitu's heir and adherents.

In addition, this paper points out the value of an interdisciplinary methodology that looks at evidence from tombs holistically. Pugu Yitu's tomb and epitaph provide insights into different aspects of Tang and Tiele relations. The epitaph tells us that political relations endured longer and were more deeply entrenched than previously believed. Though the epitaph's rhetoric provides only a Tang-centered narrative of the Pugu's subservient loyalty to the dynasty, a careful examination of

the Pugu and Bayannuur tombs and their contents provide evidence of reciprocity and cultural compromises in the relationship. On one hand, the forms of the tombs and many burial goods were typical of the Tang. On the other hand, both funerals have signs of local practices and tastes including the cremation and the gold hoard in the Bayannuur tomb, and the unique tomb guardian and bird-man in Pugu Yitu's tomb. Historians who only consider the content of epitaphs will miss important clues about the cultural orientation of the deceased. Likewise, archaeologists and art historians who concentrate only on material culture or funerary ritual will not understand the social and political context.

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Abbreviations of Primary Sources

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 TLD Li Longji, and Li Linfu. 1991. *Da Tang liu dian*. Uchida Tomoo & Hiroike Chikurô (eds.) Xi'an.
 XTS Ouyang Xiu. 1975. *Xin Tang shu*. Beijing.
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