

# *The Kitan People, the Liao Dynasty (916-1125) and their World*

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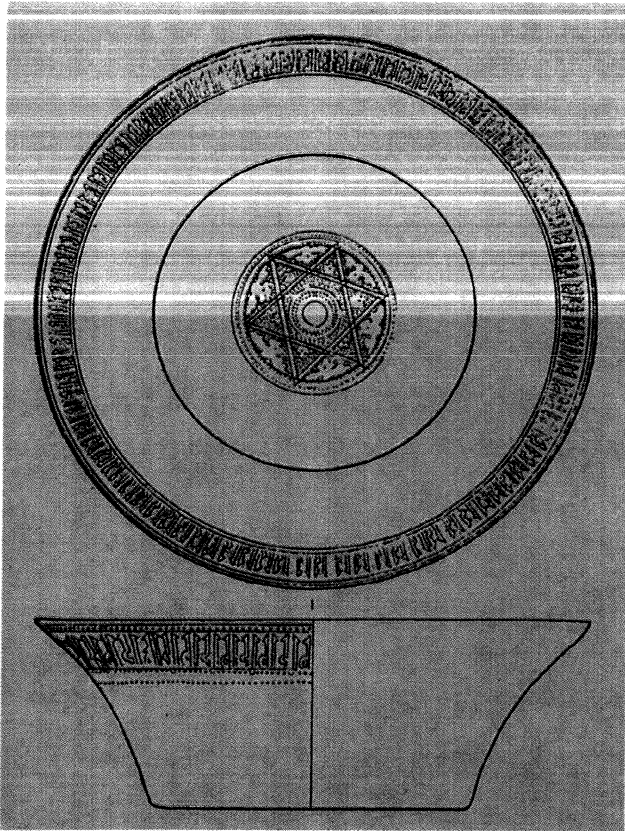
Map of the Liao state and its neighbours, circa 1120  
(image courtesy of Asia Society, New York)

The world became dramatically bigger in the year 1000, in the sense that several of the globe's peoples knew much more about their distant neighbours than they had previously. In that year, or close to it, the Vikings settled at L'Anse aux Meadows, and the Scandinavian world widened beyond Iceland and Greenland to take in Canadian Newfoundland. Similarly, with the Karakhanid conquest of Khotan in 1006, the Islamic world, expanding continuously since the time of Muhammad (c. 570-632), reached all the way into modern Xinjiang. In north China, the Kitan (also transliterated as Qidan, Qitan or Khitan) state experienced a parallel expansion; as is well known, the European name for China, 'Cathay', and the Russian, 'Kitaia', reflect the direct contact of these societies with the Kitan peoples – and not the Chinese.

The northernmost of the successor states that arose following the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907, the Kitan controlled a broad swath of grasslands in north Asia. In 938, they acquired the region around the modern capital of

Beijing. The swan hunting there was so fine that the ruler named the city his southern capital, making it the fifth of the Kitan capitals. Each year, in keeping with their nomadic lifestyle, the Liao emperors visited the five capitals in succession. The Kitan were the first to designate Beijing as a capital (they called it Nanjing, or Southern Capital) and subsequent rulers – the Jurchen (Jin), the Mongols (Yuan), the Ming and the Qing – retained the city as their primary capital.

In 947, the Kitan chose the Chinese character Liao as the name for their dynasty (916-1125) because the Liao river was the most important watercourse in their homeland, which straddled the modern Chinese provinces of Liaoning and Inner Mongolia (see Map). The Liao governed a territory with a mixed population of four million Kitan, Han Chinese, Bohai (Balhae) and other peoples. Although much smaller than the neighbouring Song dynasty (960-1279) China, the Liao dynasty's significance was great. Defeating the Song in 1004, the Kitan signed the Treaty of Chanyuan, in which



(Fig. 1) Drawing of a bowl with Kufic script  
Excavated from the tomb of the Princess  
of Chen, Tomb 3, Qinglongshan, Naiman  
Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region  
Nishapur, Iran, 1018 or earlier  
Bronze  
Diameter 57 cm  
(After Nei Menggu Zizhiqu wenwu kaogu  
yanjiusuo, Zhelimumeng bowuguan, fig. 28, p. 48)

the Chinese agreed to send massive payments in silk and silver north each year; in addition, the Kitan had frequent contacts with the Goryeo dynasty (938-1392) in Korea. After the Jurchen defeated their dynasty in 1125, Kitan ministers advised first the Jurchen and then the Mongols how to govern the Chinese; Yelü Chucai (1190-1244) was the most famous of these advisers, whose influence made it possible for the Mongols to become the first non-Chinese people to rule all of China.

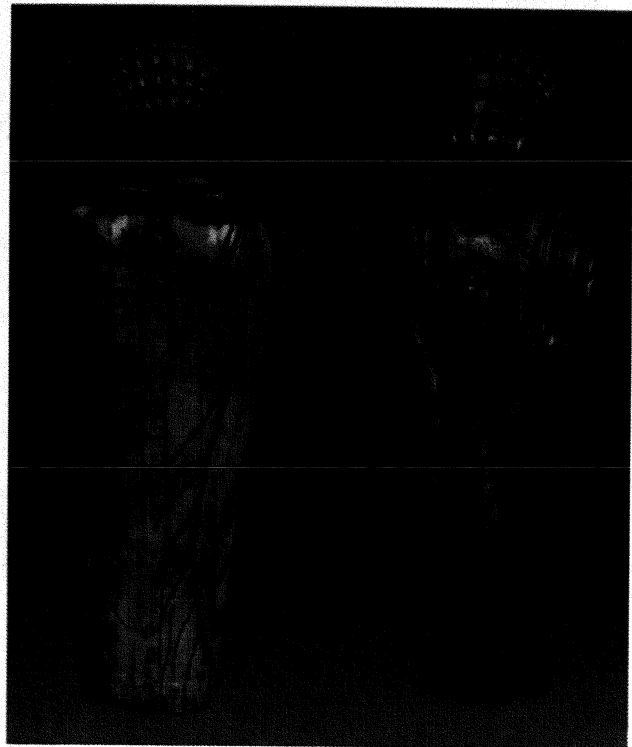
This essay will sketch the Kitan world, by starting with the neighbours they knew best – the Chinese and the Koreans – and gradually moving out to more remote peoples. The *Liaoshi* (*History of the Liao Dynasty*; completed in 1343), upon which all historians continue to depend in spite of its rushed compilation and errors, remains the fundamental starting point because it names the countries from which envoys came and the gifts they carried. By pinpointing the origins of unusual imported commodities, we can reconstruct the outer edges of the Kitan world, which extended well beyond the homelands of the peoples mentioned in the written record. (Surviving Kitan-language

sources, consisting of epitaphs for government officials and mourning poems for members of the imperial family, shed no light on this topic.)

Other critical evidence is archaeological. Excavated commodities from royal tombs and pagodas demonstrate Kitan ties to the outside world. Curiously, many of the tomb finds correspond directly to the items mentioned in written sources. Why? As the *Liaoshi* explains, whenever a ruler or close family member died, all the countries with whom they exchanged gifts sent envoys to mark the death. Mourning Envoys presented formal documents of condolence; travelling with them were Sacrifice-offering Envoys, who brought gifts for the deceased (Wright, p. 106, with some changes to the translations).

The dynastic history describes the burial of Emperor Shengzong (r. 982-1031) in unusual detail. After listing the different courtiers, it explains:

The great king of the Southern Division, and the court nobles, each according to his rank, made libations and offered saddled horses, clothing, belts decorated with rhinoceros [horn?] and jade, and other objects. The items were enumerated in a list. After being read, the list was burned. The *items and clothing contributed by the various states* and the various objects presented for the funeral and sacrifices by the imperial princes and vicegerents of all the capitals were treated in the same way [emphasis added]. (*Liaoshi*, 50:840, translated in Wittfogel and Feng, p. 279)



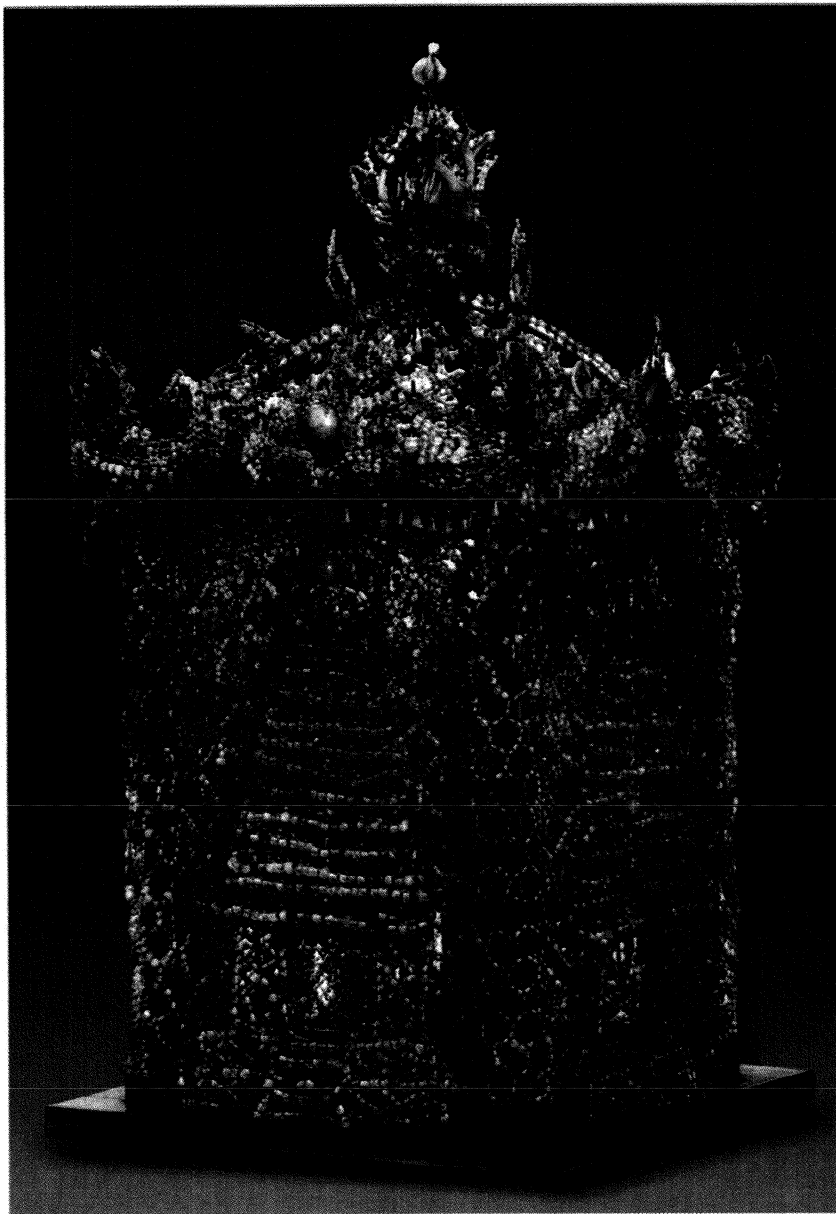
(Fig. 2) Figure of a monk  
Excavated in the Chinese city in Liao Shangjing  
Liao dynasty (916-1125)  
Ivory  
Height 7.2 cm  
(After Tang Cailan, *Liao Shangjing wenwu xieying*, Huhehaote, 2005, p. 117, top)

Some gifts, such as saddles and horses, could be sourced nearby. Others, like belts with rhinoceros-horn decoration could only be sourced from far-off lands.

The same mix of local and imported goods characterizes the well-known tomb of the Princess of Chen (d. 1018) and her husband Xiao Shaoju (d. 1016) at Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner in Inner Mongolia (see <http://sites.asiasociety.org/arts/liao/> [accessed 8 July 2010]). The saddles and horse tack were made locally, while the Islamic glasswork and the bronze basin with Arabic script illustrated in Figure 1 were clearly manufactured outside Kitan territory and carried to the Supreme capital at Shangjing (present-day Bailin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia) (comparison with other brass pots indicates that this vessel was made in Nishapur, Iran). Then there are the goods made in Kitan territory from imported commodities such as pearls, coral, rock crystal, agate and

amber. One additional item, not found in the Princess of Chen's tomb, is worth studying simply because of its diagnostic power as a trace element: ivory, whether from elephants or walruses.

**K**itan relations with the Chinese are the best documented. Since the 4th century, the Kitan had participated in the Chinese traditional gifting network. In the early 10th century, Abaoji's (r. 916-926) powerful confederation coalesced just as the Tang collapsed. Suddenly, the Kitan found themselves at the centre of the gifting system. In its opening pages, the *Liaoshi* reports that, in 906, the usurper Zhu Wen (r. 907-12) of the Liang dynasty (907-922) 'sent envoys by sea with credentials, silks, clothing, belts, and precious curios [*zhenwan*] to pay a courtesy call' (*Liaoshi* 1:2, translated in Wittfogel and Feng, p. 346, no. 1). This entry may not



(Fig. 3) House made from pearls and jade, rock crystal, agate, amber and coral beads  
From the North Pagoda,  
Chaoyang, Liaoning province  
Liao dynasty, 1043  
Height (as reconstructed) 100 cm  
(After *Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo* and *Chaoyang shi beita bowuguan*, eds, pl. 48)  
(Photography courtesy of Cultural Relics Press, Beijing)

were reserved for the exclusive use of the southern envoys; he was worried that his superiors would punish him for the missing marmots. For the rest of Zhang's trip, his Kitan escorts kept searching for the marmots. 'This is what the Kitan value,' Zhang concluded (Zhang Shunmin, *Huaman lu* [Record of Drawing Bricks] in Zhu Yian et al., eds, *Quan Song biji*, di er bian, Zhengzhou, 2006, 1, pp. 213-14; see also Franke, p. 136). The 1,500 ounces may have seemed of much greater value to Zhang (and to us), but the Kitan treasured the steppe marmot.

An earlier envoy, Yu Jing, who visited the Kitan territory in 1043, 1044 and 1045, provides an explanation. He, too, mentions the gift of the marmots in a poem including different Kitan words, all recorded in Chinese characters, 'As a friendly present, [we] are given ten *pili*.' The gloss explains: 'The *pili* has the shape of a rat, but it is bigger. It lives in holes and eats grain; it is fond of meat. The barbarians regard it as a delicacy. The taste is like that of a suckling-pig and very delicate' (Herbert Franke, 'Two Chinese-Khitans Macaronic Poems', in Walther Heissig et al.,

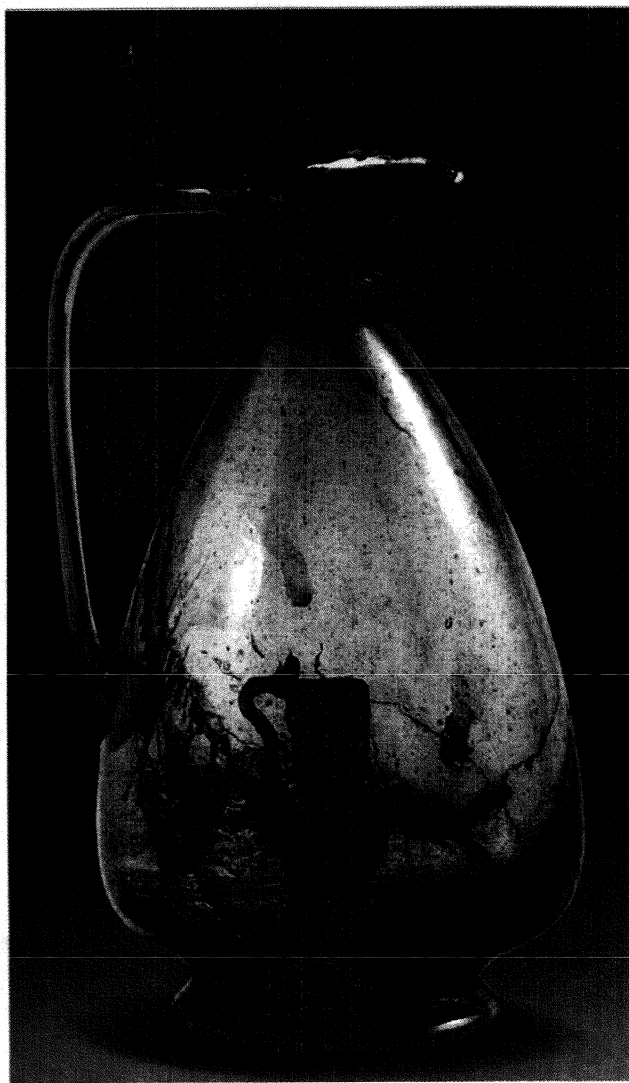
eds, *Tractata Altaica*, Weisbaden, 1976, p. 178). The Kitan showed what good hosts they were by giving the emissaries these prized animals.

The Kitan maintained close ties with their immediate neighbour, the Korean kingdom of Goryeo (918-1392). Paradoxically, many of the gifts exchanged by Goryeo and the Kitan were organic materials, such as reed mats, which have long since disintegrated. A 13th century book by Ye Longli (who passed the imperial *jinshi* examination in 1247), *Qidan guozhi* (*The Record of the Kitan Country*), lists the gifts presented by the Kitan to the Korean kingdom of Silla (c. 300-935): rhinoceros horn belts, horses, saddles, textiles, sheep and wine. The book also lists the return gifts from the Koreans to the Kitan: gold objects weighing a total of 350 Chinese ounces, 1,600 bolts of different weaves of cloth, robes for the emperor, bronze utensils, precious swords, comestibles including wine, vinegar, tea, ginseng and rice, as well as paper and ink. The only durable items were the gold and the swords (Ye, 21: 203-04).

The Kitan had much less frequent diplomatic contact with Japan, which they could reach only by sea. Prior to its conquest by the Kitan in 925, the kingdom of Bohai had had close relations with Japan: the Kitan built on these ties when they sent envoys to Japan that year. A gap of nearly 100 years follows, until the Japanese sent two delegations in 1091 and 1092.

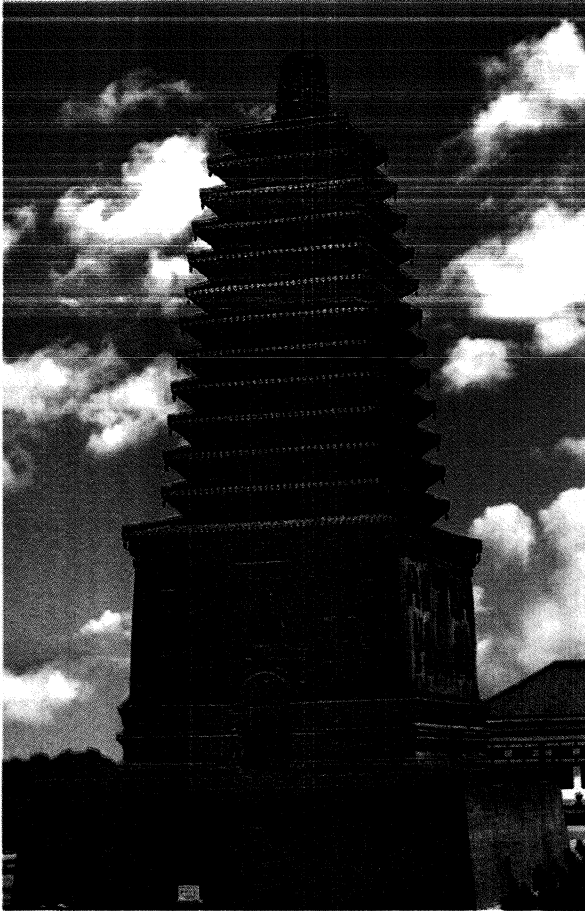
The *Liaoshi* documents the challenges of governing a large empire populated by many disparate peoples. The state required certain annual contributions in order to function: horses were crucial both because military strength depended on horses and because the state sold horses in such large quantities to other neighbouring states. The dynastic history specifies the number of horses different peoples presented to the Kitan rulers over the course of the dynasty: annual gifts of 10,000 or more horses occurred often.

Many different peoples lived in the vast territories stretching north of the Kitan realm all the way to the Arctic. Naturally, the Kitan knew the most about their immediate neighbours, the Xi and the Shiwei. The Shiwei lived to the north, in eastern Mongolia and along the Amur river in modern Heilongjiang; the Xi lived to the south (see Wittfogel and Feng, p. 84, n. 4). Some of the peoples living farther to the north, like the Wure and Mohe, inhabited a lesser-known zone in the area bounded by the Sungari river, the Pacific and the border with Korea. Still farther to the

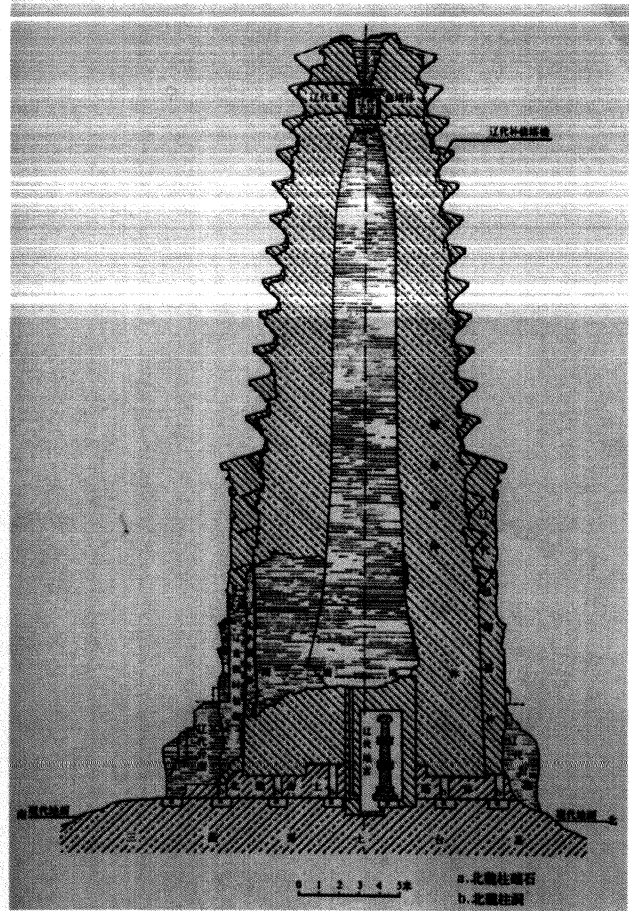


(Fig. 4) Bottle within a bottle  
From the North Pagoda,  
Chaoyang, Liaoning province, 1043  
Bottles: glass; outer bottle lid: gold  
Height 16 cm  
(After Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and  
Chaoyang shi beita bowuguan, eds, pl. 59, fig. 2)  
(Photography courtesy of Cultural Relics Press, Beijing)





(Fig. 3a) Full view of the North Pagoda after restoration  
Chaoyang, Liaoning province  
Liao dynasty, 1043-44  
(After Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo  
and Chaoyang shi beita bowuguan, eds, pl. 2)  
(Photography courtesy of Cultural Relics Press, Beijing)



(Fig. 3b) Cross-section of the North Pagoda, showing  
the two reliquary deposits. The house in Figure 3 and  
the bottle in Figure 4 were found in the upper one  
(After Liaoning sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and  
Chaoyang shi beita bowuguan, eds, fig. 53, p. 156)

be hard fact. The Liao backdated the start of their dynasty to coincide with the fall of the Tang, whom they viewed as their predecessors (Twitchett, pp. 31-54).

China served as the conduit for multiple rare commodities originating in the southernmost reaches of China and Southeast Asia, which then entered Liao territory: incense, spices, tortoise shell, ivory, pearls, rhinoceros horn and cassia (Wheatley, 1959).

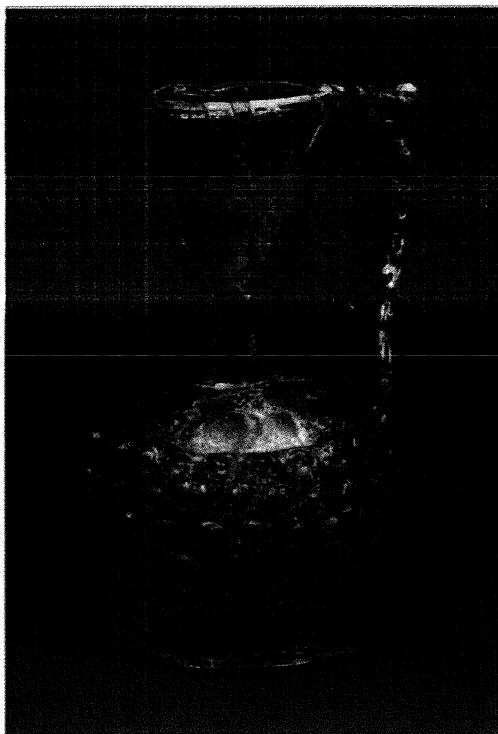
The Kitan prized rhinoceros horn; in 1031, they presented belts decorated with it to the deceased emperor Shengzong, and one regulation from 1055, for example, forbids lower-ranking officials from using rhinoceros horn for sword hilts (Tuotuo et al., 21: 252).

The most informative sources about gift-giving between the Chinese and the Kitan date to the 11th century after the signing of the Treaty of Chanyuan (also spelled Shanyuan), which specified that the Chinese had to pay the Liao 100,000 Chinese ounces of silver and 200,000 bolts of silk (1 Chinese ounce, or *liang*, is equivalent to 37.3 metric grams, rather than 28 grams). The Song made additional, unstipulated gifts to the Liao envoys. When they arrived in the Song court, the

two top-ranking envoys each received a horse, one hundred bolts of silk, two hundred Chinese ounces of silver objects, one pair of leather boots, eight suits and two hats; the lowest-ranking members of the delegation were each given twenty bolts of silk, ten Chinese ounces of silver objects, four coats and one belt. On their departure, the emperor personally bestowed 1,500 Chinese ounces of silver on the head envoys.

One Chinese envoy, Zhang Shunmin, who travelled to Kitan territory in 1094 or 1095, included a wry anecdote about the cultural differences between the Song and the Liao. While envoys to Kaifeng received silver, the Kitan gave the Song envoys ten salted sheep and ten steppe marmots. Zhang commented: 'Marmots are a large rodent, which the Kitan offer to the Buddha .... Anyone ranking below an official did not dare to keep marmots, which were used only as gifts for envoys from China.'

Oblivious to their charms, Zhang freed his marmots. One of the Kitan who worked at the hostel where Zhang stayed explained that the local people did not pay any land or labour tax, but each year contributed ten marmots, which



(Fig. 5) Ewer  
Excavated from the tomb of  
the Princess of Chen, Tomb 3,  
Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner,  
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region  
Syria or Egypt, 1018 or earlier  
Glass  
Height 17 cm, diameter of mouth 6 cm  
Research Institute of Cultural Relics  
and Archaeology of Inner Mongolia  
(After Shen, ed., cat. no. 102, p. 331)

north were peoples who used skis to move through the snow: the Orengai and the Kimak. Whatever the Kitan knew about these far northern peoples, and it may not have been much, stemmed from a single product much in demand throughout the empire: walrus tusk.

The Kitan valued northern goods, particularly animals and raptors, and probably buried them – or burned them prior to burial – but no archaeological evidence of these organic materials survives, except for walrus tusks (Fig. 2). Nearly a century ago, Berthold Laufer did an exhaustive study of this material, concluding that the Arabic *khūtu* was the same as the Chinese *gutuxi*, whose many written variants testify to the word's probable foreign origin. The Chinese added the final syllable *xi* ('rhinoceros horn') because they saw only small fragments and assumed, incorrectly, that the walrus tusk was a horn like that of the rhinoceros (Laufer, p. 352). The term appears, possibly for the first time in Chinese, in the 961 book by Wang Pu entitled *Tang huiyao* (*The Administrative Statutes of the Tang Dynasty*), as a product of the Mohe people (Wittfogel and Feng, p. 50). The Kitan banned the use of walrus tusk by lower-ranking courtiers in the same edict of 1055 that prohibited rhinoceros horn. At this time, the Kirghiz were middlemen who provided walrus tusk to the Chinese.

The 10th century Islamic encyclopaedias provide additional crucial information about walrus tusk. The polymath al-Bīrūnī (973-1048) wrote about it in his pharmacopoeia *Kitāb al-Ṣaydanah* (*The Book of the Pharmacy*). A Kitan emissary told him 'that *khūtu* is the forehead bone of a bull, and that their [the Kitan] desire for it is because it is said that it perspires when it is close to

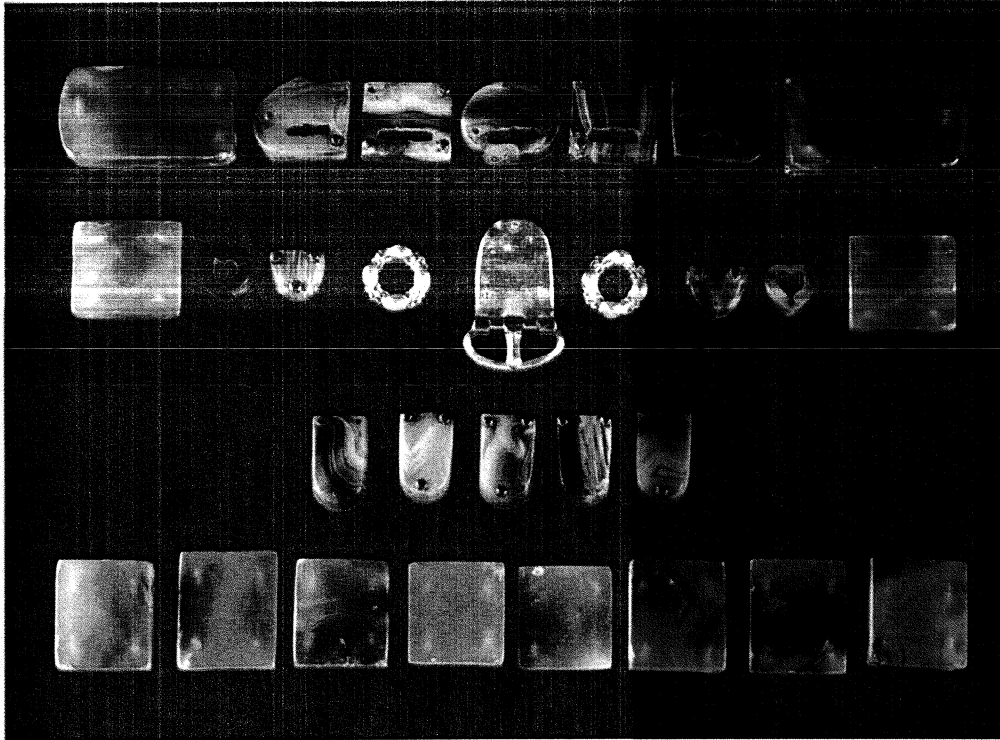
(Fig. 6) Four-lobed cup  
Excavated from the tomb of the Princess of Chen, Tomb 3,  
Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region  
Liao dynasty, 1018 or earlier  
Rock crystal  
Height 2.3 cm  
Research Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Inner Mongolia  
(After Shen, ed., cat. no. 100, p. 329)



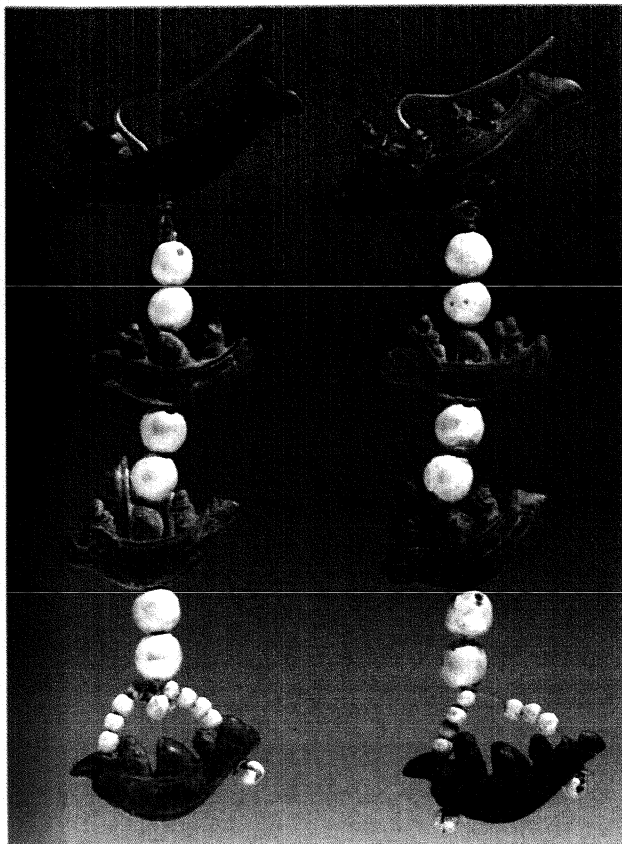
poison' (translation by Anya H. King, email 9 November 2010).

al-Bīrūnī's experience illustrates the expansion of both the Islamic and Kitan worlds after 1000. A native of Khwarezm (in present-day Uzbekistan), he encountered the Kitan envoy in 1026 at the court of Mahmūd (r. 971-1030), the Ghaznavid ruler of Ghaznī (130 kilometres southwest of Kabul, Afghanistan). al-Bīrūnī cites him as his source about walrus tusk (and tea). A second Islamic commentator, the physician Marvazī from the city of Merv in modern Turkmenistan, reports that this envoy departed from the Kitan capital in 1024 carrying a letter from Emperor Shengzong to Mahmūd of Ghaznī in Afghanistan, proposing that they exchange gifts and envoys. Mahmūd refused because the Kitan had not converted to Islam (V. Minorsky, *Sharaf al-Zamān Tāhir Marvazī on China, the Turks and India*, London, 1942).

Marvazī includes some general remarks on trade between China and the Islamic world, which seem to apply to the Kitan as well. In addition to *khutū*, he reports, the Chinese import 'ivory, frankincense, genuine Slavonic amber'. Marvazī's list overlaps with materials from the Islamic world found in Liao period graves and stupa repositories: glass, rock crystal, agate and amber. Marvazī omits coral, which the *Liaoshi* mentions a few times as an



(Fig. 7) Belt ornaments  
Liao dynasty (916-1125)  
Agate  
Lengths 1.6-5.9 cm  
(After Roger Chow, *Sparkling Splendours: The Art of Ancient Chinese Carvings on Rock Crystal and Agate – The Taoshi Zhai Collection*, Hong Kong, 2000, fig. 257, p. 240)



(Fig. 8) Boat shaped earrings with paddlers or fishermen  
Excavated from the tomb of the Princess of Chen, Tomb 3, Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region  
Liao dynasty, 1018 or earlier  
Amber and pearls  
Each: length 13 cm  
(After Shen, ed., cat. nos 45a b, p. 187)

item presented by envoys. The most important coral find from a Liao period archaeological site is an extraordinary house crafted from hundreds of pearls and jade, rock crystal, agate, amber and coral beads, found in the upper repository of the North Pagoda (Beita) of Chaoyang, Liaoning province (Figs 3, 3a and 3b). The Kitan valued coral so much that they coined the term 'precious as coral' (*shushan*) for the master craftsmen they captured and brought to their own capital (Wittfogel and Feng, p. 143; *Liaoshi* 116: 1545).

Items like those found in the North Pagoda deposit – glass, rock crystal, agate and amber – have surfaced in multiple Liao dynasty sites (Fig. 4). In the case of glass, comparison with similar artefacts makes it possible for archaeologists to pinpoint the exact place where a given item was made. The lead content of the glassware in the tomb of the Princess of Chen points to a place of manufacture in either Syria or Egypt (Fig. 5; see also Shen, cat. nos 102, 103 and 117, pp. 330-33 and 360-61).

Because glass was an unfamiliar imported substance, many observers could not distinguish between vessels made of rock crystal and those of glass. Fine rock crystal, from India, Sumatra or the Caucasus Mountains, had the same translucence as glass, but it was much more difficult to work because it shattered so easily. As art historian Hsuehman Shen has explained, Liao graves and pagoda deposits contained two types of rock crystal items: body ornaments and bowls, all small. Consider the bowl from the tomb of the Princess of Chen, only 2.3 centimetres high (Fig. 6; see De Xin, Zhang Hanjun and Han Renxin, 'Neimenggu balin youqi qingzhou baita faxian Liaodai fojiao wenwu', in



(Fig. 9) Mural on the northwest wall in the back chamber of Han Shixun's tomb, showing servants unpacking the owner's treasures  
Tomb 4, Xiabali, Xuanhua district, Zhangjiakou, Hebei province  
Liao dynasty, 1111  
(After Li, 2008, fig. 96)

*Wenwu* 1994.12:4-33, fig. 12.7, description 15; see also Sun Jianhua, in Shen, ed., pp 74-79). Polished agate lacks the translucence of glass and rock crystal, but was used to make both body ornaments (such as belt buckles) and small bowls. Agate vessels and other items, such as the belt in Figure 7, have been found in the tombs of the prominent, as well as stupa deposits packed with valuable goods.

Of all the imported goods in Liao tombs, amber is the most common. The tomb of the Princess of Chen contains amber beads, pendants, animal-shaped containers, hand-held amulets, a knife handle, and the earrings illustrated in Figure 8 (see also Emma Bunker, entries for nos 7a-b, 34a-d, 35, 36 and 37a-b, in Shen, ed., pp. 110-11 and 166-73; Hiromi Kinoshita entry for no. 43-a-b, in Shen, ed., pp. 182-83). The large number of amber items in the tomb in comparison to glass, rock crystal and agate points to its appeal to the high-born and to its relatively low cost.

Although Liaoning has amber deposits, infrared spectroscopy testing of two Liao beads from the 10th and 11th centuries has demonstrated that they were made of

Baltic amber, or succinite, from northern Europe and not from Liaoning province, which has produced amber of a lighter colour (Curt W. Beck and Edith C. Stout, 'Amber from Liaoning province and Liao Amber Artifacts', in E. C. Bunker et al., eds, *Adornment for the Body and Soul: Ancient Chinese Ornaments from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, Hong Kong, 1999, pp. 167-72). Marvazī writes that amber 'falls in drops of resin from trees in [the lands of] the Slavonic sea. [It is imported] because in China amber is blackish and there is no demand for it, but there is a demand for the genuine one for their ornaments. They pretend that it is helpful against the evil eye' (Minorsky, *Marvazī*, pp. 16-17). Perhaps amber's popularity stemmed from this perceived power. It was also softer and easier to work than agate or rock crystal. Some excavated items appear to have been made locally from imported materials; at least one local workshop, where amber, jade and rock crystal were worked, has been found at Baiyin Aobaoxiang, Inner Mongolia (Zou Tong, personal communication, 5 September 2009, Liao Shangjing Museum).



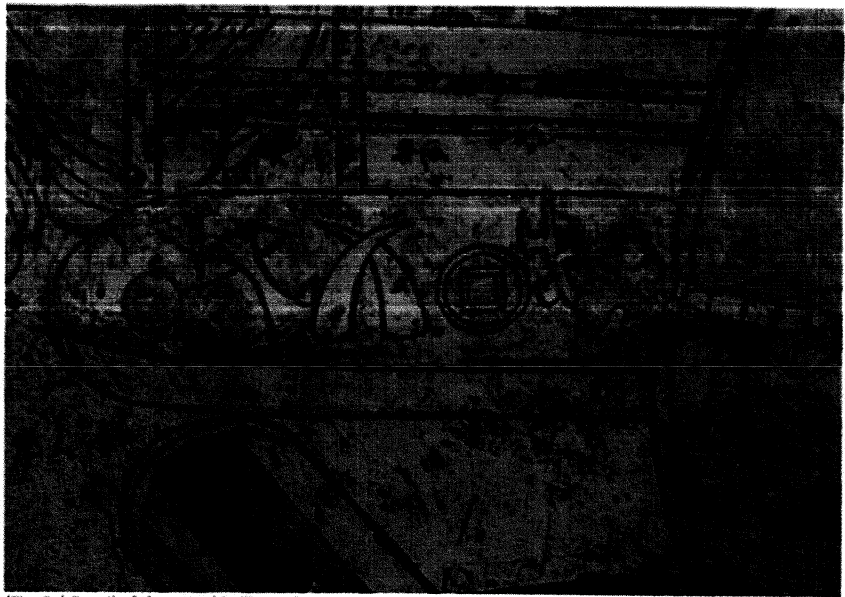
During the more than two centuries of Kitan rule, the quantity of imported goods entering the empire, particularly from the West, increased. Where earlier Liao period tombs contain only beads made from imported substances, later tombs (even as early as that of the Princess of Chen) contain many more and larger items made from imported glass, rock crystal, agate and amber.

Some important evidence about the use of imported goods in Liao territory may also be visual. The Zhang family tombs at Xiabali in Xuanhua have been much studied, especially since the publication of excellent colour photos of the wall paintings, dating between 1093 and 1117. The most successful members of the Zhang held office in the Liao government and intermarried with

the Kitan royal family. These paintings suggest a hybrid lifestyle, combining Chinese elements, such as the elaborate preparation of tea, with Kitan practices, like hunting and the use of men's hairstyles to indicate social status. The scenes are idealized: one sees multiple servants using fine utensils to prepare tea (Li Qingquan, 2008).

The nearby tomb of Han Shixun, also at Xiabali, Xuanhua, dating to 1111, contains similar wall paintings. One, on the northwest wall of the rear chamber, depicts servants and perhaps their masters examining different items in cases or on a nearby wooden frame (Fig. 9). Everything, including the two bundles of strung coins (presumably from payments in the Treaty of Chanyuan and subsequent agreements) on the floor, indicates great wealth. An open case contains a round bluish ball of jade or raw glass, a silver ingot, a pair of rhinoceros horns, a coin (perhaps made of amber), a branch of coral, and something in the shape of a fungus (Fig. 9a). The nearby stand holds multiple belts with white square tiles, possibly made of agate, on them.

Painted just before the fall of the dynasty, the Xuanhua murals document the idealized lifestyles of prosperous Chinese who intermarried with the Kitan and adopted various elements of their culture. They envisioned themselves in the next life, residing in households stocked with cases of imported goods. This was the world of at least the upper social strata of the Liao period; their horizons extended far beyond Liao territory to the northern reaches of Siberia (the source of walrus tusk), the Baltic (amber), the Caucasus (rock crystal) and Southeast Asia (pearls and rhinoceros horn). Kitan and Chinese demand for such luxury goods fuelled a global trade fully 1,000 years before our own intensely globalized era.



(Fig. 9a) Detail of the mural in Figure 9, showing the items in the open case

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- Ye Longli, comp., *Qidan guozhi*, Shanghai, 1985.



# ORIENTATIONS

In our first issue of 2011, we step back a millennium into the realm of the Liao dynasty. Valerie Hansen traces the connections between the Kitan and the world around them through critical archaeological evidence and textual sources. Zhao Feng and Yu Tingting introduce the recent Mengdiexuan Collection donations of Liao textiles to the China National Silk Museum, and we interview the collection's owners Betty Lo and Kenneth Chu.

Also in this issue, Robert E. Harrist, Jr. considers the Qianlong emperor's cultural and ideological enterprises with reference to his replications of the Stone Drums, and Marco Huysman and Laurens Heij delve into the 'three lives' of Robert Hans van Gulik. Cui Guoming of the Capital Museum, Beijing tells us about recent developments and future plans at the museum. Collectors of Japanese art Sylvan Barnett and William Burto offer insights into the iconography of deer mandalas originating at the Kasuga shrine near Nara.

Sarah Nelson reviews Elizabeth Childs-Johnson's book on the graph *yi* in Shang ritual art. We preview annual winter art fairs in Europe and San Francisco, while coverage from New York, Hong Kong and the UK reports on the latest trends in the auction world and the phenomenal record prices being set for Chinese works of art. We also review autumn art fairs in Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Beijing. In our commentary, Michael Brand offers a thoughtful perspective on restitution claims.

Cover: Bag  
Leather with damask  
Liao dynasty (916-1125)  
Height 21 cm, width 19 cm  
China National Silk Museum  
Donation from the Mengdiexuan Collection

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