

an important role in the history of Central Asia and of the Far East, is recognised in Chinese texts, particularly in the K'i-tan Kuo Chih 契丹國志 and the Liao Kuo Chih 遼國志, the annals of its dynasty.

The name K'i-tan has been transmitted to us by Chinese records. In Mongol works one reads instead Kitat (in Mongol-t is simply a plural ending). Arabian authors write Hitai, and we find these people called Khitaï in inscriptions from the Orkhon. (Today Russians call China: Kitai).

Already about 440 the Khitaï are mentioned as a people, dependent upon the northern dynasty of the Wei, who lived originally as nomads at the confluent of the Šara-müren and the Lao-ho in the southeastern section of Mongolia, afterwards in northern Manchuria from whence they moved towards the South. According to Chinese traditions, these people descended from the Sien-pi 鮮卑 (Tunguses), who in turn pretend to descend from the Tung-hu 東胡 hordes. About 900 the Khitaï appeared as a powerful people composed of eight hordes, with a Great Khan called A-pao-ki 阿保機 (posthumous name: T'ai-tsu 太祖) as chief. His successor, Têh-kuang 德光 (posthumous name: T'ai Tsung 太宗) founded in 938 a special dynasty, that of the Liao 遼, which lasted until 1125. After the destruction of their state, the remaining Khitaï went west, past the Altai, until they reached the valley of the Ili, and there founded in the same year the Hi (western) Liao dynasty of the Khara Khitaï (Kerait) which continued until the year 1208.

According to the little we know of the Khitaï language, these people have been considered Tunguses. But from their vocabulary they seem more to be Mongols with a pronounced palatalised dialect. In any case, however, the Dahures, who, like the Solones, consider themselves descendents of the Khitai, today speak a type of Mongol much mixed with Tunguse elements; the Solones even use the Tunguse idiom.

The state religion of the Khitaï as well was Buddhism, which spread through their land from 676 A.D. on. Schools, modeled also after the Chinese, were established.

They possessed a double system of writing: "large" letters, and "small" letters. The system of "large" characters was created by Chinese in 920 by order of A-pao-ki. It was composed of several thousand ideograms (cf. Ma Tuan lin, chap. 845, fol. 6 recto) which probably greatly resembled the writing of the Jurjen. The other system was borrowed from the Uigurs.

Among the documents known to us today, there are probably two Jurjen writings (five characters in a Chinese work, about thirty characters in a Tibetan xylograph). The Library of the Academy of Sciences in Budapest possesses rubbings of the two inscriptions discovered in June 1922 by L. Kervyn in the tomb of the K'i-tan Emperor Tao Tsung (died 1101 A.D.), one composed of 583 characters, and the other of 586 characters.