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A New Study of the Title of the Reigning Dynasty during the Pre-Qing Period

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Abstract

What was the title of the reigning dynasty from the time when Nurhachi assumed the title of “khan” to the time when Hong Taiji declared himself emperor? There remains controversy among scholars as to whether the title “Jin” 金 or “Later Jin” 後金 was used, or if both were in use during different periods. Based on voluminous historical sources dating to the pre-Qing period, which have been published and even digitized in recent years, in addition to conducting the first comprehensive search of relevant Manchu and Chinese sources as well as artifacts, the authors have confirmed that there is no conclusive evidence proving that “Later Jin” was once used as the title of the reigning dynasty. Based on over a hundred instances of official usage of the title “Jin,” the authors have also concluded that the title of the reigning dynasty remained “Jin” during the entire pre-Qing period and that “Tianming” (Mandate of Heaven) was not the title of an emperor’s reign.

Keywords

Jin – Later Jin – Qing history – title of a reigning dynasty – title of an emperor’s reign

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1 Introduction

Just what was the title of the reigning dynasty before Hong Taiji 皇太極 (r. 1626–1643) declared himself emperor? Scholars have yet to reach a consensus on this question. All the relevant journal articles discussing this question were written during the 20th century, and their arguments fall into three broad categories: first, the “Jin state” hypothesis, arguing that “Jin” was the only title of the reigning dynasty; second, the “Later Jin” hypothesis, arguing that “Later Jin” was the only title of the reigning dynasty; third, the “hybrid hypothesis,” which does not deny use of the title “Jin,” but also argues that the title “Later Jin” was used during a certain period. This controversy is rooted in the fact that the historical sources consulted by these scholars were neither comprehensive nor specific enough, leaving room for divergent narratives.

Following the robust development of the publication industry as well as the advent of digitization, conditions for the research of literature and history have undergone an unprecedented change. Many classics such as *Joseon sillok* 朝鮮實錄 (Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty), *Ming shilu* 明實錄 (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty), *Qing shilu* 清實錄 (Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty), *Manwen laodang* 滿文老檔 (Old Manchu Archive, hereafter referred to as *Laodang*), *Manwen yuandang* 滿文原檔 (Original Manchu archives, hereafter referred to as *Yuandang*),¹ *Neige dakudang* 內閣大庫檔 (*Imperial Cabinet Archives*) are now either electronically searchable or published in photocopy. Therefore, we enjoy better conditions for research than previous scholars, being able to conduct systematic and comprehensive searches of the relevant texts and artifacts.

Japanese scholar Sanjirō Ichimura 市村瓚次郎 (1864–1947) was the first scholar to write an article discussing the title of the reigning dynasty during the pre-Qing period. Having consulted documents circulating between the Joseon and the Jin, manuscripts in the Chongmo Hall of the Imperial Palace in Shenyang, letters from the khan of the Jin to the defending general of Ka Island, in addition to the inscriptions of the *Da Jin lama fashi baoji* 大金喇嘛法師寶記 (Great Jin Lama Master Precious Account), he argued that the title of the

1 The *Yuandang* mentioned in this article refers to the master copy which was originally housed in the Imperial Cabinet. It is now housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei and was republished in high resolution in 2006. The *Laodang* refers to the *Jia quandian Laodang* 加圈點老檔 (Old Manchu Archives with Punctuation) re-transcribed during the forty third year of Emperor Qianlong's 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796) reign and republished by Liaoning minzu chubanshe in 2010 under the title *Neige cangben Manwen Laodang* 內閣藏本滿文老檔 (Old Manchu Archives Housed in the Imperial Cabinet). See Wu Yuanfeng 吳元豐, “*Manwen Laodang chuyi*” 《滿文老檔》芻議, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊, no. 2 (2010).

reigning dynasty during the pre-Qing period was “Jin.”² Later in 1914, Iwakichi Inaba 稻葉岩吉 (1876–1940) furnished additional evidence in the form of artifacts with inscriptions containing “the great Jin,” including the lintel of Fujin 撫近 Gate, the grave of a lama in Liaoyang, and the Niangniang Temple at Dashiqiao, further supporting the “Jin state thesis.”³ Building on Inaba’s efforts, Xiao Yishan 蕭一山 (1902–1978) pointed out in 1923 that the document “Hong Taiji’s Decree to All Soldiers and Civilians” (*Huang Taiji yu junmin ren deng zhixi* 皇太極諭軍民人等知悉) in the *Imperial Cabinet Archives* also used “Jin” as the title of the reigning dynasty (see serial no. 7 of Fig. 2), further supporting the “Jin state” thesis.⁴ However, in the interests of brevity, the latter two scholars both referred to the Jin state founded by the Wanyan house as the “former Jin” and referred to the Nurhachi regime as the “Later Jin.”

Nearly half a century later, Huang Zhangjian 黃彰建 in 1966 began proposing the “hybrid thesis.” Huang relies on three key pieces of evidence for his new thesis. First, according to the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, during the eleventh year (1619) of the reign of Gwanghae-gun 光海君 (r. 1609–1623), the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) founder Nurhachi 努爾哈赤 (r. 1616–1626) affixed a seal onto his letter of credence to the Joseon dynasty, bearing the words “The Tianming Emperor of the Later Jin” (*Houjin tianming huangdi* 後金天命皇帝). Second, both the *Yuandang* and the *Laodang* contain texts with the term “amaga aisin” (Later Jin), which do not appear in other historical sources. Third, the term “Later Jin” was used to refer to the Manchu regime in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* and various other collections of documents. Huang believed that Nurhachi changed the title of the reigning dynasty from “Jianzhou” 建州 to “Later Jin” during the forty seventh year of Wanli 萬曆 (1619), and again changed it to “Jin” during the first year of Tianqi 天啟 (1621).⁵ Shortly after in 1973, Li Xuezhi 李學智 discovered that the seal of Nurhachi, which Huang regarded as one of his key pieces of evidence, was in fact a seal containing old Manchu characters which was regularly affixed onto the *Imperial Cabinet Archives*. The text on the seal ought to be read as “abkai fulingga aisin gurun han i doron,” which meant “the seal of the

2 Sanjirō Ichimura 市村瓊次郎, “Shinkoku kokugou kou” 清國國號考, in *Toyo kyokai chosabu gakujutu houkoku* 東洋協會調查部學術報告 (Tokyo: Toyo kyokai, 1909), 1: 129–39.

3 Iwakichi Inaba 稻葉岩吉, *Qingchao quanshi* 清朝全史, trans. Dan Tao 但焘 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1924), 1: 105–06; 1: 55–61.

4 Xiao Yishan 蕭一山, *Qingdai tongshi* 清代通史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1963), 48–53.

5 Huang Zhangjian 黃彰健, *Mingqing shi yanjiu congkao* 明清史研究叢稿 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1977), 481–519.

Tianming khan of the Jin state" (*tianming jinguo han zhi yin* 天命金國汗之印). In other words, the narrative in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* was not a literal translation, but rather a loose interpretation.⁶ In 1987, Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪 also refuted the "hybrid thesis" based on the seal and pointed out that the seal was once used on an official population registry now stored at the Imperial Palace Museum in Shenyang. Cai believed that the term "Later Jin" appeared on various literary collections and inscriptions because it was an informal term that spread to the Ming from the Joseon. In addition, inferring from the records in the *Laodang*, Cai also pointed out that the northern ethnic groups commonly named their state after their ethnic group, and the "Jin" was no exception to this rule. Cai is clearly a supporter of the "Jin state" thesis.⁷

After scholars neglected the question for an entire decade, Gao Qingren 高慶仁 proposed the "Later Jin" thesis in 1997. Besides repeating the aforementioned evidence from the *Laodang*, which lacked corroboration from other sources, Gao inferred that the pre-Qing Manchu regime was named "Later Jin" based on the *Hou Jin xi Ming Wanli huangdi wen* 後金檄明萬曆皇帝文 (An Official Denunciation of the Wanli Emperor [r. 1572–1620] of the Ming by the Later Jin)⁸ included in the *Qing ruguan qian shiliao xuanji* 清入關前史料選輯 (A Selected Compilation of Historical Sources from the Period before Qing Troops Entered Shanhaiguan Pass). Gao's argument was also based on usage of the term "Later Jin" in *Gwanghaegun ilgi* 光海君日記 (The Diary of Gwanghae-gun), *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* and *Zhazhong rilu* 柵中日錄 (An Everyday Record of Life behind Bars, of which the author Li Min was a Korean captured by Manchu troops at the Battle of Sarhū). According to Gao, "Da Jin" 大金 (the Great Jin) and "Jin" were merely honorific terms and simplified terms respectively.⁹

Therefore, this article will first re-examine the three key pieces of evidence in support of the "Later Jin" thesis with respect to their reliability. It will then list and analyze all available primary sources to clarify the issue of the title of the reigning dynasty during the pre-Qing period. Finally, it will discuss the

6 Li Guangtao 李光濤 and Li Xuezhì 李學智, eds., *Mingqing dang'an cunzhen xuanji* 明清檔案存真選輯 (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1959–1973), 2: 42–43.

7 Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪, "Daqingguo jianhao qian de guohao, zuming yu jinian" 大清國建號前的國號、族名與紀年, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 3 (1987).

8 This text was captured from Nurhachi's troops by Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼 (1569–1625), the Military Commissioner of Liaodong during the forty eighth year of Wanli (1620).

9 Gao Qingren 高慶仁, "1616 nian shang zunhao hou Nuerhachi zhengquan mingcheng kao-bian" 1616 年上尊號後努爾哈赤政權名稱考辨, *Manzu yanjiu* 滿族研究, no. 1 (1997).

question of whether “Tianming” 天命 (Mandate of Heaven) was the title of an emperor’s reign.

2 The Reliability of the Usage of “Later Jin”

Before we proceed to conduct in-depth analysis, we ought to clarify the official names of the various states concerned. Zhu Yuanzhang’s 朱元璋 (r. 1368–1398) edict issued during his ascension to the throne declared,

Today, all the highest ranking civil officials and military generals as well as various junior officials and the ordinary people have urged me to assume the throne in unison. All of them support me as emperor, hoping that I can govern the entire populace. Upon soliciting opinions from the common people, I paid my respects to heaven and earth at the southern slope of Zhongshan 鐘山 on the fourth day of the first month of the second year of the Wu dynasty (the name of the Ming dynasty before Zhu Yuanzhang declared himself emperor, 1368). I then assumed the throne as emperor at the southern suburbs and named the dynasty “the Great Ming,” designating that year as the first year of Emperor Hongwu’s 洪武 reign.¹⁰

Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (d. 1632), the Grand Master during the reign of the Tianqi Emperor (r. 1620–1627), once claimed, “The prefix *da* (big) was added to the title of the dynasty from the Yuan, which was founded by the barbarians. Our dynasty has followed this custom. It is appropriate that we revert to the customs of the barbarians, and we ought to distinguish our regime from that of the little Ming king. Only court officials and foreign barbarians used the honorific terms “the great Han,” “the Great Tang” and “the Great Song.”¹¹ We can thus conclude that the title of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) ought to be “the Great Ming,” which should be transcribed as “daiming” in the Manchu language.

Li Chenggui (r. 1392–1398), who proclaimed himself the regent of Korea since the late Yuan and early Ming, once despatched an envoy to the Ming court to express his wish to change the title of the ruling dynasty to “follow the heavenly way and abide by the people’s wishes” (*shun tiandao, he renxin* 順天

10 *Huangming zhaoling* 皇明詔令, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995, photocopied edition), 1.4.

11 Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎, *Yongchuang xiaopin* 湧幢小品, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (Tainan: Zhuangyan wenhua gongsi, 1997, photocopied edition), 1.

道，合人心). Between the two proposed titles “Hening” and “Chaoxian,” Zhu Yuanzhang chose the latter,¹² which ought to be transcribed as “coohiyān” in the Manchu language. Therefore, if Nurhachi were to issue a formal letter to the Joseon court, he ought to use the Manchu term “coohiyān gurun i wang” (the king of Korea). According to the *Yuandang* and *Laodang*, Nurhachi referred to himself as “amaga aisin gurun i han” (the khan of the Later Jin), while referring to the Joseon king as “solho han” (the khan of Seoul) in his letter of credence addressed to the Joseon court on the twenty first day of the third month of the Xinyou year during the reign of Tianming (1621).¹³ This runs contrary to common logic, because none of the 91 letters of credence and letters relating to the title of the dynasty and written in Manchu and Chinese (see below) referred to Korea as “solho” (Seoul) and used the official title of the dynasty “coohiyān” instead. Therefore, we suspect that the term “amaga aisin gurun” (Later Jin) in the *Yuandang* was not the official title of the dynasty. Furthermore, if “amaga aisin” was indeed the title of the dynasty, the term ought to appear frequently among primary sources of the Qing. Yet the term “Later Jin” does not appear in the “Veritable Records” of either the Taizu or Taizong emperors edited following the entry of Qing troops into the Shanhaiguan Pass and only appeared once in the aforementioned *Yuandang* or *Laodang*. Since the *Yuandang* is the most important primary source for researching the history of the early Qing, we shall then conduct a comprehensive analysis of all other mentions of the title of the ruling dynasty in this text.

If we were to conduct relevant searches previously, that would have been a herculean task which would involve much time and effort. Fortunately, the Manchu study group of Harvard University transcribed the *Laodang* word-for-word using romanization, thus producing a fully searchable electronic copy of the document,¹⁴ making it extremely convenient to conduct searches. Therefore, we first searched this transcribed document, then compared it against the *Yuandang*, in order to obtain the most accurate information in as short a time as possible.

Upon employing this approach, we found the following in the *Yuandang*: the Manchu rulers referred to the regime and themselves as “aisin gurun” (Jin state) in 87 instances; “aisin han” or “aisin i han” (khan of the Jin) in 19 instances; “amba aisin han” or “amba aisin i han” (khan of the Great Jin) in 3 instances; and

12 *Joseon Taejo sillok* 朝鮮太祖實錄 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1984), 15–16 (All other veritable records of the Joseon dynasty are of the same edition); *Ming taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄 (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1962), 3267 (All other veritable records of the Ming dynasty are of the same edition).

13 Feng Mingzhu 馮明珠, ed., *Manwen yuandang* 滿文原檔 (Taipei: Chenxiang ting wenhua gongsi, 2006), 53.

14 <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~mnch210a/index.cgi?t=Home>.

reference to “amba aisin” (Great Jin) only without mention of “han” or “gurun” (khan) appeared a total of 7 times. In addition, there were 17 instances in which “aisin gurun” (Jin state) was replaced with “manju gurun” (Manchu state). The term “jušen” (*Zhushen* 諸申/伸) appeared a total of 460 times, but there were only 20 instances in which it was used as the title of the reigning dynasty; and the term “jušen han” appeared a total of 4 times.¹⁵ Since the *Yuandang* contained references to both “manju” and “jušen” as the title of the reigning dynasty within the same year, with the Manchu rulers referring to the regime as the “aisin gurun” (Jin state), even using two different titles of the reigning dynasty within the same month or day, we know that the *Yuandang* did not follow a set of strict rules regarding the use of these terms.

Besides appearing in the *Yuandang*, the term “Later Jin” also appears in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*. To fully understand how official use of the term by the Joseon authorities evolved over time, we consulted the electronic database created by the National Institute of Korean History and conducted a comprehensive search of all related terms in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*.¹⁶ The earliest mention of the title of the Nurhachi regime appears in the Taebaeksan version of *The Diary of Gwanghae-gun*. The entry for the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year of Gwanghae-gun’s reign (1614) reads,

The chieftain of the Jianzhou tribe Tong Nurhachi was originally named “East?” (a character is missing from the original text). Thus, we have mistakenly referred to his state as Nurhachi, when “Nurhachi” ought to be the name of their chieftain, not the name of the state. Their chieftain was originally surnamed “Tong” but was later renamed “Jin” because they were descended from the Jurchen. Some call him “que” (sparrow), because the mother of their tribe gave birth to the chieftain after swallowing a sparrow’s egg. Today, he has founded a state named “Jin” in contravention of the Ming order, but men from the Central Plains usually refer to the regime as the “Jianzhou.”¹⁷

15 For similar counts done by previous scholars, see Xue Hong 薛紅 and Liu Housheng 劉厚生, “*Jiu Manzhou dang suoji da Qing jianhao qian de guohao*” 《舊滿洲檔》所記大清建號前的國號, *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學輯刊, no. 2 (1990); see also Zhao Zhiqiang 趙志強, *Qingdai zhongyang juece jizhi yanjiu* 清代中央決策機制研究 (Beijing: Shehui chubanshe, 2007), 38–39.

16 <http://www.history.go.kr/>.

17 Chunchugwan 春秋館, ed., *Gwanghaegun ilgi* 光海君日記 (Seoul: Jingcheng diguo daxue fawen xuebu), photocopied edition from the Taebaeksan version of the *Veritable Records of the Lee Dynasty*, 79: 209.

We may thus conclude that the Joseon people once referred to the Nurhachi regime as “Nu’ke chi” 奴可赤, “Jin” or “Que” 雀.

The entry for the nineteenth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of *The Diary of Gwanghae-gun* mentions that Nurhachi despatched Jeong Eungjeong 鄭應井 (fl. 1619, a Joseon general who was captured at the battle of Sarhū) as an envoy to the Joseon court, with the expression “Decree from the khan of the Later Jin to the Joseon king” on the letter of credence.¹⁸ At that time, the Joseon court ordered a translator who knew the Mongol language to translate the seal on the letter of credence, and the translator produced a text containing seven characters which read “The Tianming Emperor of the Later Jin.”¹⁹ However, the translation only contained six characters in fact. The seven characters claimed by the translator ought to refer to the original text which read “abkai fulingga aisin gurun han i doron” (the seal of the Tianming khan of Jin); this mistake in translation has already been clarified in an article by Li Xuezhi.

Following repeated discussions regarding the reply, the Joseon court decided that the reply would be sent in the name of Park Yup (n.d.), the Surveillance Commissioner of Pyeong-an Province. In accordance with existing protocol relating to correspondence between the Jurchen at the border and the Joseon court, the letter referred to Nurhachi as “Jianzhou wei mafa” 建州衛馬法 (The Elder of the Jianzhou garrison).²⁰ The *Yuandang* also mentions that this letter referred to the Jin as “giyan jeo ui mafa” (The Elder of the Jianzhou garrison). The Jin court was furious at references to “Jianzhou” and “mafa” as well as the fact that the letter was sent in the name of the Surveillance Commissioner of Pyeong-an Province, and claimed that “there was not a good word in the entire letter.”²¹ During the thirteenth year of Gwanghae-gun’s reign (1621), the Jin court rebuked the Joseon envoy Jeong Chungsin 鄭忠信 (n.d.) with reference to the reply, stating that “you would rather use the term ‘Jianzhou wei mafa’ but were afraid that we might take offense; at the same time, you consider the use of the term ‘Hou Jin guo han’ (khan of the Later Jin) to be an insult to yourself, so you have opted to prevaricate in this letter.”²²

18 Ibid., 139: 10.

19 Ibid., 139: 15.

20 Ibid., 139: 2–14.

21 Li Minhuan 李民奐, *Zhazhong rilu* 柵中日錄, in *Qingchu shiliao congkan* 清初史料叢刊 (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue lishixi), photocopied edition, 14–15; Feng Mingzhu, *Manwen yuandang*, 1: 24–43; *Manju sillok* 滿洲實錄 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1984), 5: 256–58.

22 Chunchugwan, *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, 166: 4–9; 168: 14; 169: 5–10. Feng Mingzhu, *Manwen yuandang*, 3: 59–60.

Since the presentation of letters of credence was a serious matter, the Joseon court reported this incident to their suzerain the Ming court when they despatched an envoy to Beijing. According to the entry for the Wuxu day of the fifth month of the forty eighth year of the Wanli Emperor's reign (1620; the Gengshen year of Tianming; the twelfth year of the Gwanghae-gun's reign) in the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty*, the Joseon envoy said,

You used "Later Jin" as the title of your dynasty, while border officials refer to your dynasty as the "Jianzhou"; this was the title bestowed on your tribe after you swore allegiance to the celestial empire of the great Ming. You proclaim yourself as the "khan," but border officials refer to you as the "mafa," just like how they treat chieftains of foreign tribes.²³

The Joseon court probably referred to the newly established regime as the "Later Jin" because they wanted to distinguish between it and the Jin dynasty ruled by the Wanyan house. Besides, the entry for the Wushen day of the sixth month of the forty eighth year of the Wanli Emperor's reign in the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* states that Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼 (1569–1625) once received a decree from the "khan of the Later Jin."²⁴ Some scholars believe that this decree is in fact *An Official Denunciation of the Wanli Emperor of the Ming by the Later Jin* (Houjin xi Ming Wanli huangdi wen 後金檄明萬曆皇帝文) currently housed at the Imperial Palace Museum in Beijing. However, close inspection has revealed that the original document does not contain the characters "Later Jin" at all.²⁵

In the eighth month of the fourteenth year of Gwanghae-gun's reign (1622), when the Joseon court planned to send a letter to the Jin court, the Right Premier Zhao Ting 趙挺 (1551–1629) remarked, "The bandits addressed their chieftain as the 'khan of the Later Jin' in their previous letter to us; if we omit the title of their dynasty in our letter to them today, the barbarians will certainly be even more enraged than before." The "previous letter to us" mentioned here ought to refer to the letter of credence received from the Jin court during the eleventh year of Gwanghae-gun's reign (1619). The Joseon court finally decided to adopt the format for their letter of credence to Japan in this reply, arriving at a compromise solution which involved referring to Nurhachi as "Jianzhou

23 *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄 (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1962), 594: 11397–400.

24 *Ming Shenzong shilu*, 595: 11409–11412.

25 We thank Dr. Qiu Yuanyuan 丘媛源 of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for checking this on our behalf.

wei hou Jin guo Kehan” 建州衛后金國可汗 (The khan of the Later Jin of the Jianzhou garrison).²⁶ It is worth noting that from this point onwards, the term “Later Jin” never appeared again in official sources of the Joseon court.

When the Joseon court first established contact with the Jin regime, it wished on the one hand to defend its honor, and on the other hand to avoid offending Nurhachi. Therefore, the Joseon court referred to the Jin regime by different names to test the waters and determine where Nurhachi drew the line regarding the title of his dynasty. However, after Jin troops invaded the Joseon during the first year of the Tiancong 天聰 era (1627–1636) during Hong Taiji’s reign (1627, the fifth year of the reign of King Injo of Joseon) and signed an alliance of brotherly states with the Joseon court, this situation ceased to exist. According to the entry for the third day of the third month of the fifth year of King Injo’s (r. 1623–1649) reign in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, the Joseon court referred to itself and the “Jin” as equals in its oath, declaring that both states would coexist peacefully and defend their respective borders.²⁷ An oath was an official document which should not contain any errors in names and expressions; we can thus conclude that the Joseon court referred to the Manchu regime as the “Jin” in unambiguous terms.

Furthermore, during the fifth year of King Injo’s reign, the Joseon court planned to send a letter to the Jin court, and the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* claimed, “The barbarians referred to their chieftain as ‘the khan of the Great Jin’ in their letter.” The Joseon court was divided on whether to use “the khan of the Great Jin” as well in their reply, and the Joseon king finally decided on the deletion of the character “great.”²⁸ Although some time had elapsed, it is clear that the Joseon court was still deliberating over the most appropriate title for the Manchu regime. Moreover, an entry for the fourteenth year of King Injo’s reign (1636) in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* records that “‘Jin’ was the title of the dynasty when Nurhachi proclaimed himself as khan, and ‘Qing’ was the title of the dynasty following Hong Taiji’s self-proclamation as emperor, in contravention of the Ming order.” Sandwiched between two powers, the Joseon court continued recognizing the great Ming as suzerain, and thus proclaimed, “we abide by the oath which we swore to heaven in the Dingmao year, so we refer to the Jin using their previous title; this is both legitimate and reasonable.”²⁹

26 Chunchugwan, *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, 180: 18–19.

27 *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1961–1977), 17: 811.

28 *Joseon Injo sillok* 朝鮮仁祖實錄 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1984), 16: 39–40.

29 *Ibid.*, 33: 37.

From the first year of the Tiancong era to the first year of the Chongde 崇德 era (1636–1643), the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* contain 48 direct references to the Manchu regime using the terms “Jin” or “Great Jin” and 121 references using the terms “Jin people,” “khan of the Jin” or “envoy of the Jin.” Besides, a key source from the Joseon court, the *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記 (Journal of the Royal Secretariat) does not contain a single reference to the “Later Jin”; all nine references to matters relating to the Jin state use the term “Jin.” To sum up, the reason why the term “Later Jin” only appears in official sources from the Joseon court is that the translator wished to distinguish the Manchu state from the Jin state ruled by the Wanyan house. Slightly later, this term spread to the Ming, but the Joseon court only used it up to the signing of the Dingmao treaty during the first year of the Tiancong era. It continued to be used, however, by commoners in the Joseon kingdom as well as the Ming authorities.

3 Conclusive Evidence in the Form of Artifacts

Although usage of the dynastic title on artifacts constitute the most direct and conclusive evidence, the dynastic title only appears on artifacts such as letters of credence, lintels, tablet inscriptions and seals a total of 23 times, which is insufficient to support an argument on its own. Therefore, we have endeavored to present artifacts carrying the dynastic title dating to the period before Hong Taiji changed the dynastic title to the “great Qing,” while incorporating the use of images and texts. (See Fig. 1)

Four lintels of Dongjing city gates are currently housed at the Liaoyang Museum: the lintel of Desheng 德勝 gate, with a vertical line in small font Chinese characters on its left, which reads “Da Jin Tianming Renxu nian Zhongxia Ji??” 大金天命壬戌年仲夏吉□□ (two characters missing from the original); lintel of Tianyou 天佑 gate, with a vertical line in small font Chinese characters on its left, which reads “Da Jin Tianming Renxu nian jichen li” 大金天命壬戌年吉辰立; the lintel of Neizhi 內治 gate, with characters on its left which reads “Da Jin Tianming Renxu nian” 大金天命壬戌年; the lintel of Fujin 撫近 gate, with a line of small font old Manchu with identical meaning.³⁰ In

30 Zou Baoku 鄒寶庫, “Liaoyang dongjingcheng faxian man-hanwen shike men'e” 遼陽東京城發現滿漢文石刻門額, *Wenwu* 文物, no. 4 (1982); Gao Qingren 高慶仁, “Lun Houjin Tianming jiyuan zhi bu cunzai” 論後金天命紀元之不存在, *Manzu yanjiu* 滿族研究, no. 2 (1997); Ren Wanping 任萬平, ed., *Qingshi tudian: Taizu Taizong chao* 清史圖典: 太祖太宗朝 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002), 144–45.

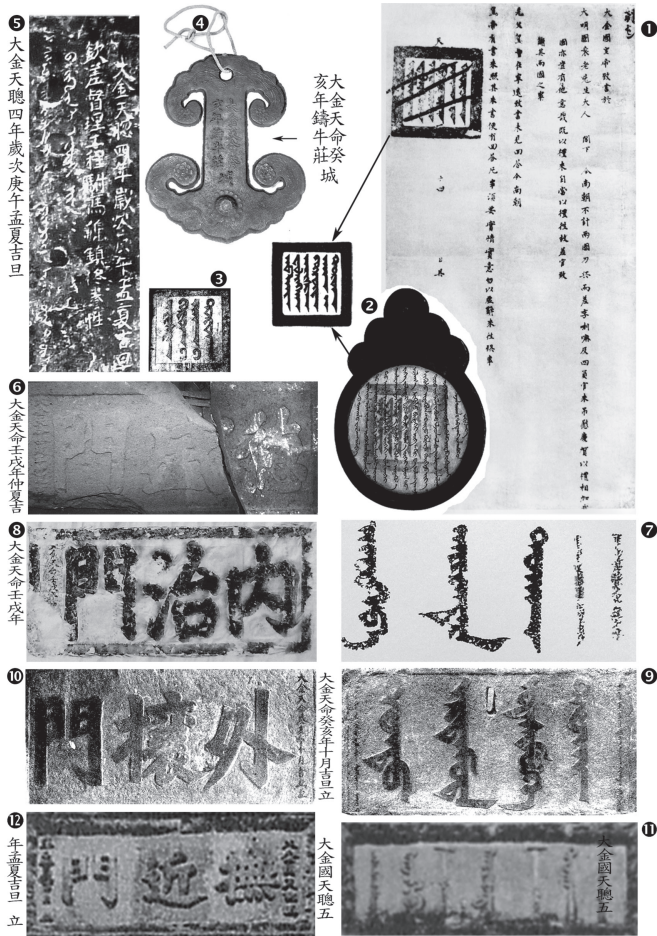


FIGURE 1 Artifacts relating to the dynastic title and dating from the pre-Qing period. They are, in successive order: 1) Letter from Hong Taiji to Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥; 2) *Xinpai* 信牌 written in the Mongol language during the sixth year of the Tiancong era (The chops in Figs. 1 and 2 are miniature images of “Tianming Jinguo han zhi yin” [The seal of the Tianming khan of the Jin]); 3) “Jinguo han zhi yin” (The seal of the khan of the Jin) written in old Manchu; 4) iron cast *umpan* 雲版 in Niuzhuang city; 5) the Great Jin Lama Master Precious Account in Liaoyang 辽阳; 6) to 8) The lintel rubbings of the Desheng 德勝 gate (in Chinese), the Fujin Gate (in Manchu), and the Neizhi 內治 Gate (in Chinese) in Dongjing; 9) and 10) the lintels of Desheng gate (in Manchu) and Wairang 外攘 gate (in Chinese) in Niuzhuang 牛莊 city; 11) and 12) the lintels of Fujin gate (in Manchu and Chinese) in Shenyang

addition, the lintel of Tianyou gate of Liaoyang, currently housed at the Chofu City Folk Museum in Tokyo, has a line of small characters on its left which reads “aisin gurun i abkai fulingga sahaliyan” (*Jinguo Tianming ren* 金國天命壬) and a line on its right which reads “indahūn aniya juwari biyade ilibuha” (*Xunian xiayue jian* 戊年夏月建).³¹

The Imperial Palace Museum at Shenyang houses four related artifacts: 1. the lintel of Wairang 外攘 gate of Niuzhuang 牛莊 city (Haicheng 海城 today), with Chinese characters on its right which reads “Da Jin Tianming Guihai Shiyue jidan li” 大金天命癸亥年十月吉旦立. 2. the lintel of Desheng gate of Niuzhuang, with old Manchu in small font on both sides; the text on the left reads “Jinguo Tianming Gui” 金國天命癸 and the text on the right reads “Hai nian Xiayue jian” 亥年夏月建, which is similar to the lintel of Tianyou gate in Dongjing.³² 3. the stone inscriptions on the lintel of Fujin gate and Hanwen 漢文 gate of Shengjing 盛京, with Chinese characters in small font on the left and right, which read “Da Jinguo Tiancong wu” 大金國天聰五 and “Nian Mengxia jidan li” 年孟夏吉旦立 respectively.³³ 4. iron cast *umpan* 雲版 used for hitting as an alarm, with inscribed text which reads “Dajin Tianming Guihai nian zhu Niuzhuang cheng” 大金天命癸亥年鑄牛莊城.³⁴

Existing tablet inscriptions or rubbings dating to the period before Hong Taiji proclaimed himself emperor are rare. The *Great Jin Lama Master Precious Account* housed at the Liaoyang Museum gives the date, preceded by the term Great Jin, as “Da Jin Tiancong sinian suici Gengwu Mengxia jidan” 大金天聰四年歲次庚午孟夏吉旦, and the corresponding old Manchu text also refers to the dynastic title as “aisin gurun” (the Jin state). In addition, the *Fengtian Tongzhi* 奉天通誌 (Fengtian Provincial Gazetteer) also contains some texts on stone tablet inscriptions which have since gone missing. For example, the “Chongxiu Yongning’an bei xu” 重修永寧庵碑文序 (Preface to the Tablet Inscription Commemorating the Reconstruction of the Yongning Temple) in Tieling dates to “Da Jin suici Yichou Zhongqiu yue shuo you yi ri jidan” 大金歲次乙丑中秋月朔有一日吉旦; the “Chongxiu huoshenmiao bei xu” 重修火神廟碑序 (Preface

31 Jun Matsumura 松村潤, “Guanyu Niuzhuang laocheng manwen men’e” 關於牛莊城老滿文門額, trans. Li Xianshu 李賢淑, *Manzu yanjiu* 滿族研究, no. 3 (1996).

32 Li Baotian 李寶田 and Jin Yufu 金毓黻, “Niuzhuangcheng laomanwen shike kaoshi” 牛莊城老滿文石刻考釋, *Kaogu tongxun* 考古通訊, no. 1 (1957); Jun Matsumura, Guanyu Niuzhuang laocheng manwen men’e.

33 Wang Shunan 王樹楠, Wu Tingxie 吳廷燮, and Jin Yufu 金毓黻, *Fengtian tongzhi* 奉天通誌 (Shenyang: Dongbei wenshi bianji weiyuanhui, 1983), 259: 11; Naitō Konan 內藤湖南, *Naitō konan zenshu* 內藤湖南全集 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1970), 627.

34 Li Li 李理 and Yu Ying 于穎, “Houjin Yunban zongheng tan” 後金雲板縱橫談, *Xungen* 尋根, no. 4 (2009).

to the Tablet Inscription Commemorating the Reconstruction of the Fire God Temple) in Tieling dates to “Da Jin suici Yichou ji xiayue nian you san ri jidan” 大金歲次乙丑季夏月廿有三日吉旦; the “Xinjian bao'an si bei” 新建保安寺碑 (The Tablet Inscription Commemorating the Construction of the Bao'an Temple) in Haicheng dates to “Da Jin Tiancong sannian suici jisi Mengxia yue jidan” 大金天聰三年歲次己巳孟夏月吉旦; the “Chi jian chongxiu Niangniang miao bei ji” 敕建重修娘娘廟碑記 (The Tablet Inscription Commemorating the Reconstruction of the Niangniang Temple on the Emperor's orders) in Yaozhou dates to “Da Jin Tiancong jiunian suici Yihai Mengdong jiri” 大金天聰九年歲次乙亥孟冬吉日.³⁵

Besides, the Manchu court used two treasure seals during the pre-Qing period. The first is the aforementioned seal containing the six lines of old Manchu “abkai fulingga aisin gurun han i doron,” which translates as “the seal of the Tianming khan of Jin.” This seal appears in several documents in the Imperial Cabinet Archives housed at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, as well as on a letter written in the Mongol language during the sixth year of the Tiancong era and housed at the Imperial Palace Museum at Shenyang. The second is the golden seal containing four lines of old Manchu, which translates into Chinese as “the seal of the khan of Jin,” and was used during the Tiancong era.³⁶ As for evidence in the form of artifacts containing Chinese texts such as letters of credence, edicts, and letters, all references to the dynastic title used the term “Jin.” (See Fig. 2)

In addition, the *Tiancong chao chengong zouyi* 天聰朝臣工奏議 (Memorials of Ministers during the Tiancong Era) compiled by Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940) contains 97 archival documents, of which 8 are related to the dynastic title, and all of them use the term “Jin.” Yet another piece of evidence is the *Taizong wenhuangdi zhaofu Pidao zhu jiang yu tie* 太宗文皇帝招撫皮島諸將諭帖 (Edicts Issued by the Taizong Wen Emperor to Offer Amnesty to the Generals on Ka Island), which contains 21 letters or edicts, of which 13 are related to the dynastic title, and all of them use the term “Jin.” Besides, the *Taizong Wen Huangdi zhi Chaoxian guowang shu* 太宗文皇帝致朝鮮國王書 (Letter from the Taizong Wen Emperor to the Joseon King) contains 15 letters of credence from the second to fourth year of the Tiancong era, all of which

35 Wang Shunan et al., *Fengtian tongzhi*, 259: 1–4; 12–13.

36 Tie Yuqin 鐵玉欽, “Xinpai yinpai zai kaoshi” 信牌印牌再考釋, *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學輯刊, no. 5 (1980); Wang Mingqi 王明琦, “Dui Houjin xinpai de liangdian bianzheng” 對後金信牌的兩點辯正, *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學輯刊, no. 4 (1981); Ren Wanping, *Qingshi tudian: taizu taizong chao*, 138, 227; Li Guangtao and Li Xuezhi, *Mingqing dang'an cunzhen xuanji*, 2: 42–43, Fig. 2.



FIGURE 2 Various artifacts containing Chinese texts such as letters of credence, edicts, and letters with references to the dynastic title
 Note: The images in nos. 8, 9, and 12 are taken from Lü Zhangshen 呂章申, ed., *Mingqing dang'an juan: Qingdai* 明清檔案卷 (清代) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 3, 5-9; no. 6 is taken from the Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Qingdai wenshu dang'an tujian* 清代文書檔案圖鑒 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004), Fig. 1-1-1. The remaining images are taken from the *Neige daku dang* 內閣大庫檔 at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica. We express my thanks to all involved

use the term “Jin.”³⁷ In the 133 documents from the Tiancong era mentioned above, the term “Later Jin” does not appear even once.

Moreover, the Kyujanggak Library of the University of Seoul in South Korea contains the *Joseonguk rae seobu* 朝鮮國來書簿 (Compilation of letters from the Joseon Court), which contains 52 letters of credence sent from the Joseon king to the Jin court during the Tiancong era; both their captions and inner texts use terms such as “khan of the Jin,” “the Jin khan” or “Jin,” and 40 of them use the exact term “Jin” without using the term “Later Jin” at all.³⁸

Finally, Fig. 3 lists four letters of credence written in Manchu and dating to the eighth and ninth years of the Tiancong era: the first sentence of No. 1 reads “aisin gurun i han i bithe daiming gurun i ambasa de unggihe,” which translates as “Letter from the khan of the Jin to the various officials of the great Ming.” Since the official dynastic title of the Ming dynasty, that is, the “Great Ming” was used on this occasion, the author would naturally have used the formal dynastic title in full when referring to his own side. No. 2 refers to their own side as “aisin gurun i han” (the khan of Jin) while referring to the Chongzhen Emperor as “daiming gurun i hūwangdi” (The Emperor of the great Ming). No. 3 is the reply from the Joseon court, which has been translated into Manchu. No. 4 is the Manchu copy of the letter of credence from the Jin to the Joseon court, and these two refer to each other as the “aisin gurun i han” (khan of the Jin) and “coohiyang gurun i wang” (king of the Joseon kingdom). The examples listed above all use the dynastic title in conjunction with the ruler’s title, referring to the Joseon as “wang” (king), the great Ming as “hūwangdi” (emperor), and the rulers of Jin (“aisin”) as “han” (khan).

37 Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, ed., *Tiancong chao chengong zouyi* 天聰朝臣工奏議, in *Sibu fenlei congshu jicheng xubian* 四部分類叢書集成續編 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1970), photocopied edition, 2: 24; Luo Zhenyu, *Taizong wenhuangdi zhaofu Pidao zhu jiang yu tie* 太宗文皇帝招撫皮島諸將諭帖, in *Sibu fenlei congshu jicheng xubian*, 1–25; Luo Zhenyu, *Taizong Wen Huangdi zhi Chaoxian guowang shu* 太宗文皇帝致朝鮮國王書, in *Sibu fenlei congshu jicheng xubian*, 1–18.

38 Zhang Cunwu 張存武 and Ye Quanhong 葉泉宏, eds., *Qing ruguan qian yu Chaoxian wanglai guoshu huibian, 1619–1643* 清入關前與朝鮮往來國書彙編 (1619–1643) (Taipei: Academia Historica, 2000), 1–9, 32–188.



FIGURE 3 Manchu documents of the Imperial Cabinet Archives

4 Is “Tianming” the Name of an Era?

The *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty* claims that Nurhachi became the great khan during the Bingchen year or forty fourth year of the Wanli Emperor's reign (1616), and founded the state while naming the era Tianming. However, is Tianming the name of an era? Over the years, while several scholars including Huang Zhangjian, Cai Meibiao, Zhao Zhiqiang 趙志強 and Gao Qingren have discussed this question in depth, they have failed to reach a clear consensus, just as in the case of the dynastic title. Huang Zhangjian discovered that *The Diary of Gwanghae-gun* dates the letter of credence from Nurhachi to “the second year of the Tianming era,” while *Luanzhong xulu* 亂中續錄 (A Continued Record of Events during an Age Of Turmoil) dates a memorial written during the forty seventh year of Emperor Wanli's reign to “Tianming sanshiliu nian (?) yue (?) ri” 天命三十六年□月□日 (two characters are missing from the original text). Therefore, Huang inferred that Tianming was the name of an era, and claimed that “when Nurhachi proclaimed himself as khan during the forty seventh year of Emperor Wanli's reign, he designated the twelfth year of Emperor Wanli's reign as the first year of the Tianming era retroactively, so the forty seventh year of Emperor Wanli's reign corresponds to the thirty sixth year of the Tianming era; but shortly after the thirty sixth year of the Tianming era, he added the *ganzhi* 干支 of the year under the Tianming title.”³⁹ Cai Meibiao's assertion that Tianming is the name of an era, however, is based on the fact that “Tianming” was added to the front of the *ganzhi* of the year in the lintel of Neizhi gate in Dongjing, the *umpan* in Niuzhuang, as well as the three memorials.⁴⁰ Zhao Zhiqiang also argued that Nurhachi founded an era named Tianming during the twelfth year of Emperor Wanli's reign. He further suggested that the reason why the Manchu regime only used *ganzhi* to denote a given year (instead of numbers) was that *ganzhi* represented certain colors, which was in accordance with the Manchu convention of denoting a given year using colors.⁴¹ Gao Qingren, on the other hand, presents an alternative argument: based on evidence in the form of artifacts including cash issued during the reign of the Tianming khan, the *xinpai* with engraved Manchu and Mongol texts, the *umpan*, the seal of the Tianming khan of the Jin, the Desheng gate of Dongjing, the Chinese text on the lintel of Tianyou gate, and the Emperor's Audience Hall at Hetu Ala, he believes that Tianming is the short form of the

39 Huang Zhangjian, *Mingqing shi yanjiu congkao*, 552–78.

40 Cai Meibiao, “Daqingguo jianhao qian de guohao, zuming yu jinian.”

41 Zhao Zhiqiang, “Qingdai zhongyang juece jizhi yanjiu.”

honorific title “Tianming khan,” which means “the khan appointed by Heaven” instead of being the name of an era.⁴²

According to common logic, assuming that Tianming is indeed the name of an era, we ought to encounter numerous mentions of “the first year of Tianming,” “the second year of Tianming,” and “the third year of Tianming” in both artifacts and literary texts. Only then can it be referred to as the name of an era. According to the entry for the Jisi year or the eleventh year of Gwanghae-gun’s reign in *The Diary of Gwanghae-gun*, the letter of credence brought back by Zheng Yingjing carries the expression “the second year of the Tianming era,”⁴³ and this has since constituted a piece of key evidence in support of Huang Zhangjian’s argument that Tianming is the name of an era. However, according to the *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*, that year ought to be “the fourth year of the Tianming era,” so we suspect that the Joseon court probably regarded the Wuwu year or the forty sixth year of Wanli (corresponding to the so-called “third year of the Tianming era” in the *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*), when Nurhachi rebelled against the Ming citing the Seven Great Grievances, as “the first year of the Tianming era,” and extrapolated from this base point.⁴⁴ In other words, this mode of calculation was not officially used by the Nurhachi regime.

In reality, existing artifacts including the Manchu and Chinese texts on the lintels of the gates of Dongjing and Niuzhuang all used Tianming in combination with *ganzhi* to denote a given year; none of them involved the use of numbers. An edict written in old Manchu and housed in the Imperial Cabinet Archives (accession no. 163607-001), which has yet to be published openly, denoted a given year as “abkai fulingga han i sahaliyan ulgiyan,” which translates as “the Renhai year during the reign of the Tianming khan.” Although “renhai” does not exist in *ganzhi*, another edict housed in the *Imperial Cabinet Archives* denotes a given year in both Manchu and Chinese as “abkai fulingga fuligiyan tasha aniya.”⁴⁵ Comparing both records, we have reason to suspect that the Manchu court denoted a given year using *ganzhi*, but specified that the denotation falls within the reign of the “Tianming (khan).”

It is also worth noting that the *Yuandang*, which was edited as a chronicle, consistently gave the denotation of the year before starting on the entry for the first day of the first month of the year in question. The denotation of any given

42 Gao Qingren, “Lun Houjin Tianming jiyuan zhi bu cunzai.”

43 Chunhugwan 春秋館, ed., *Gwanghaegun ilgi* 光海君日記 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 1984), 10.

44 *Qing taizu shilu*, 5: 69–70. Dai Yi 戴逸 and Li Wenhai 李文海, eds., *Qing tongjian* 清通鑿 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2000), 7: 149; 8: 155–61.

45 Li Guangtao and Li Xuezi, *Mingqing dang'an cunzhen xuanji*, 62.

year during the Tiancong era was given according to the “number plus *ganzhi*” format; for instance, the first month of the third year was given as “sure han ni ilan ci aniya sohon meihe aniya.”⁴⁶ Hence, we know that the Manchus adopted the convention of denoting a given year according to *ganzhi*, while also adding numbers to denote the name of the era. The *Yuandang* contains 13 entries under the first month of the Tianming era. Assuming that “Tianming” is indeed the name of an era, the relevant archival documents ought to have added the denotation of a given year in *ganzhi* or numbers following Tianming in the first month entries of successive years during the Tiancong era. However, upon consulting those documents, we discovered that all the entries used *ganzhi* to denote a given year, and never added the term Tianming before *ganzhi*.

Looking at the 6 artifacts, 2 documents, and 13 entries relating to the Tianming era in the *Yuandang* which we have discussed above, all of them use *ganzhi* to denote a given year, sometimes adding Tianming before *ganzhi*. In none of those examples was there an expression in the format “x years of the Tianming era.” we have reason to suspect that this is because Nurhachi refused to acknowledge the Ming as the legitimate ruler, and so used *ganzhi* in conjunction with the honorific title “abkai fulingga han” to denote a given year. If Tianming is indeed the name of an era, it seems unbelievable that the expression “x years of the Tianming era” is missing from all these literary texts and artifacts.

5 Conclusion

Prior to the first year of the Tiancong era (1627), owing to errors in translation or the need to distinguish between the Manchu regime and the Jin dynasty ruled by the Wanyan house, the Joseon court referred to the Nurhachi regime as the “Later Jin,” and this term made several appearances in official documents such as the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* and *Yuandang*. However, after consulting nearly a hundred archival documents, we conclude that the sole reference to the Joseon king as the “solho han” (khan of Seoul) in the *Yuandang* is a deviation from convention. Therefore, the use of “amaga aisin” in these same documents might have stemmed from the transcriber’s occasional following of Joseon convention.⁴⁷ After the Dingmao alliance of brotherly states, the Joseon court no longer referred to the Manchu regime as the “Later Jin,” but this term

46 Feng Mingzhu, *Manwen yuandang*, 5: 138. “Shule khan” is the honorific title for Nurhachi. “Shule” means “wise” in Manchu.

47 Zhao Zhiqiang, *Qingdai zhongyang juece jizhi yanjiu*, 39.

remained in use among commoners and spread to the Ming. Therefore, the term “Later Jin” appears frequently in literary collections of the time.

To study this issue, this article conducted deeper analysis and closer scrutiny of textual evidence which has been consulted in the past, and combed through primary sources including literary texts and artifacts containing both Manchu and Chinese systematically for the first time, to minimize bias and distortion owing to the lack of materials. The relevant evidence which we have gathered includes 8 lintels containing Manchu and Chinese texts, 5 tablet inscriptions, 2 seals, 1 *umpan* and 91 documents including archives and letters. Not only is the quantity of this evidence more substantial than that gathered by past scholars, it also encompasses the majority of time periods. All of these data support the “Jin” thesis; there is no conclusive evidence in the form of artifacts which refer to the dynastic title of the Manchu regime as the “Later Jin.” At the same time, this also suggests that Tianming was an honorific title and not the name of an era. In other words, from the time when Nurhachi proclaimed himself khan to the time when Hong Taiji proclaimed himself emperor and founded the “Great Qing,” the dynastic title of this regime remained “Jin” throughout, which is transcribed as “aisin” in Manchu.

Translated by Cheng Yi Meng

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