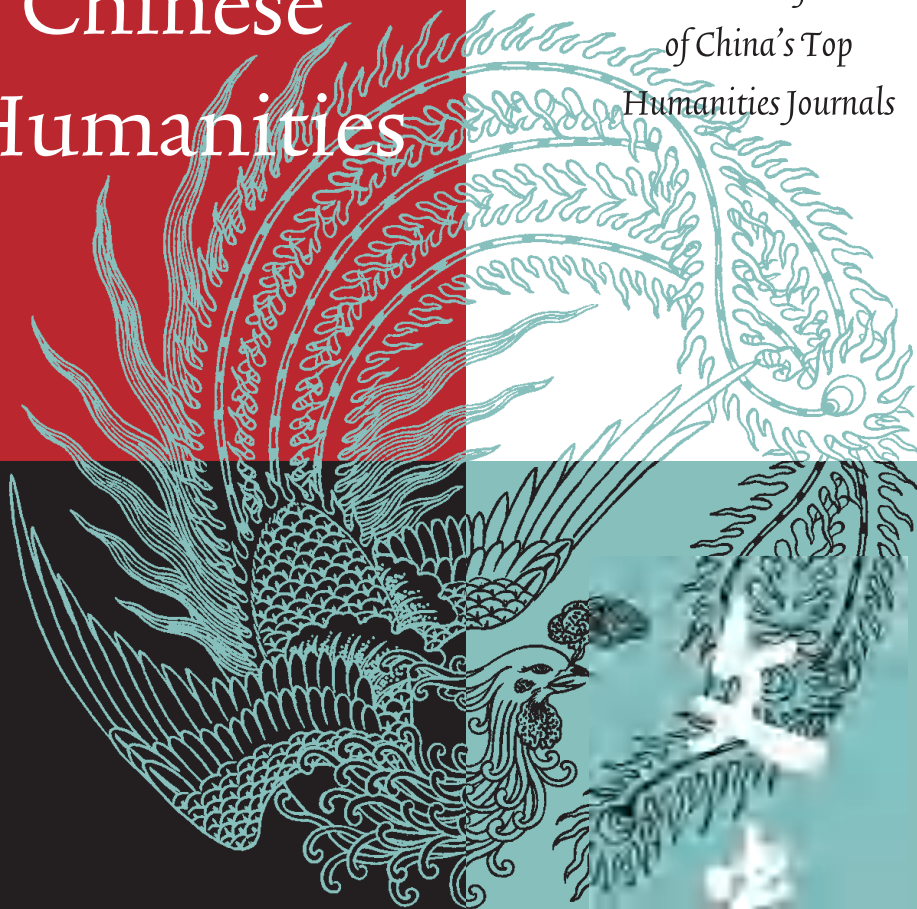


# Journal of Chinese Humanities

An English-language  
Extension of One  
of China's Top  
Humanities Journals



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# Journal of Chinese Humanities

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*Journal of Chinese Humanities* is an English-language extension of *Literature, History and Philosophy* (*Wen Shi Zhe* 《文史哲》), a famous Chinese journal published by Shandong University. The content is not restricted to one aspect of Chinese culture but rather spans important topics within the fields of Chinese history, philosophy, and literature. It covers both traditional and modern areas of research. Importantly, as opposed to most English language journals that treat on Chinese studies, this journal aims to represent the current research coming out of mainland China. Thus each issue will be composed primarily of articles from Chinese scholars working at Chinese institutions, while at the same time including a small number of articles from foreign authors so as to provide opposing perspectives. This way, top scholars in China can be read in the Western world, and our Western readers will benefit from a native perspective and first hand material and research coming out of China. Every issue will be theme-based, focusing on an issue of common interest to the academic community both within and outside China. The majority of articles will relate directly to the central theme, but each issue will also accept a limited number of articles not directly related to the current theme. This journal primarily targets academics in the English-speaking world who are interested in multiple aspects of Chinese civilization and humanities. It will be of interest to both scholars and advanced students, both specialists and informed readers. It is one of the best windows for western readers to deepen their understanding of Chinese literature, history and philosophy.

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# Introduction: Founding Histories of China's Northern Kingdoms

*Miao Runbo* 苗潤博

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Peking University,

Beijing, China

*miaorb@163.com*

When a new dynasty is established, writing the story of its own founding becomes a task of utmost importance. It is the art of turning legend into history. This act of inscribing a new dynasty's legitimacy into the pages of history is a specialized object of study for many Chinese historians.

In China, the founding histories of the major Central Plains dynasties such as the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), and Ming (1368–1644) are relatively straightforward. The founding of the northern kingdoms, however, is a much more complicated historiographical issue. These northern kingdoms often do not have their own indigenous writing system. Records of their history are after-the-fact recollections written for the first time in a foreign language (Chinese). These various Chinese accounts often represent differing historical perspectives which conflict with one another. Add to this the fact that such contemporaneous Chinese records were also few in number and indirect by nature, it becomes clear that the historian has a difficult task in separating truth from myth.

Furthermore, soon after these northern kingdoms were established, they went through a period of cultural transformation. (In the case of China, cultural assimilation might be a more accurate term.) Those who held power in the courts began to realize that they faced two tasks of great importance, which if handled properly could cement their legitimacy in the annals of Chinese history. They had to write – or rewrite – their own founding story to paint themselves in the most positive light possible. They also had to find a way to incorporate this story into the larger, unbroken narrative that comprises China's dynastic history. When framed in this light, the history of these dynasties often evolves into accounts that are hard to verify.

This special issue contains five articles researching the founding history of four northern dynasties: the Liao (907–1125), Jin (1115–1234), Yuan (1206–1368), and Qing (1616–1911).

In studying the founding histories of the northern dynasties, the two central problems that require the most attention are the specific date of a nation's founding, and name that the new nation gave itself. The themes of this special issue revolve around these topics.

In “The Question of the Founding Year of the Khitan Dynasty”, Liu Pujiang 劉浦江 (1961–2015) sifts through two strands of historical documentation, that of the Central Plains tradition and that of the Liao (Khitan) tradition, to piece together the time of the dynastic founding. Miao Runbo's 苗潤博 article, “A Political Time Rewritten: Revisiting the Founding Year of the Khitan Empire”, furthers Liu Pujiang's research into the founding of the Khitan dynasty. He argues that the controversy surrounding the specific date and circumstances of the founding is not due to contradictory camps of evidence, but rather to the fact that later Khitan historians deliberately changed their founding history.

In “On Revision and Reconstruction”, Qiu Jingjia 邱靖嘉 claims that the commonly held date for the founding of the Jin dynasty is incorrect and that this, too, is the result of later scholars rewriting history for ideological purposes. Chen Xiaowei's 陳曉偉 “On the Issue of Determining the Founding Year of the ‘Great Mongol Nation’” brings out rarely-used historical documents to argue that Genghis Khan proclaimed the founding of the great Mongol empire an entire five years after what the majority of history books claim to be the founding date. Finally, Lu Zhengheng 盧正恒 and Huang Yinong's 黃一農 research looks into the founding of China's last dynasty, the Qing. Relying on pre-Qing texts in both Chinese and Manchurian scripts, their article, “A New Study of the Title of the Reigning Dynasty during the Pre-Qing Period”, concludes that before the founding of the Qing dynasty, the forefather of the Qing emperors had called their kingdom simply “Jin”, and that, despite prevailing theory, the “Later Jin” name was never an officially adopted moniker.

Whether through the use of new material or new methodology, the articles presented herein have successfully brought new findings to the field of late medieval Chinese history. They demonstrate the complexity of issues concerning the history of China's northern kingdoms, and open up new questions for further research.



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# The Founding Year of the Khitan Dynasty: A Textual Investigation Based on Primary Sources

*Liu Pujiang* 劉浦江

Professor, Chinese Ancient History Research Center, Peking University,  
Beijing, China

*Liupujiang@pku.edu.cn*

## Abstract

This article is an investigation into the founding of the Khitan empire based on a diverse collection of historical documents from both the Northern and Central Plains regions. These sources include the official history of the Liao dynasty, *Liaoshi*, written during the year of dynasty's foundation in 907, the *Qidan guo zhi* from 916, as well as a variety of documents ranging from as early as the late 8th century to the mid 10th century. Some historians go as far as to say that Yelü Abaoji, who ruled the Liao dynasty from 907–926, never assumed the title of emperor. Although today's scholarship on the Liao dynasty tends to fundamentally agree that Yelü Abaoji, who is known in history books as Taizu, the first emperor of the Liao dynasty, officially proclaimed the founding of the dynasty with himself as emperor in the first year of Shence in 916, no one has yet undertaken a proper investigation as to the details of the historical source material which has led to this assumption. This article is based on primary source research and investigates these critical pieces of historical evidence surrounding the founding of the Liao dynasty to better clarify events surrounding this major historical moment.

## Keywords

Khitan – Qidan – Liao dynasty – Yelü Abaoji – dynastic founding

Regarding the issue of the founding year of the Khitan empire, the many historical records are not at all in agreement. The *Liaoshi* 遼史 asserts that the Taizu 太祖 Emperor, Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (r. 916–926), proclaimed the founding of the dynasty in 907 and from 916 declared the beginning of his dynasty in the year of Shence 神册 (916–922). Yet today's scholarship on the history of the Liao dynasty generally believes that in 907, Yelü Abaoji merely assumed leadership as the new Khan of the Yaonian 遙輦 clan to become leader of the unified Khitan tribes and only in 916 declared himself the emperor of a new Khitan empire. There is a small group of scholars, basing their views on the *Liaoshi*, who advocates that 907 should be considered the founding year of the Liao dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in the 1930s Japanese scholars, based on records from the Five Dynasties (907–960) and the Song dynasty (960–1279), articulated the argument that the Khitan empire was not founded until the first year of the Tianzan 天贊 (922–926) in 922.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars even go so far as to state that Yelü Abaoji never actually assumed the title of emperor, and it was only Liao Taizong 遼太宗 (r. 923–947) who finally adopted the mantle of Chinese-style emperors.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 Perspectives of Liao Dynasty Historians and the Inheritance of Historical Knowledge

While there are many conflicting historical records concerning the founding of the Khitan empire originating from the Liao-Song (960–1279), Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, these documents can generally be classified into two “systems of historical knowledge inheritance.” One is the general historical narrative originating from early historians of the Liao dynasty from the Jin and Yuan periods who compiled the texts of the *Liaoshi* – these narratives may be classified together as the “Northern Dynasties Historiographical System” (*Beichao wenxian xitong* 北朝文獻系統). A second narrative grouping can be understood to originate from the oral history and records of historians of the era of the Five Dynasties and the Song era. This narrative grouping can

- 
- 1 Hua Shan 華山 and Fei Guoqing 費國慶, “Abaoji jianguo qian qidan shehui shitan” 阿保機建國前契丹社會試探, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 6 (1958): 46–53.
  - 2 Ogawa Yuto 小川裕人, “Hashimoto masukichi shi no ‘Ryo no kenkoku nendai ni tsuite’ 橋本増吉氏の「遼の建國年代に就いて」を読む, *Touyoshi kenkyu* 東洋史研究 1, no. 5 (1936).
  - 3 Hashimoto Masukichi 橋本増吉, “Ryo no kenkoku nendai ni tsuite” 遼の建國年代に就いて, *Shii sio* 史潮, no. 1 (1936).

be identified as the “Central Plains Historiographical System” (*Zhongtu wenxian xitong* 中土文獻系統).

Within the Northern Dynasties Historiographical System, the most authoritative text is the *Liaoshi*. Based on the records from “Taizu ji” 太祖紀, Hen Dejin 痕德堇 (d. ca. 906), Khan of the Yaonian 遙輦 clan, died at the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907) in the twelfth month of the third year of the Tianyou 天佑 era (904–923). With his passing, Yelü Abaoji was proclaimed emperor on the first month the following year. He adopted the ruling title of Taizu Emperor, the “Great Sage and Bright Heavenly Emperor” (*Dasheng daming tian huandi* 大聖大明天皇帝), in the second month of 916 and entitled his reign-period as Shence.<sup>4</sup>

The *Liaoshi*, compiled by Yuan scholars, mainly relies on the *Huangchao shilu* 皇朝實錄 completed under Yelü Yan 耶律儼 (d. 1113) of Liao along with the writings of Chen Daren 陳大任 (fl. 1207) and the *Qidan guo zhi* 契丹國志.<sup>5</sup> There are indications that from this narrative’s perspective regarding the founding year of the Khitan empire, the evidence is primarily derived from the *Qidan guo zhi*. According to the *Liaoshi*, the first year of Taizu was 907 while the eleventh (should be the ninth) year of the Taizu reign is recorded as the beginning of the Shence year. The Dingwei first day 丁未朔 of the fourth lunar month of the first year of the Taizu reign was marked as “Yelü Yan,”<sup>6</sup> which indicates that the fourth month was Dingwei in that year as recorded in *Huangchao shilu* by Ye Lüyan. This demonstrates that the record of *Huangchao shilu* also began in the first year of the reign of Taizu, thereby marking the first year of Taizu as the beginning of the Khitan empire. The *Huangchao shilu* began to be compiled from the reign of Emperor Daozong 道宗 (r. 1055–1101) to that of Tianzuo 天祚 (r. 1101–1125). However, its statement regarding the founding year of the Khitan empire is most assuredly not the most original textual record from historians of the Liao dynasty.

According to research by scholar Feng Jiasheng 馮家昇 (1904–1970), before the publication of *Huangchao shilu*, the Liao dynasty had already compiled its dynastic history three times.<sup>7</sup> Among the earliest histories, *Shilu* 實錄 was compiled in the ninth year of the reign of Shengzong 聖宗 (r. 983–1031) by Shi Fang 室昉 (920–994) in a twenty-volume record. What the Liao dynasty’s *Shilu* actually refers to is a biographic type of dynastic history rather than

4 *Liaoshi* 遼史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1, 2–3, 10–11.

5 See Feng Jiasheng 馮家昇, “Liaoshi yuanliu kao” 遼史源流考, in *Feng Jiasheng lunzhu ji cui* 馮家昇論著輯粹 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 117–30.

6 *Liaoshi*, 44.568.

7 See Feng Jiasheng, “Liaoshi yuanliu kao,” 102–3.

an annalistic type of veritable records of a single emperor. However, due to the unknown start and end dates from the edition of the *Shilu* published in the ninth year of the Tonghe 統和 (983–1012) Emperor's reign, there is no way to determine whether or not it contains any content regarding the founding history of the Liao dynasty. The second instance of compilation was conducted in the thirteenth year of Zhongxi 重熙 (1044), under the reign of Emperor Xingzong 興宗 (r. 1031–1055), and was also entitled *Shilu*. The book, recorded “Yaonian Kehan zhi Zhongxi yilai shiji” 遙輦可汗至重熙以來事蹟, should obviously include content on the founding of the Liao dynasty. The third compilation was completed by the Daozong Emperor in his first year of Da'an 大安 (1085) and entitled *Shilu*. It recorded seven emperors including Taizu Emperor and his successors down to the Xingzong Emperor. Naturally, this work should also touch upon the period surrounding the founding of the Khitan empire.

According to the aforementioned volumes, the earliest reference to the founding of the Liao dynasty by its historians is recorded at the earliest in the *Shilu* compiled in the ninth year of Tonghe under the Shengzong Emperor and at the latest in the thirteenth year of Zhongxi Emperor's reign in his own edition of *Shilu*. Furthermore, Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* documentation surrounding the founding of the dynasty by Yelü Abaoji does little more than borrow from these aforementioned compilations of the dynasty's history.

As everyone knows, Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* survived until the end of the Yuan dynasty and became an importance source for the *Liaoshi*. What is less well known is that, after the fall of the Liao dynasty, *Huangchao shilu* was still included among the historical records of the Liao even up to the Southern Song (1127–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) periods. The *Suichutang shumu* 遂初堂書目 includes *Qidan shilu* 契丹實錄 as a book in the category of geography<sup>8</sup> while the *Songshi* 宋史 includes it as a biography volume but does not give the author's name. *Shishantang cangshu mulu* 世善堂藏書目錄 by Ming dynasty books collector Chen Di 陳第 (1541–1617) records two types of Liao dynastic history. One is *Liao xianchao shiji chao* 遼先朝事蹟抄 in four volumes by Xiao Hanjianu 蕭韓家奴 (975–1046). The other is *Liao shilu chao* 遼實錄抄 in four volumes by Yelü Yan.<sup>9</sup> Evidently, the former is a transcript of the *Shilu* compiled by Xiao Hanjianu and others in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi era. Furthermore, the latter work is a transcript of Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu*. *Shishantang cangshu mulu* was compiled in the forty-fourth year of the Wanli

8 You Mao 尤袤, *Suichutang shumu* 遂初堂書目, in vol. 28 of *Shuo fu* 說郛 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 489b.

9 Chen Di 陳第, *Shishantang cangshu mulu* 世善堂藏書目錄, in *Zhi buzhu zhai congshu* 知不足齋叢書, 37b.

萬曆 Emperor (1616). Regretfully, however, Chen Di's collection of works at the *Shishantang* 世善堂 disappeared, likely before the reign of the Qianlong Emperor 乾隆 (r. 1736–1796). It can be inferred from this that these two records of Liao dynasty history were lost at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1616–1911).

Based on intuitive judgment, as these types of records concerning the Liao dynasty's history can be seen in the Southern Song and Ming era, their origins are likely to be similar. When contrasted with the Yuan dynasty's Historiography Institute collection of the *Huangchao shilu*, these Southern Song and Ming documents are unlikely to be any longer than small volumes. Although the number of volumes in the collection entitled *Qidan shilu* belonging to You Mao 尤袤 (1127–1194) is not stated, it is likely that *Songshi* and *Qidan shilu* are the same type of book and only about one volume in length. Based on this situational analysis, it is highly probably that there were a variety of dynastic histories in circulation among the Liao people. It was only when the six prefectures of Yanjing 燕京六州 entered the Song during the reign of the Xuanhe Emperor 宣和 (1119–1125) that they were seen among Song society. This could explain why they only entered historical records after the fall of the Southern Song. What is regrettable is that very few people in the Southern Song dynasty knew about the existence of these manuscripts and they are not at all cited. Therefore, it is not hard for us to understand why the Song people were completely unaware about the founding of the Khitan empire in relation to the history of the Liao.

Besides the people of the Song dynasty, awareness towards Liao dynasty history was very low even amongst the Jin people. Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257), once emotionally stated, “Alas, we have been without historians for too long. In the Taihe 泰和 era, the Wanyan Jing Emperor 完顏璟 (r. 1190–1208) ordered the compilation of the *Liaoshi*. Not long after book was completed the Jin lost the capital of Yanjing and moved to Bianjing 汴京. The histories were lost, never to be see again. Today's people speak about the history of the Liao, countless lords have wiped from our history, and the next generation cannot name them yet let alone describe them in any detail.”<sup>10</sup> This quote clearly illustrates the circumstances at the twilight of the Jin dynasty. The people of the Jin dynasty clearly were interested in and discussed the issues surrounding the founding of the Khitan empire but could not explain them in detail. As seen in the year of the Jin dynasty's collapse (1234), the article written by Xiu Duan 修端 “Bian Liao Song Jin zhengtong” 辯遼宋金正統, “The Liao dynasty's

10 “Gu Jin qishuijun hou Yelu gong muzhi ming” 故金漆水郡侯耶律公墓志銘, in vol. 51 of *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 424.554b.

Taizu took full advantage of the opportunity to subdue Koryŏ and other countries, even annexing Yanzhou 燕州 and Yunzhou 云州 thousands of miles to the north. Thereafter, he ascended to the throne the same year as the Zhu Wen 朱溫 Emperor, known as the ‘Year of Dingmao’ 丁卯年. In the ‘Year of Bingzi’ 丙子年, assuming a reign name as ‘Shence’. In total, he reigned for twenty years.”<sup>11</sup> This volume’s statement completely coincides with perspectives from the the *Liaoshi*. This volume likely never came into contact with the edition of *Jinshi* 金史 compiled under Emperor Zhangzong 章宗 (r. 1189–1208) by Chen Daren 陳大任 (fl. 1207). The author’s understanding of the history of the founding of the Liao dynasty quite possibly comes from the *Liaoshi* compiled by Xiao Yongqi 蕭永祺 (fl. 1148) during the reign of Xizong 熙宗 (r. 1132–1150). Yet, another more plausible explanation could be that the author’s understanding is derived from a type of historical account such as the *Huangchao shilu* or a similar type of record of Liao history.

Since the compilation of the *Liaoshi* by the Yuan, historians of later dynasties often utilized the narrative derived from this work when discussing the founding year of the Khitan empire. Examples can be seen in *Tongjian xu bian* 通鑑續編 by late Yuan scholar Chen Jing 陳經 (fl. 1369), *Liao xiao shi* 遼小史 by Ming scholar Yang Xunji 楊循吉 (1456–1544), as well as Qing-era works such as *Lidai jianyuan kao* 歷代建元考 by Zhong Yuanying 鍾淵映 (ca. 1640–ca. 1680), *Liaoshi jinian biao* 遼史紀年表 by Wang Yuansun 汪遠孫 (1789–1835), and *Liaoshi jishi benmo* 遼史紀事本末 by Li Youtang 李有棠 (1837–1905).

## 2 Various Theories on the Founding of the Khitan Empire Based on Records from the Central Plains Historiographical System

In comparison with records originating from Liao dynasty historians, the theories coming from the Central Plains region concerning the founding of the Khitan empire seem to originate from a wholly different body of historical knowledge. After all, this is because these theories are based on indirect accounts of a “foreign country” (*yibang* 異邦) and naturally a variety of contrasting opinions have arisen.

Within the records of the Five Dynasties, there is one which places the ascension of Yelü Abaoji to the imperial throne in the final years of the ninth century. Within *Tongjian kao yi* 通鑑考異 by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), it is noted that the *Han Gaozu shilu* 漢高祖實錄 were compiled during the Five Dynasties

11 Xiu Duan 修端, “Bian Liao Song Jin zhengtong” 辯遼宋金正統, in vol. 45 of *Guochao wenlei*, 496a.

periods and *Tang yulu* 唐餘錄 were published by Wang Hao 王皞 (d. 914) during the reign of the Renzong Emperor of Song 宋仁宗 (r. 1022–1063). They state, “The records indicate that Yelü Abaoji planned to unite the various tribal factions and then ascend to the imperial throne. This occurred before the year of Qianning 乾寧 of the Tang dynasty when Youzhou 幽州 was garrisoned by Liu Rengong 劉仁恭 (d. 914).”<sup>12</sup> It was the second year of the Qianning era (895) that the Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888–904) Emperor of the Tang dynasty decreed Liu Rengong as military commissioner (*Jiedushi* 節度使) of Youzhou.<sup>13</sup> However, this record of events is obviously false as Sima Guang clearly rejects it.

Other narratives assert that Yelü Abaoji founded his dynasty either right before or after the establishment of the Later Tang (923–936). This is the most commonly found narrative among the historical records of the Five Dynasties and Song dynasty eras. For instance, *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 states, “As the political power of Khitan leader Qinde 欽德 Khan declined, another Khitan leader, Yelü Abaoji, among the most powerful and strongest of the Khitan leaders, arose to replace him ... In the final years of the reign of the Tianyou Emperor of the Tang dynasty, Yelü Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor, assuming the mantle of rulership in the manner of the Central Plains.”<sup>14</sup> Here, “the final years of the reign of the Tianyou” refers to the Tang Tianyou era, a phrase that Li Cunxu 李存勗 (r. 923–926) used before he became emperor. As this record originates from the Five Dynasties era, it can be seen that Yelü Abaoji’s self-proclamation as emperor and establishment of the dynasty occurring in the last year of Tianyou’s reign before the establishment of the Later Tang was a commonly held view among scholars of the Five Dynasties era.

When compared with *Jiu Wudai shi*, the description of the founding of the Khitan empire found in *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 seems rather unclear: “As Yelü Abaoji had been leader of the eight tribes for nine years and had been unwilling to accept a replacement, the leaders of the other tribes unanimously began to reproach him ... Yelü Abaoji then decided to kill off the other tribal leaders as he would not accept anybody taking away his position ... Thereafter, he declared himself emperor and assumed the mantle of Son of Heaven ... The name of his reign was Tianzan 天贊 and he located his capital at Shangjing 上京.”<sup>15</sup> However, this narration lacks a clear timeframe and does not clearly state when Yelü Abaoji assumed the title of emperor. Yet, we may assume that

12 *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 269.8809. For the records about the establishment of the empire by Yelü Abaoji in *Han Gaozu shilu* 漢高祖實錄 and *Tang yulu* 唐餘錄, see *Zizhi tongjian*, 266.8677–78.

13 See *Ibid.*, 260.8475.

14 *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 137.1827–30.

15 *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 72.886–88.

using Tianzan as a reign name suggests that the founding year of Yelü Abaoji's reign was 922. This narrative and others like it are influenced by the perspective from *Lu ting za ji* 虜廷雜記 by Zhao Zhizhong 趙志忠 (fl. 1141) which states that "When Yelü Abaoji declared himself emperor, the reign name of his first year was Tianzan. The second year was Shence and the name of the dynasty was the Da Liao 大遼."<sup>16</sup> Zhao Zhizhong, himself a native of the Khitan Guiming 歸明 people, fled the Liao dynasty for the Song in the eighth month of first year of the Qingli 慶曆 era (1041). Among the Song, he composed works introducing the circumstances of the Liao dynasty, the most important being the ten-volume *Lu ting za ji*.<sup>17</sup> As noted by the title, *za ji* 雜記 (miscellaneous notes), the work is not thorough in nature. The narration is at times rather distorted and there may have been other factors which interfered with the author's account. The author's description of the naming of the founding year of the Liao dynasty is not clear, especially concerning why the reign name was changed from Tianzan to Shence. Therefore, Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007–1072) account of the Liao dynasty's founding may have been seriously misled by the "miscellaneous" nature of Zhao Zhizhong's narrative. According to the narrative from the *Xin Wudai shi*, the naming of the year when Yelü Abaoji declared himself emperor as Tianzan was the nineteenth year of the Tianyou era of the Later Tang (922). This narrative is in line with accounts from *Jiu Wudai shi* and other works which claim that Yelü Abaoji's ascension to the emperor's throne came at the end of the Tianyou era.

Another similar yet slightly different account states that Yelü Abaoji's enthronement occurred following the end of the Later Tang. *Tongjian kao yi* states, "Previous historical works did not record the month or year when Yelü Abaoji ascended to the emperor's throne. The *Zhuangzong zhuan* 莊宗傳 records that it occurred after Zhuangzong 莊宗 ascended the throne and Li Cunshen 李存審 (862–924) had garrisoned Fanyang 范陽."<sup>18</sup> The *Zhuangzong zhuan* is referred to as *Zhuangzong gongchen liezhuan* 莊宗功臣列傳 and it was written by Zhang Zhaoyuan 張昭遠 during the reign of Li Congke 李從珂, the Min 閔 Emperor of the Later Tang.<sup>19</sup> The Later Tang Emperor Li Cunxu was enthroned in the fourth month of the twentieth year of the Tianyou era (923) as the Zhuangzong Emperor while Li Cunshen became military commissioner of Lulong 盧龍 in the third month of the same year.<sup>20</sup> According to the

16 *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

17 See *Xu Zizhi tongjian chang bian* 續資治通鑒長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 185.4475.

18 *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

19 *Ibid.*, 253.8197.

20 See *Ibid.*, 272.8881.

narrative found in *Zhuangzong gongchen liezhuan*, Yelü Abaoji only became emperor once these events had already come to pass. While slightly different in terms of the ordering of events, this narrative and the aforementioned accounts about Yelü Abaoji's enthronement during the final years Tianyou era do not differ greatly.

In the Five Dynasties period, people tended to believe that Yelü Abaoji's enthronement was probably about the same time, either right before or after the establishment of the Later Tang. However, this brings up different questions. That is, how should later historians view the authenticity of the annals in the *Liaoshi*? *Jiu Wudai shi* only says that in the third year of the Tiancheng 天成 era (928) "Yelü Deguang 耶律德光 (r. 927–947) decided himself to change the reign name to Tianxian 天顯," and does not mention anything about the previous reign name. The Song stated more clearly that "Yelü Abaoji passed away in the first year of Tiancheng in the Later Tang (926). The Liao people gave him the posthumous title of Dasheng Emperor 大聖皇帝. It was only after two years that Yelü Abaoji's second son Yelü Deguang, a prince and grand marshal of the military, ascended the throne and established his reign title as Tianxian."<sup>21</sup>

This type of narrative would have a major impact on later generations' views on the subject. In the 1930s, the Japanese scholar Hashimoto Masukichi 橋本増吉 (1880–1956) wrote a piece discussing the founding of the Liao dynasty. He believed that the *Liaoshi* and other records from the Five Dynasties period and the Song and Yuan periods regarding the Khitan empire's founding history were insufficient in their descriptions. He believed that only *Jiu Wudai shi* was a reliable source. Based on this line of reasoning, Yelü Abaoji most probably became leader of the Khitan people in the third or fourth year of the Tang dynasty's Tianyou period (906–907), but during his lifetime he never himself adopted the mantle of Chinese emperorship. *Jiu Wudai shi* only mentions the beginning of the Tianxian era, illustrating that the year titles of Shence and Tianzan found within the *Liaoshi* are the inventions of later historians.<sup>22</sup> Up until the end of the last century, Western scholars remained skeptical about the Taizu era. Volume 6 of *The Cambridge History of China* states in the introduction regarding the chronology of the Liao dynasty that "There is some doubt whether Shen-ts'e (Shence) and T'ien-tsan (Tianzan) ever existed: They may have been invented later to push back the date of the independent Ch'i-tan

21 *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1957), 7673a.

22 Hashimoto Masukichi, "Ryo no kenkoku nendai ni tsuite," 51–86; Hashimoto Masukichi 橋本増吉, "Kyugodaishi kitan den ni tsuite" 舊五代史契丹傳について, *Touyoshi kenkyu* 東洋史研究 2, no. 1 (1936): 36–58.

(Qidan) state to 916.”<sup>23</sup> This skepticism largely stems from the aforementioned insights of Hashimoto Masukichi.

At the same time, however, another Japanese scholar named Ogawa Yuto 小川裕人 (fl. 1939) expressed his disagreement with this line of reasoning. He disagreed with the conclusion that Taizu never became emperor and Tianxian was the first reign name of the Liao dynasty by citing the eleventh volume of *Quanzhi* 泉志 written by Hong Zun 洪遵 (1127–1279) in which coins containing the phrase *Tianzan tongbao* 天贊通寶 appear as evidence to demonstrate the existence of a contemporaneous Tianzan. However, regarding the issue of when Yelü Abaoji declared himself emperor and founded the dynasty, he still adhered to the position found in *Jiu Wudai shi* and other works which asserted that the nineteenth year of Tianyou (922) was the first year entitled Tianzan when Yelü Abaoji assumed the throne and founded the dynasty. In this way, he disagreed with the *Liaoshi*'s conclusion surrounding the Shence era as the time when the dynasty was founded.<sup>24</sup>

In determining the authenticity of Tianzan, many scholars remain unconvinced by Ogawa Yuto's citation of the Tianzan coinage as evidence of a genuine contemporaneous Tianzan era. Such critics assert that such coinage said to have been passed down through the ages could easily have been forged and are not as firmly reliable as unearthed cultural artifacts discovered in archaeological excavations, for example. However, according to the archaeological materials we have today, it is enough to draw some definitive conclusions on this issue. For example, the inscribed text on the stele of “Dawang ji jieqin shi” 大王記結親事 discovered in Ningcheng 寧城 County, Inner Mongolia 內蒙古 in 1989, seems to have been inscribed in the second year of Tianzan 923, and it is the earliest stele of the Liao dynasty discovered so far.<sup>25</sup> In 1994, two Liao tombs were excavated in Baoshan Village 寶山村, Ar Horqin Banner 阿魯科爾沁旗, Chifeng 赤峰. Among the discoveries was an original piece of handwriting in

23 Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 6: *Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xxii.

24 Ogawa Yuto, “Hashimoto masukichi shi no ‘Ryo no kenkoku nendai ni tsuite,’” 26–37; Ogawa Yuto 小川裕人, “Ryo no kenkoku ni tsuite” 遼の建國に就いて, *Toyoshi kenkyu* 東洋史研究 2, no. 3 (1937): 27–45.

25 See Li Yi 李義, “Liao Daixi ‘dawang ji jieqin shi’ bei” 遼代奚“大王記結親事”碑, in *Liao Jin Xixia shi yanjiu* 遼金西夏史研究, ed. Song Dejin 宋德金, Jing Ai 景愛, Mu Lianmu 穆連木, and Shi Jinbo 史金波 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1997), 244–51; Li Yi 李義, “Neimenggu Ningcheng xian faxian Liao dai Dawang ji jieqin shi bei” 內蒙古寧城縣發現遼代《大王記結親事》碑, *Kaogu* 考古, no. 4 (2003): 380–83. The date of “the fifteenth day of the second month of the fifth year of Tianzan” and so forth was inscribed on this stele.

the upper left corner of the mural painting on the west wall of tomb number 1 stating: “In the second year of Tianzan of the Liao dynasty, Qin De 勤德 the second son of Da Shaojun 大少君, died at the age of fourteen on the twentieth day of the fifth month. On the eleventh day of the eighth month of the same year he was entombed here and this inscription was made.”<sup>26</sup> In the summer of 2007, archaeologists were excavating a tomb garden from the Liao dynasty and discovered several pieces of a Liao stele. Among the writings on the stele were the phrases “Tianzan wunian” 天贊五年 and “Shengtian huangdi” 昇天皇帝 among other such markings.<sup>27</sup> These critical archaeological discoveries demonstrate that the narrative placing the so-called Taizong first year as the starting point of the Liao dynasty can no longer be taken seriously.

During the Five Dynasties and Northern Song eras, the Han peoples of the Central Plain were actually quite isolated from the Khitan peoples. Even though there was nothing especially secretive about the history of the Liao dynasty, the understanding of the Han towards the Liao was extremely limited. In the *Xin Wudai shi*, Xu Wudang 徐無黨 (1024–1086) commented on this issue: “Regarding the reign name of the Khitan, there are many mistakes and inconsistencies and there is not enough evidence to add critical comments.” When comparing works such as *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, *Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, and *Qidan guo zhi* with the *Liaoshi*, almost all the chronologies of the reign names are in disagreement,<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, most of the chronological record as maintained in the *Liaoshi* can be corroborated by archaeological evidence. Therefore, as far as the reign name Shence is concerned, although there are no “double-proof methods of judging” (*erchong zhengju fa* 二重證據法) in accord with one another, its existence cannot be denied simply because it is never mentioned in the historical documents of the Five Dynasties era.

For many years, both Chinese and foreign historians have tended to treat the historical documents from the Central Plain knowledge body regarding the history of the founding of the Khitan empire as the most reliable source of information.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the only exception would be Yang Zhijiu

26 Qi Xiaoguang 齊曉光 et al., “Neimengu Chifeng Baoshan Liao bishua mu fajue jianbao” 內蒙古赤峰寶山遼壁畫墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 文物, no. 1 (1998): 82–83.

27 Dong Xinlin 董新林 et al., “Liaodai zuling kaogu fajue qude zhongyao shouhuo” 遼代祖陵考古發掘取得重要收穫, *Zhongguo wenwu bao* 中國文物報, November 28, 2007.

28 See Hitoshi Matsui 松井等, “Ryo dai kinen kou” 遼代紀年考, *Mansen chiri rekishi kenkyu houkoku* 滿鮮地理歷史研究報告 3 (1916): 362–408; Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, “Guanyu Qidan guozhi de ruogan wenti” 關於《契丹國志》的若干問題, in *Liao Jin shi lun* 遼金史論 (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1999), 323–34.

29 See *Nian'er shi zhaji* 廿二史札記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 227.584–5; Jitsuzo Tamura 田村實造, *Chugoku seihuku oucho no kenkyu* 中國征服王朝の研究 (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku toyoshi kenkyukai, 1964), 1: 119–23.

楊志玖 (1915–2002). In his work, “Abaoji jiwei kaobian” 阿保機即位考辨, he examines these sources, pointing out that in many aspects they are evidently inconsistent with established historical facts. He concludes that these narratives of Yelü Abaoji failing to successfully unify the eight Khitan tribes under his rule are simply unfounded rumors.<sup>30</sup> If we take a look at the Central Plain source material on the founding of the Khitan empire and compare it with the *Liaoshi*, it is quite hard to find commonalities between them. On the one hand, one narrative is that Yelü Abaoji was declared Khan before abdicating under pressure from the eight tribes while scheming to unite them under his rule. However, this narrative is almost without any verification in the “Northern Dynasties Historiographical System.” On the other hand, there is another narration which asserts that after Yelü Abaoji replaced the previous Yaonian ruler as Khan, the main source of contention was a power struggle within his own family. During this period, after confronting several rebellions from his founder brothers, Yelü Abaoji’s hereditary monarchy was finally cemented. Yet, this historical process is without mention in the body of Central Plains source material. From this comparison, although the records from the Five Dynasties place the founding of the Liao dynasty by Yelü Abaoji much earlier in the timeline, they seem to be based on indirect rumors from a foreign regime. How can such material, therefore, be considered primary source evidence?

### 3 On the Origin of Shence for the First Year of the Liao Dynasty

In summary, these aforementioned narratives from the Central Plains regarding the timeframe surrounding Yelü Abaoji’s enthronement and the establishment of the Liao dynasty are generally historical rumors without clear evidence. Within the Central Plains body of historical records about this event, a work which truly deserves our attention is the research found in *Zizhi tongjian*.

Addressing the varied muddled narratives derived from the Five Dynasties source materials, the *Zizhi tongjian* contains a critical investigation on the Khitan empire’s founding, and the book, *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* 資治通鑑考異, contains a quote from *Ji nian tong pu* 紀年通譜 which reads:

30 Yang Zhijiu 楊志玖, “Abaoji jiwei kaobian” 阿保機即位考辨, *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 17 (1948): 213–25. However, this article does not discuss the timeframe issue of when exactly Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor and established the dynasty.

The previous historical records did not contain information regarding the time of Yelü Abaoji's founding of the Liao. Today, the Liao dynasty maintains a calendar which records about one hundred and twenty years. In the winter of third year of Jingyou 景祐 I traveled to the Khitan state and found their historical records. I investigated their calendar system which marks the year of Yihai 乙亥 as the first year. It was only the following year which was stated as the founding year of the dynasty and entitled Shence. Following that, Tianzan was used. According to *Jiu Wudai shi*, it was not until the reign of Yelü Deguang, known as the Taizong Emperor of the Liao, that Tianzan was used. A possible point of skepticism is that no relevant historical documents were available when the historical records were revised. It is also possible that the Khitan people were ashamed that Yelü Abaoji originally had no reign title and that this was a later addition to the record.<sup>31</sup>

*Ji nian tong pu* was a historical work quite popular among the scholars of the Song dynasty. This work was compiled by Song Xiang 宋庠 (996–1066) in the sixth year of Qingli (1046).<sup>32</sup> As can be seen in the second year of Zhidao 至道 (996) of the Emperor Song Taizong 宋太宗 (r. 976–997), the officially issued calendars contained two sixty-year cycles (*jiazi* 甲子), that is one hundred and twenty-years, the calendar system used by the Song was imitated by the Liao and Jin peoples. Therefore, the Liao calendars investigated by Song Xiang in the third year of Jingyou (1036) also followed this one hundred and twenty-year system. This would indicate that the Liao calendar seen by Song Xiang began in the year of Yihai (915), with the second year being entitled Bingzi (916) and marked as the Shence first year. Following this, there was the Tianzan reign name. Yet, this evidence does not align with the narrative found in the *Jiu Wudai shi* regarding the year in which Yelü Deguang began using the reign name Tianxian. He believes that there are two possibilities. One is that *Jiu Wudai shi* was poorly documented, and that the true account was not definitively known at the time. A second possibility is that the historians of the Liao dynasty deliberately retrofitted their calendar system as the Liao were ashamed Yelü Abaoji had no reign name and therefore invented one for him.

Based on *Ji nian tong pu*, Sima Guang and Fan Zuyu 范祖禹 (1041–1098) expounded on important clues and made a careful analysis of the founding of the Khitan empire. *Zizhi tongjian* describes Yelü Abaoji's enthronement as emperor as taking place at the end of the twelfth month of the second year of

31 See *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

32 See *Xu Zizhi tongjian chang bian*, 159.3840.

Zhenming 貞明 (916) with the reign title of Zhence as one singular event. *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* clearly states, “Regarding the time of Yelü Abaoji’s enthronement as emperor, previous historical works did not record the month nor year ... they were not aware of which year this event occurred in and because of this, the these reign names were changed and set as the year names as found as they are today.”<sup>33</sup> Bases on the writer’s meaning, Yelü Abaoji’s enthronement and founding of the dynasty occurred before the second year of Zhenming and no later than what the Liao historical records describe as the Shence inaugural year, Bingzi. However, it is hard to make a more exact judgement beyond this point. For those who had not seen the narrative from *Zizhi tongjian* or from the *Liaoshi*, reaching such a conclusion is already no small feat.

However, it was inevitable that the rigorous examination found in the *Zizhi tongjian* would be misunderstood by later generations. The first volume of the *Qidan guo zhi* states, “In the first year of Bingzi Shence and the second year of Zhenming during the Later Liang 後梁, Yelü Abaoji declared himself emperor and his people called him the Son of Heaven. Yelü Abaoji made his wife, Shulü 述律 empress, established the dynasty’s state offices (*baiguan* 百官), entitled his first year as Shence, and adopted Khitan as the name of his state.” Meng Guangyao 孟廣耀 (1938–2006) believes that the *Qidan guo zhi* also places the founding year of the Khitan empire and the enthronement of Yelü Abaoji in the first year of Shence but that the book misunderstands the conclusion found in the *Zizhi tongjian*.<sup>34</sup> It is truly a convincing argument, and, as a matter of fact, the Song already had succumbed to similar misunderstandings. In the tenth volume of *Lidai ji nian* 歷代紀年, Song scholar Chao Gongmai 晁公邁 (d. 1139) writes, “The Great Sage Emperor Taizu of Liao was surnamed Yelü and named Abaoji. His state was named Khitan, and he appropriated the title of emperor for himself and declared himself Emperor and Son of Heaven, selecting the name of his dynasty as Liao. He entitled the inaugural year of his reign as Shence (Original Note: This was in the second year of the Zhenming Emperor at the end of the later Liang)... From the founding of the Liao dynasty by Yelü Abaoji in the second year of Zhenming’s reign to its destruction in the sixth year of the Xuanhe 宣和 of the Song, in total there were nine Liao emperors.”<sup>35</sup> This work was published after the twentieth year (1150) of the reign of Shaoxing 紹興 of the Southern Song. This is the most earliest statement which clearly asserts

33 See *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8808–9.

34 Meng Guangyao 孟廣耀, “Yelü Abaoji jianguo chengdi niandai kaolun” 耶律阿保機建國稱帝年代考論, *Neimenggu daxue xuebao* 內蒙古大學學報, no. 1 (1981): 46–53.

35 *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 824.207–8.

that the Khitan empire was indeed founded in the year of Shence. Additionally, in the fifty-fourth volume the *Tongjian gang mu* 通鑑綱目 states that from the second year of the reign of the Zhenming Emperor of the Later Liang, “The Khitan Khan Yelü Abaoji asserted his claim as emperor, and the Khitan people started to call him Heavenly Emperor (*Tianhuang wang* 天皇王) ... the name of the year was changed to Shence.”<sup>36</sup> Evidently, these narratives of the Shence first year are both based on the body of Song dynasty historical records. Both seem to stem from a misreading of the *Zizhi tongjian*,

Before the *Liaoshi* was published, the narrative found in the *Qidan guo zhi* was highly influential. For example, the records regarding Yelü Abaoji’s enthronement and the founding of the Khitan empire as recorded in *Shishi jigu lue* 釋氏稽古略 and *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 are obviously derived from the *Qidan guo zhi*.

#### 4 A New Understanding of the History of the Founding of the Khitan Empire

Since the publication of the *Liaoshi* at the end of the Yuan dynasty, it quickly replaced the *Qidan guo zhi* as an official dynastic history of Liao dynasty and it became popular in the world. Afterwards, the discussion of the history of the founding of the Khitan empire no longer referenced the *Liaoshi*. Thereafter, the narrative of Shence as the founding year of the Liao dynasty gradually disappeared over time.

In the first half of the twentieth century, historians began to realize that the narrative as found in the *Liaoshi* was riddled with inconsistencies. Among the pioneers in attempting to rectify the narrative was the Japanese scholar Hitoshi Matsui and his contemporaries. In 1915, he published the long essay “Kittan bokkou shi” 契丹勃興史 in which he asserted that the *Zizhi tongjian* had examined the issue of Yelü Abaoji’s enthronement as emperor and founding of the dynasty in the second year of the reign of Zhenming, calling the first year of his reign Shence and from this record a conclusion could be drawn. He inferred that the *Liaoshi* places Yelü Abaoji’s self-enthronement in the first year of Kaiping 開平 and only nine years later declared the year of Shence. Yet, the *Qidan guo zhi* holds that Yelü Abaoji’s self-enthronement took place in the first year of Shence. This contradiction can be addressed using *Xin Wudai shi* to expound on the history of the founding of the Khitan empire. Based on

36 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zizhi tongjian gangmu* 資治通鑑綱目, in vol. 5 of *Zhuzi quan shu* 朱子全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 3178.

the statements of Ouyang Xiu nearly nine years after Yelü Abaoji was elected as Khan of the Khitan people, he killed off the nine other leaders to unite the tribes under his rule. It can be inferred from this that the year of Kaiping was significant in that it was the year in which he, Yelü Abaoji, was chosen as Khan. However, it was only after nine years that he fully unified the Khitan tribes under his rule and could lay claim to emperorship in the second year of Zhenming. This inference matches the narrative from *Xin Wudai shi* concerning Yelü Abaoji's wait of about nine years between his election as Khitan Khan and self-declaration as emperor.<sup>37</sup>

Based on what I know, this is the earliest point at which modern historians would advocate placing the Shence first year and the enthronement of Yelü Abaoji within the historical timeline. This school of thought would come to dominate the historiography of the Liao dynasty in no small part due to this aforementioned article. However, Matsui and like-minded scholars regrettably made the same mistake as the writers of the *Lidai ji nian*, *Tongjian gang mu* and the *Qidan guo zhi* in misinterpreting the original meaning found within *Zizhi tongjian*.

In the early 1940s, Jin Yufu 金毓黻 (1887–1962) expressed a similar viewpoint in a *Dongbei tong shi* 東北通史. He believed that the *Liaoshi* holds that Yelü Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor in the first year of Kaiping, remarking that “what is referred to as ‘emperor’ is simply a translation of the title ‘khan.’ Later official historians would exaggerate Abaoji’s position by using the title of ‘emperor’ in a different way than it was actually meant to be used at the time.” Furthermore, according to Han oral sources, Yelü Abaoji was forced to abdicate his position as lord of the Khitan people for a period of nine years. He went to live in a Han city during the first year (915) of Zhenming of the Later Liang period. After his time in exile, during a meeting at Yanchi 鹽池, Abaoji’s troops ambushed and killed the seven other Khitan lords. In the following year, he declared himself emperor and founded a dynasty, entitling the first year of his rule as Shence.<sup>38</sup> This narrative is almost entirely the same as those put forth by Matsui and his like-minded colleagues. The only difference is with regards to the status of Yelü Abaoji during the interim period of nine years from 907 to 915–916. One interpretation holds that in 907 Yelü Abaoji became Khan of the Khitan and in 916 assumed the mantle of emperor, while the other interpretation holds that in 907 Abaoji retreated to a Han city before emerging as leader

37 Hitoshi Matsui 松井等, “Kittan bokkou shi” 契丹勃興史, *Mansen chiri rekishi kenkyu houkoku* 滿鮮地理歷史研究報告 1 (1915): 249–51.

38 Jin Yufu 金毓黻, *Dongbei tongshi* 東北通史, *Shehui kexue zhanxian zazhishhe fanyinben* 《社會科學戰線》雜誌社翻印本, 1980, 305–7.

of the unified Khitan tribes. However, this is where the divergence ends. Both narratives hold that following this period of unification Yelü Abaoji declared himself emperor and founded the Khitan empire, declaring his inaugural year the year of Shence.

Since the 1950s, this aforementioned narrative has gradually become the majority opinion amongst scholars of the Liao dynasty. Zhao Weibang 趙衛邦 (1908–1986),<sup>39</sup> Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪 (1928–2021),<sup>40</sup> Zhang Zhengming 張正明 (b. 1938),<sup>41</sup> Chen Shu 陳述,<sup>42</sup> Yang Shusen 楊樹森,<sup>43</sup> Li Guizhi 李桂芝,<sup>44</sup> Li Xihou 李錫厚<sup>45</sup> and other researchers have all accepted the conclusion that Yelü Abaoji became Khan in the first year of Kaiping and finally declared himself emperor in the first year of Shence. Yet, their conclusion all exhibit the same problem in that their narratives are sharply at odds with the narrative and timeline found in the *Liaoshi*. Again, these scholars did not complete the necessary assessment on the origins of their historical source material, so they failed to differentiate between their respective levels of reliability and viewpoints in their own unique historical contexts. That is to say that in these works there is no discussion of the historiography regarding the source material. It goes without saying that this is a necessary and uncontroversial first step when completing textual analysis. Because of this, their argumentation fails to make any critical analysis and discussion of textual sources, resulting in quick and abrupt conclusions.

In the last half century, there are still a minority of scholars who still hold onto the old narrative from the *Liaoshi*, such as Yang Zhijiu,<sup>46</sup> Hua Shan 華山, Fei Guoqing 費國慶,<sup>47</sup> and Shu Fen 舒焚.<sup>48</sup> But since they did not specifically

39 Zhao Weibang 趙衛邦, “Qidan guojia de xingcheng” 契丹國家的形成, *Sichuan daxue xuebao* 四川大學學報, no. 2 (1958): 4–6.

40 Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪, “Qidan de buluo zuzhi he guojia de chansheng” 契丹的部落組織和國家的產生, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 5 & 6 (1964): 184, 189; Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪, *Zhongguo tongshi* 中國通史 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1979), 6: 23–29.

41 Zhang Zhengming 張正明, *Qidan shilüe* 契丹史略 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 24–29.

42 See *Zhongguo da baikequanshu, minzu juan* 中國大百科全書·民族卷 (Beijing: Zhongguo da baikequanshu chubanshe, 1986), 368.

43 Yang Shusen 楊樹森, *Liaoshi jian bian* 遼史簡編 (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1984), 20–27.

44 Li Guizhi 李桂芝, *Liao Jin jianshi* 遼金簡史 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2000), 25–26.

45 Li Xihou 李錫厚 and Bai Bin 白濱, *Liao Jin Xixia shi* 遼金西夏史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003), 9–12.

46 See the aforementioned Yang Zhijiu, “Abaoji jiwei kaobian”.

47 Hua Shan and Fei Guoqing, “Abaoji jianguo qian qidan shehui shitan,” 52.

48 Shu Fen 舒焚, *Liaoshi gao* 遼史稿 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1984), 119–29.

focus on this issue in detail, in their works they view the founding of the Khitan empire briefly. In 1981, the works of Meng Guangyao renewed the examination of Yelü Abaoji's self-declaration as emperor and founding of the Khitan empire by advocating a return to the narrative found in the *Liaoshi* which asserts the Kaiping year as the founding year of the dynasty. However, since it failed to provide much persuasive evidence, it was not taken seriously by the rest of the academic community.<sup>49</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

Since the tenth century, discussion of the events surrounding the founding the Khitan empire has been riddled with disagreement. In the present, the scholarship on the Liao dynasty has almost reach a consensus that the Taizu Emperor founded the dynasty and ascended the throne in the Shence first year. However, this conclusion is usually just accepted as common knowledge without concrete reasoning. The details of this conclusion have never been adequately investigated in depth.

Nowadays, it seems that the narrative found in the *Liaoshi* asserting the Kaiping year as the year in which Yelü Abaoji was self-enthroned is not readily believed. First of all, based on various indications, at that time the Khitan state had not yet established itself as a unified political regime nor had it adopted the Han Chinese system of establishing reign names. Secondly, it is clear from reading the *Liaoshi* that when Yelü Abaoji had replaced the previous leader as Khan of the Yaonian clan, he still lacked the power to immediately secure himself as a hereditary monarch. The biggest obstacle to establishing a system of dynastic emperorship was the well-established political system among the Khitan peoples of electing a new Khan. It was only after an arduous struggle and suppressing three rebellions from within his own family that Yelü Abaoji finally was able to declare himself emperor and found his own dynasty in the first year of Shence. Finally, he was able to declare his son Yelü Bei 耶律倍 (899–937) as crown prince which marked the official establishment of a system of hereditary monarchy.<sup>50</sup>

Why, then, does the *Liaoshi* link both Yelü Abaoji's founding of the dynasty and declaration of himself as emperor as one event taking place in the first year

49 The aforementioned Meng Guangyao, "Yelü Abaoji jianguo chengdi niandai kaolun."

50 See Ogawa Yuto 小川裕人, "Ryo shitsu kunshuken no seiritsu ni kansuru ichi kousatsu" 遼室君主權の成立に関する一考察, *Toyoshi kenkyu* 東洋史研究 3, no. 5&6, 4, no. 1&2 (1938). Also in Cai Meibiao, *Qidan de buluo zuzhi he guojia de chansheng*.

of Kaiping? As stated above, the direct source for the narrative in *Liaoshi* comes from *Huangchao shilu*, that is, directly from the official history self-written by historians of the Liao dynasty. As we already know, the first edition of the Liao dynasty's history was compiled in *Shilu* by Shi Fang in the ninth year (991) of Tonghe. Even though this book contains the history of the founding of the Liao dynasty, it was already after a time of eighty to ninety years since the year of Kaiping when it was written in retrospect and cannot be considered a contemporaneous work. Due to the haphazard nature of the Liao record keeping system, it is doubtful that any truly contemporaneous records have survived until the present. Simply by word of mouth alone, omissions and mistakes are inevitable in the historical record-keeping process. A classic example of this is seen in the narration of the *Liaoshi* describing the events surrounding Yelü Abaoji's proclamation of himself as emperor and the founding of the dynasty. This record fails to even mention the name of the dynasty, the Liao, and this omission cannot help but compel one to imagine that this error may be just the tip of the iceberg.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is not at all an impossibility to imagine that the Liao dynasty historians could have mistakenly conflated Yelü Abaoji's election as Khan of the Yaonian clan with his self-declaration as emperor.

Today, the theory which holds that Yelü Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor in the first year of Shence is quite popular among academic circles. However, this version of events is only found in records coming out of the Southern Song dynasty – *Lidai ji nian* and *Tongjian gang mu*, and *Qidan guo zhi* written by the Yuan people. And upon completing a closer textual analysis and comparison, this narrative is simply based on a misreading of the original text found in *Zizhi tongjian*, making it unreliable. Yet, when in completing an empirical examining of these collected historical records, we cannot help but accept that this narrative is most likely to be closest to historical fact.

*Translated by Jon Formella*

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51 See Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, "Liao chao guohao kaoshi" 遼朝國號考釋, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 6 (2001): 30–44, 189–90.

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# A Political Time Rewritten: Revisiting the Founding Year of the Khitan Empire

*Miao Runbo* 苗潤博

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Peking University,

Beijing, China

*miaorb@163.com*

## Abstract

Materials dating from the Liao dynasty usually record the founding year of the Khitan Empire as 907; this was done deliberately, rather than it being caused by the negligence of historians. The official history records of the Khitan Empire contain two completely different narratives of the founding year: the account of “Junji Taiyi deity Repeatedly Appearing” from the “Biography of Taizu” in *Liaoshi* reflects the original appearance of the history of the empire foundation period in the first year of the Shence era (916). Other records were reworded by later historians, which caused the contents of these originally clear records to become completely blurred and concealed. This rewriting process may have been completed in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi era (1044) during Emperor Xingzong’s reign; the records advance Emperor Taizu’s rise to the throne to the year that the Tang dynasty was destroyed. That year was essential in reconstructing the founding history of the Khitan Empire and a narrative showed a strong tendency to orthodoxy in the late Liao dynasty. This article offers further reflection on the portrayal of a political epoch in historical records from a dynamic and productive angle.

## Keywords

Khitan – founding year – Abaoji – Junji Taiyi – political era

## 1 The Origin of the Problem

Not only is the founding year of the Khitan Empire a central issue to scholars of Liao (907–1125) history and of Northern Chinese history in general, it is also

the focus of a long-term debate. Available literature has always presented a number of different views on this issue, mainly focusing on the first year of the reign of Emperor Taizu of Liao 遼太祖 (i.e. the first year of the Kaiping 開平 era of the Later Liang, 907). The “Taizu ji” 太祖紀 (Biography of Taizu) in *Liaoshi* 遼史 indicates that Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (r. 907–926) ascended the throne and founded the empire in 907, and he established the new regnal year Shence 神冊 in 916. Books such as *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 or *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志 (Records of the Khitan Empire), on the other hand, state that the empire was founded in 916. Following nearly a century of debate and discussion, scholars of Liao history have reached a consensus: Abaoji had become khan in the first year of the Kaiping era, and in the first year of the Shence reign he declared himself emperor and officially established the empire.<sup>1</sup> However, the discussion does not end here. If Abaoji had only become emperor and proceeded to establish the Khitan Empire in the first year of Shence, why does the “Biography of Taizu” in *Liaoshi* set the founding date of the country nine years before that? Liu Pujiang 劉浦江 (1961–2015) believes it is this way because these events happened very long ago and there would have been mistakes in oral accounts of what happened, which then led to inaccuracies in historical records. In my opinion, it is likely that the issue is not this simple.

According to *Liaoshi*, “Abaoji ordered a Khitan script to be created, and in recognition for doing so, Lubugu 魯不古 was given the task of supervising the compiling of the national history records.”<sup>2</sup> This shows that during the reign of Abaoji, specially-assigned persons were already in charge of recording history, which suggests that later generations would not have had to depend completely on oral accounts. The recently discovered Stele of Taizu’s Virtues (*Taizu jigong bei* 太祖紀功德碑)<sup>3</sup> in the Liao Ancestral Mausoleum at Guifu 龜趺 Mountain was erected in the early years of Emperor Taizong’s 太宗 reign (927–947). Most historical events recorded in surviving materials from the Abaoji era are consistent with the current version of *Liaoshi*, which suggests that the way of recording historical events at the time was already quite established. As a key event for any dynasty, the founding year is often linked to the dynasty’s legitimacy and core beliefs, and as such they are an important time politically. I believe that information on the founding year in the Liao dynasty

1 See *Liaoshi* 遼史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 114. For a review of related academic history, see Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, *Song Liao Jin shi lunji* 宋遼金史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 28–30.

2 See *Liaoshi*, 76.1375.

3 See Dong Xinlin 董新林, Tala 塔拉, and Kang Lijun 康立君, “Neimenggu Balin zuoqi Liaodai zuling Guifu shan jianzhu jizhi” 內蒙古巴林左旗遼代祖陵龜趺山建築基址, *Kaogu* 考古, no. 8 (2011), 3–12, 113, 97–98.

records is not a result of negligence, but rather of intentional alteration by historians at the time. This process and its development and background are well worth researching in depth.

The most reliable record on the founding year of the Khitan Empire can be found in “Biography of Taizu” of *Liaoshi*.<sup>4</sup> It clearly states that at the end of the third year of Tianyou 天祐 (906) of the Tang (618–907), the last khan of the Yaonian 遙輦 tribe died, and left an order that Abaoji become the new khan. The next year, Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor, thereby starting a new dynastic era. At the same time, measures were put in place for empress dowagers, empresses, and other honourable titles to be put on record. Era names, however, were not announced. The “Biography of Taizu” adopts this rare method of chronicling without marking era names for the following ten years, resorting instead to calling each year the First Year, Second Year, Third Year, and so forth. It was not until the first year of Shence that an era name emerged, and at that time Abaoji was given his honorary title once more. In the same book, the beginning of the section “Shuo kao” 朔考 of “Lixiangzhi” 曆象志 covers the first ten years of Taizu, and for almost every year the words *yelü yan* 耶律儼 or *yan* 儼 appear, which indicates that the source for this material was *Huangchao shilu* 皇朝實錄 compiled by Yelü Yan at the end of the Liao dynasty. This shows that the practice of not marking era names used in *Liaoshi* comes from official historical records of the Liao dynasty. If we say that Liao historians mistakenly recorded Abaoji’s title incorrectly as emperor while he was still a khan, how can we explain the existence of chronological records without era names and other supporting documentation surrounding this misrepresentation?

Looking at *Liaoshi* in its entirety, it is particularly noteworthy that what is recorded in the “Biography of Taizu” is not an isolated example, but connects to many other records within the book, e.g., in the “Biography of Queen Chunqin” 淳欽皇后傳, “Biography of Yelü Helu” 耶律曷魯傳, and “Biography of Yelü Xiadi” 耶律轄底傳, which all echo one another, forming a systematic historical narrative. The point that the state was founded in the first year of Taizu Abaoji’s reign is consistently made throughout *Liaoshi*, and it then, as one might expect, also emerges in *Huangchao shilu*, the official historical records of the Liao dynasty. This text is clearly the result of careful polishing and planning, with historians highlighting the same point repeatedly in different parts of their records. So, is this historical narrative truly flawless? I have noticed a remark in the “Biography of Taizu” that was previously overlooked, which may shed light onto the original story of Abaoji founding the empire. It is quite different from the above-mentioned, clearly altered chronicle of

4 See *Liaoshi*, 1.2–3, 10–11.

the founding year. The strong contrast between these two texts suggests that studying the issue of the founding year of the Khitan Empire may yet resolve some unanswered questions.

## 2 Evidence for the Founding Year of the Khitan Empire: The Incident of “Junji Taiyi Deity Repeatedly Appearing” Recorded in the “Biography of Taizu”

In the “Biography of Taizu” of *Liaoshi*, there is one such brief but quite intriguing record about the end of the ninth year of Emperor Taizu’s reign (915): “In this year, the Junji Taiyi deity appeared many times, (and Abaoji) issued an order to paint his image.”<sup>5</sup> In the final chapter of the same book, the historians of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) wrote in the *Guoyu jie* 國語解 (Commentary on National Language): “(Junji Taiyi is) the name of the lucky god. In the country upon which the lucky god descends, the monarch may ascend the throne and gain the trust of the whole country, so peace reigns over the land, and the people will enjoy blessings.”<sup>6</sup>

The name “Junji Taiyi deity” (Junji Taiyi *shen* 君基太一神) is found only in this instance in Liao dynasty literature. It refers to one of the ten gods of the Taiyi 太一/乙 system. The so-called Ten Taiyi Deities are Junji Taiyi 君基太一, Chenji Taiyi 臣基太一, Minji Taiyi 民基太一, Wufu Taiyi 五福太一, Tianyi Taiyi 天一太一, Diyi Taiyi 地一太一, Sishen Taiyi 四神太一, Dayou Taiyi 大遊太一, Xiaoyou Taiyi 小遊太一, and Zhifu Taiyi 直符太一. Some of them stand for good and some for evil, and their ways of operating are also all quite different. Each Taiyi is found in a specific area of the sky, which may indicate that the deity of the corresponding geographical location will appear and bring either misfortune or good fortune; this can be predicted through astronomical estimations. The Taiyi’s celestial position is used to check the national affairs of the corresponding geographical area. The trajectory in the sky is not obtained through visual inspection, but rather through mathematical calculations. Because the “Taiyi method” (*Taiyi shi* 太乙式) related to the Ten Taiyi Deities was a theory used to predict good and bad luck in various locations, it could easily cause social unrest; therefore, in the early Tang dynasty, this practice was only allowed within relevant state departments, and its use among ordinary people was prohibited.

5 Ibid., 17.

6 Ibid., 116.1692.

After the An Lushan Rebellion (*Anshi zhiluan* 安史之亂, 755–763), the state's control over the region declined, this ban was lifted, and social instability gave this method the soil and reasons to thrive. In the Late Tang and Five Dynasties (907–960) eras, this gradually became the way of expressing mainstream consciousness, turning into a cohesive regional force and a means of integrating local power, becoming popular to varying degrees across the country.

Existing records on the Ten Deities, the Taiyi system, and its calculation methods are mainly found in *Taiyi jinjing shi jing* 太乙金鏡式經 written by Wang Ximing 王希明 (fl. 723) of the Tang dynasty, *Jingyou Taiyi fuying jing* (景祐)太乙福應經 written by Yang Weide 楊惟德 (fl. 1054) in the early Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), and the Yuan dynasty document *Taiyi Tongzong baojian* 太乙統宗寶鑑.<sup>7</sup> Based on these three sources, it can be said that in a time of national unity, when Junji Taiyi appears, the emperor should make a show of conciliation in the corresponding location. In a time of national division, however, the image of Junji Taiyi to the separatist regime is a symbol of a ruler, which means the emperor will come from the place where the regime is located. After that, different strategies and measures the emperor implements will result in different outcomes, but the basic tendency is that the emperor will be a good ruler.

Through the calculation methods of Junji Taiyi recorded in these three sources, we can in turn verify the authenticity of the statement about the end of the ninth year of Taizu's reign in the "Biography of Taizu" of *Liaoshi*. The results of this comparison show that, regardless of which method and what kind of divination system is used, Junji Taiyi was far from the region of Khitan at that time.<sup>8</sup> In addition, as mentioned earlier, the theory of the Ten Taiyi Deities is a system entirely based on mathematical reasoning. There are records of the appearance of the Ten Taiyi Deities, but *Liaoshi* claims that "the Junji Taiyi deity repeatedly appeared," and even features an image of this deity, which is inconsistent with other related theories. We can see that this record is by no means the true record of Junji Taiyi's tour to this region but should

7 Wang Ximing 王希明, *Taiyi jinjing shi jing* 太乙金鏡式經, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 810: 5.891–92; also, Yang Weide 楊惟德, *Jingyou Taiyi fuying jing* (景祐)太乙福應經, Yingyin Mingshuo Jianshanju chubanshe, 2002), 1061: 14b; also, Xiaoshan Laoren 曉山老人, *Taiyi Tongzong baojian* 太乙統宗寶鑑, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, 1061: 6.443.

8 For the specific calculation process, see Miao Runbo 苗潤博, "Bei gaixie de zhengzhi shijian: zailun Qidan kaiguo niandai wenti" 被改寫的政治時間：再論契丹開國年代問題, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 6 (2019).

clearly be regarded as an auspicious sign deliberately created to suit political purposes.

This is the last entry of recordings about the ninth year of Taizu's reign in the "Biography of Taizu," and the next chronological entry is about the second month of the following year when the Shence era was founded: "On the first day of the second month of the first year of Shence, Abaoji was in Longhua 龍化 Prefecture. Yelü Helu 耶律曷魯, the leader of Dielie 迭烈 clan, led officials to request that Abaoji become emperor. Abaoji only agreed after the request was submitted to him three times ... He granted a general amnesty and founded the Shence era."<sup>9</sup> This time, the founding of the era was the actual time when Abaoji founded the empire and declared himself emperor, and the symbol of a ruler, the Junji Taiyi deity, happened to appear on the eve of the founding. The correlation between this auspicious rumor and the political reality shows the two are intrinsically related. Apparently, the appearance of Junji Taiyi deity at the end of the ninth year of Taizu's reign implied that Abaoji's accession to the throne was in accordance with the mandate of Heaven, thus preparing for his becoming emperor and founding of the empire in the second month of the following year.

Naturally, this rumor is not the suggestion of Abaoji himself, or of other Khitan people. The influence of the Ten Taiyi Deities on the people at local level happened in the late Tang dynasty. It was Emperor Xianzong of Tang 唐憲宗 (r. 805–820) who first used the Ten Deities in the first year of Yuanhe 元和 era (806) to predict the good and bad of a region and wrote "Wufulou Ji" 五福樓記, and this theory then reappeared in the literature around the second year of the Guangqi 光啟 era (886), whereafter it was gradually used more and more frequently. This increase in influence even showed in the first year of the Tianyou era (904) when Zhu Wen 朱溫 (r. 907–912) forced Emperor Zhaozong of Tang 唐昭宗 (r. 888–904) to move the capital to Luoyang 洛陽. Clearly, in terms of the overall situation in the early tenth century, the theory of the Ten Taiyi Deities was put into practice in the Central Plains by the Han people for a relatively short period of time, and it was a complex theory. Obviously, it was not possible for the Khitan people, who lived far outside the Great Wall and had not been heavily sinicized by that time, to have mastered it.

Judging from the above-mentioned situation, rumors of the Junji Taiyi deity appearing on the eve of Abaoji's proclamation as emperor were possibly fabricated by Han advisors around him. *Tongjian kaoyi* 通鑑考異 quotes Zhao Zhizhong's 趙至忠 (fl. 1041) *Luting zaji* 虜廷雜記 as saying: "Han Zhigu 韓知古, Han Ying 韓穎, Kang Mei 康枚, Wang Zaoshi 王奏事, and Wang Yu

9 *Liaoshi*, 1.10.

王鬱 were all Chinese, and they advised Taizu not to agree to be replaced.”<sup>10</sup> It is not difficult to see how Abaoji changed the original tribal alliance system in the first year of the Shence era to become emperor and founded the empire. To a certain extent, he was influenced by Han advisors, who played an indispensable role in the detailed preparations for this process. Among them, Han Zhigu (898–930) deserves special attention. Back then, he was someone highly regarded by Abaoji. The recently revealed tombstones of Han Zhigu’s descendants provide relatively clear evidence for our judgment. Until the sixth year of the Yuan dynasty (1269), the tomb was owned by Han Rui 韓瑞 (d. 1269), a descendant of the Yutian 玉田 Han 韓氏 family. This source traces the development of the family during the Liao and Jin (1115–1234) dynasties in detail, and its records of historical events are of unique value. In it, it is recalled how the earliest ancestor, Han Zhigu, was called the first ancestor Linggong 令公, and was in ancient times “deeply involved in the study of the astronomical calendar and mathematics,” and had “returned to the Khitan Empire, served Abaoji in the Yaonian 姚輦 tribe, and assisted while Abaoji was emperor; the country was then called the Great Liao.”<sup>11</sup> Special mention is made of Han Zhigu’s deep study of celestial phenomena, a detail not found in other historical sources. This information very probably comes from a family genealogy handed down within the Han family. This is truly worthy of attention. Not only was Han Zhigu well-versed in astronomy, but he was also valued by Abaoji. Judging from the situation at the time, it is likely that these auspicious rumors about the Junji Taiyi deity came from Han Chinese advisors represented by Han Zhigu. Only they would adapt this information to the advantage of Abaoji to facilitate him turning his homeland into an empire.

Han Zhigu and those who like him were knowledgeable in astronomy, may have been aware of the fact that, at the time, Junji Taiyi was not at all close to the Khitan Empire, and they would have understood that this system of counting and measurement had very little to do with actual astronomical phenomena, let alone the appearance of a deity. However, considering the political situation at the time, what Abaoji needed was simply a useful result that would prove that he was destined to be emperor: the selection of an element that best connected with reality, from the original, extremely abstract and complex system of the politics and culture of the Central Plains in the Ten Taiyi deities, its transformation it into a specific and visible image of a deity, the drawing of its image, and passing that image on to the people. To a certain extent, this

10 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 266.8678.

11 Chang’an bowuguan 長安博物館, ed., *Chang’an xinchu muzhi* 長安新出墓誌 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2011), 340–41.

was in conformity with the Khitan people's original faith in shamanism, and it magnified the credibility of rumors, laying the groundwork for the political action to follow – I even suspect that the reference to a “deity” (*shen*) in Abaoji's regnal name “Shence” may refer to the one deity that appeared repeatedly on the eve of him becoming emperor, namely Junji Taiyi.

We have now finally revealed the truth about the mention of Junji Taiyi in the “Biography of Taizu” of *Liaoshi*. This record is, in fact, an auspicious rumor that was created by the emperor's Han advisors in order to justify Abaoji becoming emperor and founding the empire in the first year of Shence. There is an obvious discrepancy between the political era in this source and that in the above-mentioned series of historical narratives, in which the date Abaoji was proclaimed emperor was given as 907. This contradiction shows that in the official historical writings of the Liao dynasty, at least two distinct narratives of the founding year have appeared successively. One account points to the first year of Shence as the year when the Empire was established and Abaoji was proclaimed emperor. In line with research findings, this is a version generally recognized in academic circles today and is closer to the original historical reality of the time. It would have originated in the beginning during the founding of the empire, and it would then have been retained for a long time thereafter. The other narrative clearly ties the founding year of the Khitan Empire to the first year of Taizu's reign and refers to the khan as emperor. This is far from the real situation back at that time, and should be reconsidered and reviewed.

### 3 The Rewriting of the Founding Year and the Origin of the Khitan Dynasty

The analysis so far shows that the whole set of meticulous records related to the founding of the Khitan Empire in the first year of Taizu's reign mentioned at the beginning of this article were reshaped by later generations, and they do not correspond to the original reality of the Abaoji period. So, when did the version of the founding year of the Khitan Empire as seen in today's *Liaoshi* take shape? In other words, when was it rewritten? Naturally, the answer must be sought in the establishing process of the official historical narrative of the Liao dynasty.

Looking at existing materials, it seems that the Liao dynasty did not systematically process and compile the history of its founding in the early years. The Stele of Taizu's Virtues discovered at the Liao Ancestral Mausoleum at Guifu Mountain is currently the most recent document dating from the founding

year of the Khitan Empire, and as such it represents the official historical narrative. Perhaps due to excessive damage, academics did not pay enough attention to it in the past. Recent research findings show that this stele would have been erected in August (or October) of the second year of the Tianxian 天顯 era (927), and that it narrates the military exploits and achievements of Liao Taizu Abaoji in chronological order. It has been confirmed that this can be called the essential version of the “Biography of Taizu” in *Liaoshi*.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that, even though the content of this stele is mostly found in handed-down documents, there is a key detail on it that contradicts the current records of *Liaoshi*. A fragment of the stele contains the sentence “this is the region located in Longhua Prefecture” (see the third row from the left in Figure 1). Although the above-mentioned sentence is not fully readable, it can be roughly understood from the context and from the meaning of the text. This is likely to be a description of the story of Abaoji becoming emperor and founder of the empire. The recorded founding date of the empire is the first year of Taizu’s reign in “Biography of Taizu” of *Liaoshi*. In the first year of the Shence era, the location where the Yuan dynasty was established, and the title of honor which was given, was indeed Longhua Prefecture.

Following the discussion in the previous section, we can now clearly see the truth and falsehood: in 907, Abaoji was khan in a meeting of kings, and in 916, he became emperor in Longhua Prefecture. The Stele of Taizu’s Virtues has preserved real historical information, but the current *Liaoshi* has been changed. This can be seen from the fact that in the early years of Emperor Taizong’s rule, the Liao dynasty had not yet recorded its founding year, something that was also written on two other steles erected during the same period.

As mentioned above, there was an official historian in the Liao Taizu period, and the fact that the contents of the Stele of Taizu’s Virtues and *Liaoshi* correspond with one another shows that the way of recording history at that time was already relatively established. However, this way of recording history is probably still mainly a record of important events on a national level and of the emperor’s daily life, and it is limited at the level of official archives. The first historical book of this dynasty that was systematically compiled in the Liao dynasty only appeared as late as Shengzong’s 聖宗 reign (983–1031), in the ninth year of Tonghe 統和 era (991), and was compiled into a twenty-volume *Shilu* 實錄 (Veritable Records). It has not been possible yet to obtain more information about this *Veritable Records*, and it is therefore impossible to judge

12 Dong Xinlin 董新林, Kang Peng 康鵬, and Wang Ying 汪盈, “Liao Taizu jigong bei chubu zhengli yu yanjiu” 遼太祖紀功碑初步整理與研究, in *Sui Tang Liao Song Jin Yuan shi luncong* 隋唐遼宋金元史論叢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2022).



FIGURE 1 A fragment from the Stele of Taizu's Virtues

whether it includes the history of the founding of the empire. Thereafter, the Liao dynasty produced three more historical accounts: one was written by Xiao Hanjianu 蕭韓家奴 (fl. 1055–1078) and others in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi 重熙 era (1044), *Yaonian Khan zhi Zhongxi yilai shiji* 遙輦可汗至重熙以來事蹟 (Deeds from Yaonian Khan to the Zhongxi Era); the second is by Emperor Daozong of Liao 遼道宗 (r. 1055–1101), written in the third year of the Da'an 大安 era (1085), and was called *Taizu yixia qidi shilu* 太祖以下七帝實錄 (Veritable Records of the Seven Emperors after Taizu); and the third is Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* 皇朝實錄 (Veritable Records of the Imperial Dynasty) compiled during the Qiantong 乾統 era (1101–1110). The aforementioned scholar Liu Pujiang has correctly pointed out that the history of the founding of the empire recorded by historians of the Liao dynasty, as seen in *Liaoshi*, may first be found in the *Veritable Records* of the 9th year of Tonghe, and no later than the book compiled in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi era. That is to say, the latest point in time for forming the narrative of the founding of the empire as now seen in *Liaoshi* should be the Zhongxi era.

Recent research further proves that the sinicization of the Liao dynasty gradually deepened from late in Shengzong's reign to early in Xingzong's 興宗 reign (r. 1031–1055), and a trend of legitimization gradually emerged, reaching its peak in the middle of the Zhongxi era. Internally, this was meant to solve the dynasty's own legitimacy problem through an official revision of history books. In the eleventh year of the Zhongxi era (1042), the Liao dynasty took

advantage of the Song and Xia wars to cross the border and demand a territorial concession in Guannan 關南. The system encouraged the legitimization demands of the Khitan rulers and ministers, demands which were directly reflected in legislation, rituals, history records, and many other aspects. The main achievement in terms of historical records is *Yaonian Khan zhi Zhongxi yilai shiji* (also known as *Guochao Shangshi yilai shiji* 國朝上世以來事蹟, or *Liao guo Shangshi shiji ji zhudi shilu* 遼國上世事蹟及諸帝實錄), which was compiled in the thirteenth year of Zhongxi. The officials in charge of this history revision, Yelü Guyu 耶律穀欲 (ca. 956–ca. 1045), Yelü Shucheng 耶律庶成 (fl. 1032), and Xiao Hanjianu, were all highly sinicized Khitan people. Earlier, they had done a major revision to the history of Khitan before the founding year, and had completely reshaped the face of the founding history: on the one hand, they concocted a series of narrations about Abaoji's seven temple names, shaping that as the starting point of the Khitans' journey from ignorance to civilization, elevating the family's status in the group's development history, and establishing a natural connection with the highest power, thereby providing legitimacy for the Abaoji family; on the other hand, they used elements of Chinese political culture to interfere with and package the process of Abaoji's founding of the empire, making it appear to have no connection with the enthronements of the previous Central Plains emperors.

With an understanding of the above background, we naturally have reason to suspect that the rewriting of the founding year in the official historical narrative of the Liao dynasty is likely to have been done by officials who were revising the history in the thirteenth year of Zhongxi. The following two points prove this directly.

First, in the early years of the Zhongxi era, the almanacs used by the people of Liao and Song did not feature any such chronological term as “a certain year of Taizu's reign” (*Taizu mounian* 太祖某年). *Tongjian kaoyi* quotes Song Xiang's 宋庠 (996–1066) *Jinian tongpu* 紀年通譜 as saying: “Old historical records do not include the original event of Abaoji's rise to power. Nowadays, there is a calendar in the Khitan Empire, and one hundred and twenty years of history have been recorded. In the winter of the third year of Jingyou 景祐, I was sent as an envoy to Khitan and obtained their calendar, so I investigated their way of counting, which was started with the year of Yihai, and the Shence era was established the second year, followed by the year of Tianzan 天贊.”<sup>13</sup> In the third year of Jingyou (1036), or the fifth year of Zhongxi of Liao, what he saw then was the “one hundred and twenty years of Tongji,” which started from the year of Yihai 乙亥 (915) and ended in the third year of Zhongxi (1034).

13 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

It is worth noting that, in this calendar, the year before Shence was recorded as the year of Yihai, not the ninth year of Taizu's reign. It can be seen from this that the chronology system before the founding of the empire which we see in *Liaoshi* today was not fully formed yet in the early years of the Zhongxi era.

Second, Zhao Zhizhong, who lived in the Liao dynasty and served as an official for a long time, returned to the Song dynasty in the tenth year of Zhongxi (1041, or the first year of the Qingli 慶曆 era during the reign of Emperor Renzong of Song 宋仁宗), and the founding of the Khitan Empire recorded in his *Luting zaji* is quite different from *Liaoshi*. The "Biography of Taizu" in *Liaoshi* states that, in the third year of Tianyou, "Hendejin Khan died, and the ministers asked for the establishment of Taizu according to his will."<sup>14</sup> *Tongjian kaoyi* quotes *Luting zaji* as saying: "Taizu was born wise, and the leaders of the eight tribes admired his bravery, so they let the previous leader return to the Yaonian tribe and crowned him the khan."<sup>15</sup> Once Abaoji ascended the throne, Yaonian Khan retired and returned to his tribe, but had not died. It is particularly noteworthy that Abaoji is called "Taizu" instead of his actual name, which is, in fact, related to the process of compiling *Luting zaji*. It can be seen from the lost texts of *Luting zaji* that are cited in books such as *Tongjian kaoyi* and *Guitian lu* 歸田錄 that the founding emperor of the Liao dynasty is referred to sometimes as "Taizu," sometimes as "Abaoji or Abaojin" 阿保謹; as products of different stages, the former is from an old manuscript compiled by Zhao Zhizhong in the Liao dynasty, while the latter is from a later record after Zhao's return to the Song dynasty. The one cited above belongs to the former. In the narrative of the founding history of the country as heard and seen by Zhao Zhizhong in the Liao dynasty, as Abaoji ascended the throne and the last Khans of Yaozhan were still there, we notice there is no mention of the founding history of the Khitan Empire taking place after it was succeeded by the Song dynasty.

To sum up, the rewriting of the founding year of the Khitan Empire is likely to have been finished in *Yaonian Khan zhi Zhongxi yilai shiji*, which was completed in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi era. Why did this historical revision advance the founding year from 916 to 907, thus creating a nine-year period without an era name? This is obviously closely related to the legitimization issues of the Khitan dynasty discussed above. The effect of rewriting the founding year is that the year when Abaoji became emperor is exactly the year when the Tang dynasty ended. The legitimacy of the dynasties since the Zhu Liang period 朱梁 (907–923) is thus denied, and the Khitan Empire seems

14 *Liaoshi*, 1.2.

15 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 266.8677.

to have skipped the Five Dynasties era and was directly descended from the Tang dynasty.

As to the source of legitimacy of the Liao dynasty, the current mainstream view in academia is the so-called “the Liao succeeded the Later Jin” theory. This statement was first seen in the late Jin and early Yuan period: “Liao has kept the north since the end of the Tang dynasty, the throne was not usurped, and its legitimacy was inherited from the Later Jin dynasty ... it should be recorded in the *History of the Northern Dynasties*.”<sup>16</sup> According to the Jin 金 people, “the Liao people value water’s virtue.” Considering the historical fact that the Liao people make an issue of the imperial seal obtained from the Later Jin 後晉 (936–927), it seems credible that the legitimacy of Liao dynasty is based on that of the Later Jin, and the so-called “water’s virtue” replaces the “gold’s virtue” of the Later Jin.<sup>17</sup> However, in my opinion, there may be room for further consideration.

It should be noted that the “Liao succeeded the Later Jin” theory was proposed by Jin and Yuan people, and there is no historical data from the Liao dynasty to prove this. At present, there are two main reasons supporting this theory. One is that the Jin people say that “the Liao people value water’s virtue,” and the other is the origin of the imperial seal of the Liao dynasty. However, both points can be reconsidered. 1) When the ancients discussed the lineages and moral values of the previous generation, they often speculated, and added contents based on their own perception and needs. Therefore, most of what they said deviated from the actual reality of the previous generation. 2) The imperial seal of the Liao dynasty was indeed offered by the last emperor of Later Jin when his country was subjugated, but a careful examination of the Khitan emperors’ discussions about the imperial seal did not mention the Later Jin dynasty. For example, in the seventh year of Emperor Xingzong’s reign (1038), the candidates for the *jinshi* degree were asked to write an article on the topic “he who inherits the national treasure is considered legitimate.”<sup>18</sup> The Song people recorded a poem written by Emperor Daozong of Liao, “The beautiful treasure made by the Qin dynasty has helped the dynasty prosper for thousands of years. After the fall of the Central Plains, the treasure returned to the North. The descendants of future generations should cautiously guard

16 Xiu Duan 修端, “Bian Liao Song Jin zhengtong” 辨遼宋金正統, in *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類, *Sibu congkan ben* 四部叢刊本, 45.3a.

17 Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, *Zhengtong yu huayi: Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi wenhua yanjiu* 正統與華夷: 中國傳統政治文化研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), 90–92.

18 *Liaoshi*, 57.914.

it, and the kingdom will prosper forever.”<sup>19</sup> These facts only reflect that the Liao emperors attached great importance to the imperial seal and its political and cultural implications, rather than to the direct source of this treasure, so it should not be regarded as evidence for the Liao emperors identifying with the Later Jin dynasty. Furthermore, if the Liao directly succeeded the Later Jin dynasty, then as the founder of the Khitan dynasty, the legitimate status of Abaoji would have become water without a source and a tree without roots. How could such a narrative of legitimacy be accepted by the people of Liao?

Due to the extreme shortage of historical sources, direct records of the Liao people on the origins of the legitimacy of their dynasty are still currently difficult to find. However, we can receive a preview of clues through other related writings compiled by people in that period. In the inscriptions from the Liao dynasty, it is often mentioned that the Liao replaced the Tang. Until the end of the Liao dynasty, when people talked about the origin of their empire, they all traced it to Taizu and even to the Sui (581–618) and Tang dynasties, but never mentioned the Later Jin. On the other hand, the extant narratives by the Liao people about the Later Jin all indicate that they themselves were established by the Liao and destroyed by the Liao. The recently discovered epitaph of Shi Zhonggui 石重貴, the last emperor of the Later Jin, from the sixth year of the Baoning 保寧 era (974), expresses this attitude vividly and in great detail: “At the beginning, Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭, the great ancestor of the Later Jin dynasty, started founding the state in Jinyang. He suffered defeat by the army of Li Congke 李從珂, the last emperor of the Later Tang dynasty, and the state was in great danger. Yelü Deguang 耶律德光, Emperor Taizong of the Great Khitan Kingdom, helped Shi Jingtang to overcome the crisis and become emperor in the Central Plains. Shi Jingtang was very grateful to Yelü Deguang and vowed to be the son of the Liao, and so would his future generations. In the sixth year of Tianfu 天福, Shi Zhonggui was led by a traitor into believing that he could ignore such a great kindness, so he broke the agreement and stopped paying tribute. Therefore, Emperor Taizong of Liao showed his military might, overthrew the Later Jin, and moved Shi Zhonggui to the city of Dongjing 東京 in the Liao Kingdom.”<sup>20</sup> This epitaph was written in the Liao dynasty by “Lulong jun jiedu tuiguan, jiang shi lang, shouyou shiyi Niu Cangyong” 盧龍軍節度推官、將仕郎、守右拾遺牛藏用. It can represent the Khitan officials' attitude

19 Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲, *Henghuang xinlun* 珣璜新論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 4.40.

20 For the recorded text, see Qi Wei 齊偉, “Liaoning sheng bowuguan cang Shi Zhonggui muzhiming kaoshi” 遼寧省博物館藏石重貴墓誌銘考釋, in *Liao Jin lishi yu kaogu* 遼金歷史與考古, ed. Liaoning sheng Liao Jin Qidan Nüzhen shi yanjiuhui 遼寧省遼金契丹女真史研究會 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013), 4: 303–4.

towards the Later Jin regime. It is hard to imagine that the rulers and ministers of the Liao dynasty would regard the Later Jin as the source of their legitimacy, since the first emperor of the Later Jin “vowed to be the son of the Liao.”

Naturally, the above-mentioned inscriptions cannot be seen as completely equal to, or as rising to the height of, the ideology of the dynasty, but at least they reflect the true understanding of history by the people at the time. Whether officials or ordinary people, the Liao people have always regarded the Later Jin dynasty as inferior, and I am afraid they would not regard the Later Jin as the source of their legitimacy. In stark contrast to this, ancestors of the Liao people stated that their regime started from the replacement of the mausoleum at the end of the Tang dynasty, thereby intentionally or unintentionally linking the founding of the Khitan Empire by Abaoji with the demise of the Tang dynasty, ignoring the time interval between these two events. This vague idea of history may have been popular only among Han people in the early Liao dynasty, and it then became an undercurrent of legitimacy narrative; during the Zhongxi era of Xingzong's reign, the movement of legitimacy at the centre of the Khitan dynasty was reaching its climax, and the idea that the Liao directly inherited from the Tang was gradually recognized by the ruling elite, thus providing ideological resources for the transformation of the founding history of the empire. The Liao people created a historical narrative that Taizu proclaimed himself emperor and founded the Khitan Empire in 907 by taking advantage of the fact that the Tang dynasty ended in the year that Abaoji became the khan.

#### 4 Conclusion: Political Temporality in Historical Writing

A time that has been earmarked as politically significant due to the occurrence of important events can be regarded as a representative political era. In real history, the temporal relationship between a political era and specific events is usually fixed, and readers of historical resources are often accustomed to observing from a static and ready-made perspective; therefore, right, wrong and authenticity have become the only standards, and a final point of reference, for judging a certain political era. However, there may be another aspect to the problem: at the level of historical memory and writing, many factors such as the rise and fall of power relations, the adjustment of internal structures, and changes in ideology, may lead to the rewriting of a key political time. The meaning and impact of such an era will also change accordingly. In other words, the instability of real politics inevitably creates volatility in recording

political times. Unlike the partial rewriting of historical texts and events that we are familiar with, a whole political era is more complex and systematic, and the cost of rewriting is higher, requiring echoes in, and the cooperation of, a whole set of historical narratives. Once reworded, the era becomes more difficult for future generations to perceive. This may be the reason why traditional political history research rarely examines a political era from a dynamic and productive perspective.

For a long time, scholars of Liao history have tended to regard the issue of the founding date of the Khitan Empire as a systemic difference between the documentation of the Central Plains and sources from the Liao dynasty, believed there to be strong contradictions between the two, and tried to reach an either-or type of judgment. However, this kind of approach ignores the evolution and development of the two narratives, especially the Liao dynasty literature itself. As a result, the historical narrative at the time of the founding of the state by Abaoji has been obfuscated – writing about a political era so close to the time of the actual historical events can best explain the problem. This is also key to the interconnection of different narratives.

The argument in this paper shows that the root of the problem of the founding year of the Khitan Empire is not the incompatibility of different document systems, but the rewriting and transformation of the history of the Taizu era by historians in the late Liao dynasty. In the first year of the Shence era, Abaoji proclaimed himself emperor and founded the empire. The official documentation of the Khitan dynasty has retained the political time corresponding to this historical fact, which aligns with the Central Plains documentation, for a long time. Until the thirteenth year of Emperor Xingzong's Hongxi era, when *Yaonian Khan zhi Zhongxi yilai shiji* was compiled, due to the strong demands for legitimism and legitimacy following the gradual sinicization of the dynasty, historians advanced the founding year of the Khitan Empire to 907 when Abaoji became the khan, and they created a form of chronology without an era name, as well as expressions like “a certain year of Taizu's reign” that had never been used in practice. The original era of the founding of the Khitan Empire was completely altered, and a new political era was formed, along with a set of historical narratives. Thereafter, in the Daozong and Tianzuo eras, the dynastic history was revised twice; all of these revisions have followed this same narrative framework. Later, the Jin and Yuan dynasties revisited *Liaoshi* without making any changes, and it finally became what we see today.

*Translated by Caterina Weber*

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# On Revision and Reconstruction: A Discussion about the Founding Year of the Jin Dynasty and Related Questions

*Qiu Jingjia* 邱靖嘉

Associate Professor, Department of History, Renmin University,  
Beijing, China  
[qiujingjia@aliyun.com](mailto:qiujingjia@aliyun.com)

## Abstract

According to records in the *Jinshi*, Wanyan Aguda established the Jin dynasty and proclaimed himself emperor in the year 1115. He selected the dynastic name Da Jin and the era name Shouguo. Liu Pujiang's publications, however, have raised serious doubts about the *Jinshi* version of the Jin dynasty's founding narrative and sparked a scholarly debate on the matter. On the basis of Liu Pujiang's research and by careful analysis of records on the founding of the Jin state in Song and Yuan dynasties documents and stone inscriptions, this article manages to restore a rough picture of the real history of the early Jin. On advice by his counsellor Yang Pu, Aguda established the Jin dynasty and declared himself emperor in the seventh year (1117) of the Tianqing period of the Liao. He proclaimed the dynastic name Da Jin and the era name Tianfu. The founding history of the Jin dynasty as described in the *Jinshi* should be considered the product of historical revision that occurred during the rewriting process of the *Taizu shilu*. The era name Shouguo was only created retrospectively.

## Keywords

Jin dynasty – state founding history – dynastic name – era name – distortion of history

## 1 Introduction: Thought Traps and New Revelations

According to the *Jinshi* 金史, the commanding prefect (*jie du shi* 節度使) of the “uncivilized” Jurchens (*sheng Nüzhen* 生女真) tribe Wanyan Aguda 完顏

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阿骨打 (r. 1115–1123) led an armed rebellion against the Liao dynasty (916–1125) in the ninth month of the fourth year (1114) of the Tianqing 天慶 (1111–1120) period. After victory in the battles of Ningjiangzhou 甯江州 and Chuhedian 出河店, Aguda established a new dynasty and proclaimed himself emperor on the first day of the first month of the new lunar year (1115). He adopted the dynastic name Da Jin 大金 and the first regnal or era name Shouguo 收國 (1115–1116). In the twelfth month of the second year, he designated “the next year as the first year (1117) of the Tianfu 天輔 period.”<sup>1</sup>

For several hundred years, until the end of the twentieth century, this account of the founding history of the Jin remained universally accepted. The first to raise credible doubts about the facts presented in the *Jinshi* account was Liu Pujiang 劉浦江 (1961–2015). In his research, Liu primarily relied on conflicting records on the founding of the Jin state in Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) documents that he combined with a detailed analysis of the Jurchen military actions during the late Liao. He was of the opinion that the founding history recorded in the *Jinshi* was not authentic and was probably compiled in retrospect during the revision of the *Taizu shilu* 太祖實錄, a history book written in the middle of the Jin dynasty. Liu’s preliminary conclusion stated: “After Wanyan Aguda staged a rebellion in the year 1114, he probably established the nation in 1117 or 1118. The dynastic name was the Jurchen (*Nüzhen* 女真) and the era name Tianfu. In the year 1122, the dynastic title was changed to Da Jin.” The era name Shouguo, he argued, never existed.<sup>2</sup> Liu Pujiang’s research sparked many reactions in academic circles with scholars both supporting<sup>3</sup> and opposing his views.<sup>4</sup> Liu himself declared that the results of his work only amounted to preliminary opinions that were still “far from a final conclusion”

1 *Jinshi* 金史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 2.24–30.

2 Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, *Liao Jin shilun* 遼金史論 (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1999), 1–22.

3 See for instance: Jakhadai Chimeddorji 齊木德道爾吉 and Wu Yingzhe 吳英喆, “Yi Liu Pujiang er san shi” 憶劉浦江二三事, in *Dajie luoluo gaowen bingbing: Liu Pujiang jiaoshou jinian wenji* 大節落落 高文炳炳—劉浦江教授紀念文集, ed. Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 and Zhang Fan 張帆 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 108–11; Li Xiulian 李秀蓮, “Aguda cheng Dubo jilie yu Jinchao kaiguo shi zhi zhenwei yanjiu” 阿骨打稱都勃極烈與金朝開國史之真偽研究, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊, no. 6 (2008): 43–49.

4 See for instance: Dong Sili 董四禮, “Ye tan Jin chu jianguo ji guohao nianhao” 也談金初建國及國號年號, *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊, no. 6 (2008): 94–98; Aishinkakura Urakishun 愛新覺羅烏拉熙春, *Aishinkakura urakishun joshin kitangaku kenkyu* 愛新覺羅烏拉熙春女真契丹學研究 (Kyoto: Shokado shoten, 2009), 13–22; Xin Shidai 辛時代, “Jinchao jianguo shijian kaobian” 金朝建國時間考辨, in *Liao Jin shi lunji* 遼金史論集, ed. Liu Ning 劉甯 and Qi Wei 齊偉 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2017), 15: 107–27.

on the matter. He argued that “a thorough reconstruction of the real features of the early history of the Jin dynasty will still require our ongoing efforts.”<sup>5</sup>

If we seek to explore the true nature of the founding of the Jin dynasty, a key question becomes how to explain the many differing accounts of the Jurchen founding in Song, Liao, and Jin documents and how to determine the authentic historical record. For a considerable time, most scholars regarded the *Jinshi* as a credible historical source since its contents were compiled during the Jin dynasty and primarily based on the *shilu* 實錄 (veritable records) type of historical documents of the Jin emperors. Documents from the Song dynasty, on the other hand, were considered unreliable since their records on historical events from the Jin dynasty were necessarily based on hearsay and prone to contain mistakes. The majority of experts on Liao and Jin history therefore reject Song records and continue to rely on the *Jinshi* version of the founding history of the Jin dynasty.

While there is a certain logic to this view, it also appears overly simplistic. Records of historical events in the *Jinshi* may also contain inaccuracies or even be the result of Jin authors attempting to alter the nation’s history intentionally. Authors from the Song dynasty, on the other hand, based their records on a comparatively broad range of sources that contained both credible information from the Jin dynasty as well as information that was passed down erroneously. When making use of historical documents from the Jin and Song dynasties, we should therefore not rely on preconceived ideas. Instead, we should discuss specific historical events on the basis of the study of historical sources, investigate the original sources of all records, and analyze how these written records were created. It is important to deal with each question on its own merits, to distinguish clearly between authentic and erroneous information, and to avoid falling victim to any thought traps.

In order to reevaluate the founding history of the Jin dynasty, we not only need to discard our preconceived ideas about Jin and Song historical documents but can also benefit from a number of new research discoveries. With regard to the date on which the Liao dynasty was founded, there are also major contradictions between official records and the actual historical events in question. The *Liaoshi* 遼史 states, for instance, that the Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 916–926) Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 proclaimed himself emperor and established the Liao dynasty in the year 907 and that he inaugurated the first era name Shence 神册 (916–922) in 916. In reality, however, Abaoji merely replaced the khan of the Yaonian 遙輦 tribe to become the leader of the Khitans (*Qidan* 契丹) tribal federation in 907. It was not until the year 916 that he was officially

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5 Liu Pujiang, *Liao Jin shilun*, 22.

proclaimed emperor and established the great empire of Qidan (*Da Qidan guo* 大契丹國).<sup>6</sup> During the late Liao, the founding history of the Khitans nation was predated to the final year of the Tang dynasty (618–907) in order to establish the Liao dynasty's political legitimacy as well as its legitimacy of succession. The extremely important political date of the founding year of the Liao dynasty was thus intentionally distorted.<sup>7</sup> The Jin dynasty succeeded the Liao dynasty and displayed a certain continuity with regard to its political system, as well as in terms of thought and culture. This further intensifies existing doubts about the founding history of the Jin and introduces the possibility that Jin authors followed the Liao example to alter the founding date of the Jin dynasty for political reasons.

An additional piece of historical data shows that the *Jinshi* version of the Jin state founding during the first month of the fifth year of the Tianqing period is unreliable. *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 contains an anecdote of the Jin Emperor Taizu 金太祖 Wanyan Aguda from Miao Yao's 苗耀 *Shenlu ji* 神麓記. In contrast to the *Jinshi*, this record notes that after his first rebellion in Ningjiangzhou during the fourth year of the Tianqing period, Aguda "was proclaimed emperor, and he assumed a new era name and imperial title."<sup>8</sup> The record found in the *Shenlu ji* was probably a comparatively early version of the state's founding history that official Jin court historians created during the compilation of the *Taizu shilu*. This version was eventually discarded, and the founding of the state was dated to the first month of the following year instead.<sup>9</sup> Since the exact point in time when Aguda established the Jin dynasty could be determined by officials at will, it becomes even more apparent that the *Jinshi* records on the Jurchen founding do not necessarily correspond to actual historical events.

The re-examination of records from the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties as well as new academic findings all urge us to further question the founding history of the Jin.

6 See Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, "Qidan kaiguo niandai wenti: lizu yu shiyuanxue de kaocha" 契丹開國年代問題—立足于史源學的考察, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢, no. 4 (2009): 245–72.

7 Miao Runbo 苗潤博, "Bei gaixie de zhengzhi shijian: zai lun Qidan kaiguo niandai wenti" 被改寫的政治時間：再論契丹開國年代問題, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 6 (2019): 94–106.

8 Xu Mengshen 徐夢莘, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2013), 18.4b–5a.

9 Qiu Jingjia 邱靖嘉 and Li Jingze 李京澤, "Guanyu Jin Taizu de yize yishi: jian lun Jinchao xiushi de gaicuan wenti" 關於金太祖的一則佚史—兼論金朝修史的改纂問題, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢, no. 4 (2021): 259–85.

## 2 The Real Story of How Aguda Founded the Jin State in the Seventh Year of the Tianqing Period

The familiar theory of the Jin dynasty having been established during the first month of the fifth year (1115) of the Tianqing period comes from the *Jinshi*. Liu Pujiang has already demonstrated that the original source of this version of the founding history of the Jin can be traced back to the creation of the *Taizu Shilu* in the eighth year (1148) of the Huangtong 皇統 (1141–1149) regnal period. Historical works from the Southern Song (1127–1279), on the other hand, contain a different record of how the Taizu emperor Aguda established the Jin dynasty. *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* 建炎以來繫年要錄, for instance, notes that in the first year (1118) of the Chonghe 重和 (1118–1119) period, “Aguda accepted the plan of the court librarian Yang Pu 楊璞 (d. ca. 1132) and assumed the position of emperor.”<sup>10</sup> The *Taiping zhiji tonglei* 太平治跡同類 states that during the eighth month of the eighth year of the Zhenghe 政和 (1111–1118) period (the first year of the Chonghe period was proclaimed during the eleventh month) “Yang Pu from Liaodong 遼東 persuaded Aguda to proclaim himself emperor, and to adopt the surname Wang 王 and the given name Min 旻. Since the state produced gold, he decided on the dynastic name Da Jin (the great gold empire). The first era name was Tianfu.”<sup>11</sup> These records state clearly that Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and founded the Jin dynasty during the eighth month of the first year of the Chonghe period of the Song dynasty. Other written works merely note that these events took place during the first year of the Chonghe period or the eighth year of the Zhenghe period without specifying the exact month. The “Jinguo zhuan” 金國傳 chapter of the *Dongdu shilüe* 東都事略, for instance, simply notes that “Yang Pu from Liaodong urged Aguda to proclaim himself emperor. Since the state produced gold, it was called Da Jin guo 大金國. The first era name was *Tianfu*. The date was the eighth year of the Zhenghe period.”<sup>12</sup> The contents of Southern Song documents are mostly consistent and record that Aguda founded the Jin state in the first year of the Chonghe period, proclaimed the dynastic title Da Jin, and announced the first era name Tianfu. Many documents also mention that Aguda’s actions followed the recommendations of his counsellor Yang Pu and that the Jin sent envoys to the Liao court to request a document of investiture. These accounts clearly

10 Li Xinchuan 李心傳, *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* 建炎以來系年要錄, comment. Hu Kun 胡坤 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 1.4.

11 Peng Baichuan 彭百川, *Taiping zhiji tonglei* 太平治跡統類 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1966), 25.1789–90.

12 Wang Cheng 王稱, *Dongdu shilüe* 東都事略 (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1991), 125.1925.

diverge from the *Jinshi* version that dates the state founding to the first year of the Shouguo period.

Yang Pu's recommendations, Aguda's state founding, and the Jin request for a document of investiture are all recorded in detail in the *Yiyi mouxia lu* 裔夷謀夏錄 and the *Sanchao beimeng huibian* from the Southern Song, as well as in the *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志, a forged book from the Yuan dynasty.<sup>13</sup> While the records of historical events are roughly identical in these three sources, they still differ with regard to details and contain a number of omissions. It is clear that they share a common source in the *Jinren wang Liao lu* 金人亡遼錄 that Shi Yuan 史願, a presented scholar (*jinsshi* 進士) of the late Liao dynasty, compiled in the fourth year of the Xuanhe 宣和 (1119–1125) regnal period after joining the Song.<sup>14</sup> The scholarly value of these historical sources should be considered high. Passages from the three sources discussed above show that the original record of Aguda's enthronement and his request for investiture were described in considerable detail in the *Jinren wang Liao lu*. The original record even contains details about Yang Pu's appeal for Aguda to ascend to the throne, Aguda's ten demands, as well as the text of the Liao document of investiture. This demonstrates rather convincingly that these events were not fabricated. Since its contents can be corroborated by available records from the Liao, Jin, and Song dynasties, the credibility of the *Jinren wang Liao lu* should be considered as comparatively high.

It nevertheless remains important to highlight the question of when exactly Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and established the Jin dynasty. The *Yiyi mouxia lu* and the *Qidan guozhi* both date the founding of the Jin dynasty to the eighth year of the Liao Tianqing period (the first year of the Song Chonghe period), which is 1118. According to both sources, the Jin dispatched an embassy to the Khitans with a request for investiture during the eighth month of the same year. This shows that the account of the Jin state founded in the eighth year of the Tianqing period in the *Jinren wang Liao lu* served as the original source for the records in the Song documents discussed above. A number of

13 Liu Zhongshu 劉忠恕, *Yiyi mouxia lu* 裔夷謀夏錄, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2012), 5: 1: 85–88; Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 3.12b–14a; Ye Longli 葉隆禮, *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志, comment. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 and Lin Ronggui 林榮貴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 10.126–28.

14 See Miao Runbo 苗潤博, “Youguan *Yiyi mouxia lu* zhu wenti de xin kaosuo” 有關《裔夷謀夏錄》諸問題的新考索, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 2 (2016): 125–47; Gao Yu 高宇, “*Qidan guozhi yanjiu*” 《契丹國志》研究 (PhD diss., Beijing University, 2012), 31–37; Qiu Jingjia 邱靖嘉, “Nüzhen shiliao de shenfan yu jiantao: *Sanchao beimeng huibian* juan san yandu ji” 女真史料的深翻與檢討—《三朝北盟會編》卷三研讀記, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢, no. 2 (2019): 195–229.

works such as the *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* mistakenly use the eighth month of the first year of the Chonghe period, the date when the Jin sent an embassy to the Liao court to request investiture, as the date when Aguda declared himself emperor of the Jin dynasty. The *Dongdu shilüe* and other works, on the other hand, choose a more cautious approach and only note that Aguda declared himself emperor during the first year of the Chonghe period.

Does this mean that the record in the *Jinren wang Liao lu* that Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and founded the Jin dynasty in the eighth year of the Tianqing period is credible? We might do well to first investigate the time period for which the era name Tianfu was used during the Jin dynasty. Historical records from the Southern Song all accord with the *Jinren wang Liao lu* and note that Aguda inaugurated the first era name Tianfu after proclaiming himself emperor. The same is true for books from the Yuan dynasty such as the *Qidan guozhi* or the *Da Jin guozhi* 大金國志.<sup>15</sup> These documents also record that Aguda died in the fifth year of the Song Xuanhe period, the fifth month of the third year (1123) of the Liao Baoda 保大 (1121–1125) period, and that the Jin Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 1123–1135) Wuqimai 吳乞買 changed “the sixth year of the Tianfu period into the first year of the Tianhui 天會 (1123–1135) period” after he ascended to the throne.<sup>16</sup> This would mean that the era name Tianfu was in use for only six years. The *Jinshi*, however, dates the proclamation of the Tianfu era name one year earlier than Song documents or the *Qidan guozhi* and *Da Jin guozhi*, namely to the seventh year of the Song Zhenghe period (the seventh year of the Liao Tianqing period, 1117). The records on the year Aguda died and Wuqimai ascended to the throne and declared the first year of the Tianhui period, on the other hand, are consistent.<sup>17</sup> This would mean that the Tianfu period actually lasted for seven years. There is evidence to show that during the early Jin dynasty a seven-year Tianfu period did indeed exist. The *Sanchao beimeng huibian* notes that in the second month of the fifth year of the Xuanhe period, the Jin sent Ning Shuge 寧術割 with official state documents to the Song court. The documents included a carefully collated list of “goods that originate in the areas under the administration of Yanjing 燕京”

15 See Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, “Guanyu *Qidan guozhi* de ruogan wenti” 關於《契丹國志》的若干問題 and “Zai lun *Da Jin guozhi* de zhenwei: jianping *Da Jin guozhi jiaozheng*” 再論《大金國志》的真偽—兼評《大金國志校證》 both in *Liao Jin shilun*, 323–56.

16 For instance, Yang Zhongliang 楊仲良, *Tongjian changbian jishi benmo* 通鑑長編紀事本末, in *Song shi ziliao cuibian* 宋史資料萃編 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 8: 143.4347; Ye Longli 葉隆禮, *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志, comment. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 and Lin Ronggui 林榮貴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 12.150.

17 *Jinshi*, 3.48.

that was signed “second month of the seventh year of the Tianfu period.”<sup>18</sup> In the fourth month of the same year, the Jin sent Yang Pu to the Song with a document that opened with the following words: “Eighth day of the fourth month of the seventh year of the Tianfu period, correspondence by the Emperor of the Da Jin to the Emperor of the Song.”<sup>19</sup> The fifth year of the Song Xuanhe period corresponds to the seventh year of the Tianfu period as recorded in the *Jinshi*. The list of goods and official court documents are original archival documents of Jin diplomacy with the Song that clearly record the year as the seventh year of the Tianfu period. In the third year of the Huangtong 皇統 (1141–1149) period, the *Shi Lǐ'ài muzhì* 時立愛墓誌 also recorded that “in the seventh year of the Tianfu period, the Taizu emperor of the Jin Aguda suppressed the Liao and captured Yanjing.”<sup>20</sup> This tomb inscription was written before the *Jin Taizu shilu* 金太祖實錄 was compiled in the eighth year of the Huangtong period. The tomb inscription was therefore not yet influenced by the final version of the history of the Jin state founding and refers to a seventh year of the Tianfu period. This shows that the Jin Emperor Taizu began to use the era name Tianfu from the seventh year of the Tianqing period onwards. When the Emperor Taizong ascended to the throne in the seventh year, that year was declared the first year of the Tianhui period. This corresponds to the Tianfu era as recorded in the *Jinshi*. From this we can conclude that the *Jinren wang Liao lu* record that Aguda founded the Jin dynasty and proclaimed the first year of the Tianfu period during the eighth year of the Liao Tianqing period is incorrect.

The complexity of the issue lies in the following question. Even if the *Jinren wang Liao lu* dates Aguda's state founding and declaration of a new era name incorrectly, this does not necessarily render the entire narrative about how the Jin dynasty was founded unreliable. According to records in the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and founded the Jin dynasty on Yang Pu's suggestion. Aguda's decision to negotiate with the Liao court and request a document of investiture was equally based on Yang Pu's advice. This shows that Yang Pu from Bohai 渤海 played a central role throughout the founding process of the Jin dynasty. As Aguda's principal advisor and an important figure both before and after the founding of the Jin dynasty, Yang Pu's historicity is not in question.<sup>21</sup> He advised Aguda to first proclaim himself

18 Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 14.12b.

19 Ibid., 15.12a.

20 Shi Yongshi 石永士 et al., eds., *Hebei jin shijilu* 河北金石輯錄 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1993), 282.

21 See Jiao Hui 焦慧, “Yang Pu Jin chu huodong kaobian” 楊璞金初活動考辨, *Liaoning daxue xuebao* 遼寧大學學報, no. 6 (1990): 26–27; Li Xiulian 李秀蓮, “Yang Pu zai

emperor and then request a document of investiture from the Liao in order to attain political legitimacy. Since both steps were closely related, we should not rely on either one of them individually when evaluating the record of Aguda's state founding in the *Jinren wang Liao lu*. We need to consider the process in its entirety in order to fully evaluate the record's level of credibility and uncover the reasons behind the erroneous dates in the *Jinren wang Liao lu*. If Yang Pu "surrendered to the Jurchen during the Gao Yongchang rebellion" and Gao Yongchang's 高永昌 (d. 1116) rebellion in Dongjing 東京 (the Eastern Capital) occurred during the first month of the sixth year of the Tianqing period (1116), then Yang Pu cannot have encouraged Aguda to ascend the throne before the sixth year of the Tianqing period. The *Jinren wang Liao lu* records on the Liao and Jin embassies during the negotiation process for investiture remain incomplete. Despite the negotiation process being rather complicated, the *Jinshi* merely states that "the Liao dispatched envoys thirteen times, but the peace talks eventually proved unsuccessful."<sup>22</sup> The details of the thirteen embassies can be studied by referring to the "Tianzuo Huangdi ji" 天祚皇帝紀 in the *Liaoshi* and the "Taizu ji" 太祖紀 in the *Jinshi*.<sup>23</sup> These two sources can also be used for comparison and to verify the *Jinshi* account.

In the fourth year of the Tianqing period, Aguda mobilized his troops and quickly rose in power after the battles of Ningjiangzhou and Chuhedian. In the fifth year, he successfully captured Huanglong fu 黃龍府, a location of strategic military importance. In the sixth year, Aguda's power expanded further with the suppression of Gao Yongchang's uprising and the occupation of Dongjing. In the seventh year of the Tianqing period, the first year of the Tianfu period (1117) according to the *Jinshi*, the Liao court sent troops against the Jurchen. During the twelfth month, however, they were soundly defeated at Jili Mountain 蒺藜山. During the first month of the eighth year of the Tianqing period, the Liao and Jin entered into peace negotiations. By the time relations were severed in the third month of the tenth year of the Tianqing period (the second to the fourth year of the Tianfu period, 1118–1120), both sides "had exchanged envoys thirteen times." According to the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, Aguda issued ten demands when he requested investiture from the Liao during the eighth month of the eighth year of the Tianqing period. By comparing extant sources, we can conclude that these demands were probably raised officially during the

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*Jinshi zhong de yindun yu Jin chu zhengzhi* 楊樸在《金史》中的隱遁與金初政治, *Heilongjiang minzu congkan* 黑龍江民族叢刊, no. 4 (2010): 71–74.

22 *Jinshi*, 84.1881.

23 *Liaoshi* 遼史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 28.371–79; *Jinshi*, 2.25–34.

sixth round of negotiations between the Liao and the Jin.<sup>24</sup> The *Jinren wang Liao lu* also records that the Emperor Tianzuo 天祚 (r. 1101–1125) dispatched Xiao Xinilie 蕭習泥烈 and others to perform the rites and convey the official document of investiture, stating “they departed during the tenth month and arrived at the Jin court during the twelfth month.” By the third month of the following year, Aguda ordered the envoys to return to the Liao since neither the rites nor the document had fulfilled the expectations of the Jin court. This incident is clearly recorded both in the *Liaoshi* as well as the *Jinshi*, albeit with differences regarding the travel dates of the envoys. During the third month of the ninth year of the Tianqing period, “the Liao court sent officials such as the Vice Grand Counsellor (*zhiyou yilibi shi* 知右夷離畢事) Xiao Xinilie and others to invest the head of the Jin state as emperor of the Donghuai guo 東懷國.”<sup>25</sup> When the envoys arrived at the Jin court during the sixth month, they were ordered to return since Aguda was dissatisfied with the contents of the document of investiture.<sup>26</sup> If we compare these accounts, it becomes clear that the record in the *Jinren wang Liao lu* of envoys such as Xiao Xinilie travelling to the Jin court is mostly accurate but contains slight mistakes with regard to the dates. According to the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, the Liao intentionally delayed further progress after this crisis until “the peace negotiations came to an end.” In reality, however, both sides continued to engage in another three rounds of negotiations in an attempt to revise the document of investiture. It was not until the third month of the tenth year of the Tianqing period that the Jin eventually ended peace talks with the Liao and once more resorted to arms.

On the question of investiture, there are also records from the Song dynasty. On the eighteenth day of the third month of the first year of the Xuanhe period (the ninth year of the Tianqing period, the third year of the Tianfu period, 1119), the Song dispatched Zhao Youkai 趙有開, Wang Gui 王瓌, and Li Shanqing 李善慶 as envoys to the Jin. “Before they had departed, Zhao Youkai passed away. At this point in time, the emperor received word from Hebei 河北 that informants had learned that the Khitans had already ceded the eastern part of the Liao and invested the Jurchen Aguda as head of the Donghuai guo.” “As a result, the diplomatic mission was abandoned. Hu Yanqing 呼延慶 and others were sent to the Jurchen with an official document from Dengzhou 登州 instead.”<sup>27</sup> This shows that the Northern Song had already learned about the Liao-Jin peace negotiations as well as the request for investiture via their

24 *Liaoshi*, 28:377.

25 *Ibid.*, 28:378.

26 *Jinshi*, 2:33.

27 Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 4.1a–2b.

network of informants in Hebei. Hu Yanqing was detained by the Jin during his visit and not released until the twelfth month. During this time, he met Aguda personally on several occasions and heard him speak about the question of investiture.<sup>28</sup> This account is completely consistent with relevant records in the *Liaoshi*, the *Jinshi*, and the *Jinren wang Liao lu*.

Based on the comparison of various sources, the original record in the *Jinren wang Liao lu* of Aguda accepting Yang Pu's suggestion to negotiate with the Liao and request a document of investiture appears credible on the whole. The *Jinren wang Liao lu*, however, does not outline the entire process of the thirteen embassies between the Liao and the Jin. Instead, it focuses on the dramatic parts of the narrative and describes how Xiao Xinilie and others delivered the document of investiture, how Aguda beat and expelled them, and how the peace talks were finally abandoned. We can confirm that the Jin requested investiture from the Liao court, one of two important steps that led towards the founding of the Jurchen. The account that Yang Pu advised Aguda to proclaim himself emperor is most likely also based on historical facts. It is especially noteworthy that the *Sanchao beimeng huibian* contains a passage with the contents of Yang Pu's speech that appears to be genuine. The peace negotiations between the Liao and the Jin began during the first month of the eighth year of the Tianqing period. Aguda's reply to the Liao during the second month contained the following passage: "treat me according to the propriety deserving of an older brother, pay tribute in local products on a yearly basis."<sup>29</sup> These were early versions of two of Aguda's ten demands described in the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, namely to "communicate as older and younger brothers," and to "deliver silver and silk on a yearly basis."<sup>30</sup> Aguda also referred to himself as "zhen 朕" and requested "the imperial edicts and documents the Liao uses in their diplomatic relations with the Song, Xia, and Koryŏ."<sup>31</sup> This shows that the Jurchen desired to study and imitate the system of correspondence that the Liao used in its diplomatic relations with the Song, Xia, and Koryŏ. These circumstances suggest that the Jin state had already been established at this point in time. Yang Pu therefore appears to have urged Aguda to establish the Jin and declare himself emperor after he surrendered to the Jurchen in the sixth year of the Tianqing period and prior to the first month of the eighth year. It is possible that Shi Yuan, the author of the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, was not aware of the exact time the Jurchen state was founded. He might have created a cause for

28 Ibid., 4.2b–3a.

29 *Liaoshi*, 28.377.

30 Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 13a.

31 *Liaoshi*, 28.377.

misunderstanding for later generations by tentatively dating the state founding to the first year of the Liao-Jin peace negotiations.

What then was the exact point at which Aguda heeded Yang Pu's advice to proclaim himself emperor and found the Jin dynasty? The most likely date is the seventh year of the Tianqing period. There are three pieces of evidence to support this. First, the most direct information can be found in the records of the "Tianzuo Huangdi ji" in the *Liaoshi* which state that at the end of the seventh year of the Tianqing period: "In this year, Jurchen Aguda adopted the plan of Yang Pu from Tiezhou 鐵州; he was crowned emperor and proclaimed the first year of the Tianfu period and the dynastic title Jin. Yang Pu also stated that since antiquity heroes had founded their dynasties by either accepting abdication or by requesting investiture from an important power. Aguda therefore dispatched envoys to negotiate peace with the Liao and request investiture."<sup>32</sup> This record can also be found in the "Shuguo biao" 屬國表 of the *Liaoshi* and reads: "In this year, the head of the Jurchen Aguda ascended to the position of emperor, proclaimed the first year of the *Tianfu* period, and chose the dynastic title Jin."<sup>33</sup> The record in the "Shuguo biao" consists of passages from the basic annals (*benji* 本紀) chapter in Yelü Yan's 耶律儼 (d. 1113) *Huangchao shilu* 皇朝實錄 from the Liao dynasty and Chen Daren's 陳大任 version of the *Liaoshi* from the Jin dynasty. Research has shown that the account in the "Tianzuo Huangdi ji" in the *Liaoshi* was originally based on the concise records of the annals of the Tianzuo Emperor in Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* as well as additions by other Liao authors. Official historians of the Yuan dynasty took these records as a framework and added passages from the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, such as "adopted the plan of Yang Pu from Tiezhou" or "Yang Pu also stated" and other more detailed content. In other words, the narrative of the "Tianzuo Huangdi ji" in the *Liaoshi* that Aguda proclaimed himself emperor in the seventh year of the Tianqing period is based on contemporary records by official historians of the late Liao dynasty. This fact makes the document a very convincing piece of evidence that is more authoritative and precise than the *Jinren wang Liao lu*, a historical work created by a private author.<sup>34</sup>

Second, we should consider the time when the era name Tianfu was first used. Both the "Tianzuo Huangdi ji" in the *Liaoshi* and the *Jinren wang Liao lu* record that having declared himself emperor, Aguda proclaimed the first

32 Ibid., 28.376.

33 Ibid., 70.1301.

34 See Miao Runbo 苗潤博, "Liaoshi 'Tianzuo Huangdi ji' shiyuan xinshuo" 《遼史·天祚皇帝紀》史源新說, in *Tang Song lishi pinglun* 唐宋歷史評論, ed. Bao Weimin 包偉民 and Liu Houbin 劉後濱 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2020), 7: 75-105.

regnal era Tianfu. As already shown above, the Tianfu period of the Jin dynasty began during the seventh year of the Tianqing period of the Liao.

Third, we can refer to records of diplomatic documents of the Jin court in the *Koryŏ sa* 高麗史. The *Koryŏ sa* states that on the Guichou 癸丑 day of the third month of the twelfth year (the first year of the Tianfu period, 1117) of King Yejong 睿宗 (r. 1105–1122), Aguda sent a diplomatic document to the King of Koryŏ in which he referred to himself as “elder brother, Emperor of the Da Nüzhen Jin guo 大女真金國.”<sup>35</sup> At this point in time, Aguda had obviously already proclaimed himself emperor and chosen the dynastic title Jin. This record further clarifies that the founding of the Jin dynasty must have taken place between the first and the third month of the seventh year of the Tianqing period.

Based on this investigation of historical sources and analysis of historical events, we can determine the following: Song records of Aguda having proclaimed himself emperor and established the Jin state during the eighth year of the Tianqing period are based on a misunderstanding in Shi Yuan's *Jinren wang Liao lu*. In fact, Aguda followed the suggestion of his advisor Yang Pu in the seventh year of the Tianqing period, ascended to the position of emperor, chose the dynastic title Da Jin, and proclaimed the first year of the Tianfu period. This should be considered an accurate account of the founding of the Jin dynasty.

### 3 A Discussion about the Era Name Shouguo and the Dynastic Title Da Jin

In order to explore the history of the founding of the Jin state further, we should also analyze the authenticity of the era name Shouguo and consider the question of when the dynastic title Da Jin was inaugurated. According to the *Jinshi*, Aguda proclaimed himself emperor during the first month of the fifth year of the Tianqing period (1115) and chose the first era name Shouguo. Liu Pujiang has already demonstrated clearly that this narrative should be considered unreliable and that the so-called era name Shouguo never actually existed. The literal meaning of the characters in the era name Shouguo can be ascertained with reference to the *Sanchao beimeng huibian*. The book records the *Jinren guoshu* 金人國書 from the fourth year of the Xuanhe period that contains passages such as “by the time the Liao have been captured” and “the enemy nation

35 Chŏng Inji 鄭麟趾 et al., *Koryŏ sa* 高麗史 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk Kwahagwŏn, 1957), 14.209.

has recently been subdued.”<sup>36</sup> This shows that the era name Shouguo originally referred to the idea of the submission of the Liao dynasty. As Liu Pujiang has pointed out, however, the Jurchen had only won two small-scale battles by the beginning of the fifth year of the Tianqing period. At this point in time, their actual strength was still limited, and they had neither the ability nor the intention to destroy the Liao dynasty. There could thus not have been an era name such as Shouguo. As shown above, Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and established the Jin state on Yang Pu’s advice during the seventh year of the Tianqing period. The *Jinren wang Liao lu* denotes the first era of the Jin dynasty as the Tianfu era. Original records from the Liao dynasty also clearly state that “the head of the Jurchen state ascended to the position of emperor and established the Tianfu period.” Throughout the Jin dynasty, the memories of the nation’s founding days were always connected to the belief in a “mandate of heaven” (*tianming* 天命). During the twenty-fifth year (1185) of the Dading 大定 period (1161–1189), Emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 1161–1189) commemorated the founding of the Jin dynasty and the achievements of Emperor Taizu on the *Da Jin deshengtuo songbei* 大金得勝陀頌碑 memorial stele, on which the inscription reads in part “received the blessings and protection of the heavens and meted out their punishment.”<sup>37</sup> This expression signifies the conviction that the founding of Jin dynasty had indeed received the support of the heavens. The *Shi Liai shendaobei* 時立愛神道碑 memorial stele that was engraved during the sixth year (1195) of the Mingchang 明昌 regnal period (1190–1196) reads: “in the seventh year of the Tianfu period, the Jin dynasty came into existence, and Emperor Taizu destroyed the Liao and complied with the way of the heavens.”<sup>38</sup> The tomb inscription *Wugulun Yuanzhong muzhi* 烏古論元忠墓誌 from the first year (1201) of the Taihe 泰和 period (1201–1208) had the following words inscribed: “the Jin dynasty began to accept the mandate of heaven.”<sup>39</sup> All these expressions convey similar ideas, and the literal meaning of the era name Tianfu corresponds entirely to the traditional Jin believe in the mandate of heaven. The Emperor Taizong and the Emperor Xizong 熙宗 (r. 1135–1149) successively established the Tianhui and the Tianjuan 天眷 periods (1138–1141). The era names they selected were not only alike in meaning but can also be traced back to a common origin. It therefore seems credible that Aguda should

36 Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 7.4a–4b.

37 See Luo Fuyi 羅福頤, *Manzhou jinshi zhi* 滿洲金石志, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1982), 1: 23: 17299.

38 See Wang Xinying 王新英, *Quan jinshi kewen jijiao* 全金石刻文輯校 (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2012), 377.

39 Mei Ninghua 梅甯華, ed., *Beijing Liao Jin shiji tuzhi* 北京遼金史跡圖志 (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2004), 2: 213.

have chosen the era name Tianfu after declaring himself emperor. The *Jinshi* record of the era name Shouguo, on the other hand, appears questionable.

This article has argued that Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and inaugurated the dynastic title Da Jin during the seventh year of the Tianqing period (1117). Liu Pujiang, on the other hand, has pointed out yet another interpretation. Lü Yihao's 呂頤浩 (1071–1139) *Shang bianshi shanhou shice* 上邊事善後十策 from the seventh year (1137) of the Shaoxing 紹興 period (1131–1162) of the Southern Song contains a commentary that states “the Jurchen only proclaimed the dynastic title Da Jin in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period.”<sup>40</sup> According to this version, the early Jin state was originally called *Nüzhen guo* 女真國 (the Jurchen state) and the dynastic title Da Jin was not adopted until the fourth year of the Xuanhe period (the second year of the Baoda period of the Liao, the sixth year of the Tianfu period of the Jin, 1122). Liu Pujiang concludes that there are reliable sources to support this interpretation.

In addition to Lü Yihao's writing, there are also other records of relevance to this question. The “Liao guo zhuan” 遼國傳 chapter of the *Dongdu shilüe*, for instance, contains an account of historical events of the late Liao dynasty and states “the Jurchen had already attacked the Yunzhong fu 雲中府 and reached the Juyongguan 居庸關, the power of the state was already exceedingly strong and the dynastic title was therefore changed to Da Jin.”<sup>41</sup> If the Jin troops controlled the Yunzhong fu in Xijing 西京 (the Western Capital) by the fourth month of the sixth year of the Tianfu period (the second year of the Baoda period, the fourth year of the Xuanhe period, 1122) and attacked Yanjing and the Juyongguan during the twelfth month,<sup>42</sup> the Jurchen could have “changed the dynastic title to Da Jin” in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period. The *Sanchao beimeng huibian* quotes from the *Xiaochen gufen yelu zongxu* 小臣孤憤野錄總敘 and states “during the tenth month of the fourth year of the Xuanhe period, the Liao empress declared the nation a vassal state of the Song. When the Jurchen destroyed the Liao dynasty, they were called Jin guo 金國.”<sup>43</sup> The records in these two historical sources are entirely consistent with the version presented in Lü Yihao's writings. Does this mean the Jurchen state was called *Nüzhen guo* after it was founded, and its dynastic title only changed to Da Jin in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period?

40 Lü Yihao 呂頤浩, *Zhong mu ji* 忠穆集, in *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 影印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 1131: 2.268.

41 Wang Cheng, *Dongdu shilüe*, 124.1916.

42 *Jinshi*, 2.37, 39.

43 Xu Mengshen, *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, 100.3a.

This article has already shown that on Yang Pu's suggestion, Aguda proclaimed himself emperor and declared the dynastic title Da Jin in the seventh year of the Tianqing period. The records to support this claim are clear. The *Jinren wang Liao lu*, for instance, relates the negotiations between the Liao and Jin during the eighth year of the Tianqing period. This account suggests that when the Jin submitted their request for investiture, one of the ten demands was for the "dynastic title to read Da Jin." When the Jin eventually declared the contents of the document of investiture to be unsatisfactory, one of the reasons provided was the Liao's failure "to employ the term Da Jin." The "Shuguo biao" chapter of the *Liaoshi* also states that "the head of the Jurchen state Aguda ascended to the position of emperor, proclaimed the first year of the Tianfu period, and chose the dynastic title Jin." These documents all show that when Aguda proclaimed himself emperor, he had already created the dynastic title Da Jin. Diplomatic documents from the Song and Jin dynasties also contain evidence to show that the dynastic title Da Jin was already in use prior to the fourth year of the Xuanhe period. The *Sanchao beimeng huibian* records that on the eighteenth day of the seventh month of the second year of the Xuanhe period, the Jin sent Sici Xilu 斯刺習魯 as an envoy to the Song. He carried a diplomatic document from the Jin court that opened with the following line: "document written during the seventh month by the Emperor of the Da Jin to his Excellency the Emperor of the Da Song 大宋."<sup>44</sup> On the twentieth day of the ninth month, the Song formulated a reply that employed the corresponding phrase "document written during the ninth month by the Emperor of the Da Song to his Excellency the Emperor of the Da Jin."<sup>45</sup> This shows that the creation of the dynastic name Da Jin by the Jurchen could not have occurred later than the fourth year of the Xuanhe period.

How should we then understand the account that Lü Yihao presented? The term Jurchen had in fact long been in use for the political body of the north-eastern ethnic groups with the Wanyan tribe at its center. After the founding of the Jin state, the ethnic name was not immediately abolished, but for a time used in combination with the term Da Jin guo to describe the newly established political entity. The *Koryŏ sa* records that during the third month of the twelfth year of King Yejong (the first year of the Tianfu period, 1117), Aguda sent a diplomatic document to the King of Koryŏ that opened with the words "document by the elder brother Emperor of the Da Nüzhen Jin guo to the younger brother King of the Gaoli guo 高麗國."<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of the document, Aguda referred to his own state as "Da Nüzhen Jin guo." He combined the tribal

44 Ibid., 4.7b–8a.

45 Ibid., 4.9b.

46 Chŏng Inji et al., *Koryŏ sa*, 14.209.

title with its unique political meaning with the Chinese style dynastic title. This is identical to the use of the terms *Da Liao Da Qidan* 大遼・大契丹 in the Liao dynasty and *Da Yuan Da Menggu guo* 大元・大蒙古國 in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and reflects the system of dual state names that was popular with the imperial courts of the northern tribes during the Liao, Jin, and Yuan dynasties.<sup>47</sup> For the Liao and Yuan, however, the system of dual state names basically remained in use until the final days of the dynasties. In the context of the Jin dynasty, on the other hand, the use of a dual state name has so far only been observed in the context described above. In the diplomatic correspondence between the Jin and the Song that followed, the single state name *Da Jin* was used consistently. This change probably occurred during the sixth month of the second year of the Tianfu period when the Jin received “the imperial edicts and documents the Liao used in their diplomatic relations with the Song, Xia, and Gaoli.”<sup>48</sup> The Jin court most likely began to follow their system of official correspondence and eventually opted for the term *Da Jin* as a form of mutual address. Thereafter, the use of a dual state name seems to have gradually stopped in the Jin dynasty. Lü Yihao’s statement that “the Jurchen proclaimed the dynastic title *Da Jin* in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period” might have referred to the fact that the Jin dynasty officially abolished the ethnic state name Jurchen in favor of the single state name *Da Jin*. Lü Yihao and other Song authors might have been unaware of the underlying reasons and mistakenly assumed that the Jurchen had only just established the dynastic title *Da Jin* at this point in time. What then caused the Jin to alter the state name in the fourth year of the Xuanhe period? It might have been a symbol of power and the decisive victory the Jin had achieved over the Liao by the twelfth month of that year. The Jin troops had captured Yanjing, brought all five Liao capitals under their control, and forced the Tianzuo Emperor to flee. By the end of the year, the Jin might therefore have reformed their state name system as recorded in the *Xiaochen gufen yelu zongxu*: “as soon as the Jurchen had destroyed the Liao, they were called *Jin guo*.”

#### 4 Conclusion

According to research presented in this article, Aguda’s proclamation as emperor, the establishment of the Jin dynasty, and the efforts by Jin authors to rewrite the history of the state founding can roughly be outlined in the

47 Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉, “Liaochao guohao zai kaoshi” 遼朝國號再考釋, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 4 (2016): 95–106.

48 *Liaoshi*, 28:377.

following manner. During the Gao Yongchang rebellion in the sixth year (1116) of the Tianqing period, Yang Pu from Tiezhou surrendered to the Jurchen. In the seventh year (1117), Yang Pu advised Aguda to proclaim himself emperor and establish the Jin dynasty. Aguda consequently ascended to the position of emperor, and proclaimed the dynastic title Da Jin and the era name Tianfu. The following year (1118), Aguda again chose to follow Yang Pu's suggestion to enter into peace negotiations with the Liao and issue a request for investiture. But despite "envoys being dispatched thirteen times; the peace talks eventually proved unsuccessful." During this period, however, the Jin and the Song began to establish their alliance at sea. The Jin eventually followed a new strategy and decided to launch a full-scale war against the Liao with the intention to destroy the dynasty. When official Jin historians later began to compile the *Taizu shilu*, they did not mention these details about the nation's founding history but fabricated an entirely different version of the narrative instead. They erased the important role that Yang Pu played both before and after the Jurchen state was established. Instead, they described how Aguda had followed appeals from Wuqimai and other members of the Wanyan clan to establish the state, proclaim the dynastic title Da Jin, and adopt the era name Shouguo on the first day of the first month of the fifth year of the Tianqing period (1115). With these changes, the authors predated the founding of the Jin state by two years and created the imaginary era name Shouguo. The term Shouguo (literally 'receive country') clearly 'implies the meaning of subjugating the Liao state. This notion, however, should only have existed after the breakdown of the peace talks in the fourth year of the Tianfu period and after the Jin had decided to end the Liao dynasty. The era name Shouguo was designed to show that, shortly after the start of their rebellion, the Jurchen already had the ambition to overthrow and replace the Liao dynasty and establish the Jin as a legitimate successor state. When the *Jin Taizu shilu* was compiled in the eighth year of the Huangtong period, it constructed an entirely new version of the history of the Jin state founding. Jin authors resorted to altering their state's founding history in the same manner as authors from the Liao dynasty and displayed a sense of history that allowed for distortions and misrepresentations. These actions seem to reflect a change in Khitan and Jurchen mentality after the Liao and Jin dynasties were founded and point towards a common political tradition of reconstructing national history. Such similarities may allow us to study in more detail how northern ethnic groups chose to narrate their national histories after they successfully established state power.

*Translated by Anja Bihler*

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# On the Issue of Determining the Founding Year of the “Great Mongol Nation”

Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉 | ORCID: 0000-0001-5223-486X

Associate Professor, Department of History, Fudan University,  
Shanghai, China

*pkuqara@163.com*

## Abstract

The exact date of creation of the “Great Mongolian Nation” has long been a controversial topic. This article will point out that, according to the history of Mongolia and the Yuan dynasty as described in *The History of the Buddha*, the name “Great Mongol Nation” was first used in the Xinwei year. Since the source of the historical materials used to compile the *Fozu lidai tongzai* most likely were related to manuscripts used in the compilation and revision of *Taizu shilu* earlier in the Yuan dynasty, this should be a fairly trustworthy source. It is therefore possible to infer that Genghis Khan coined the term “Yeke Mongyol Ulus” (i.e., Great Mongol Nation) in 1211. As this was also the year that the Mongols began their war with the Jin dynasty, the creation of the “Great Mongol Nation” was a political move closely related to then ongoing matters of now historical significance and – in terms of the eventual establishment of the Yuan dynasty by the Mongolians – it had both far-reaching political impact and important strategic significance.

## Keywords

Great Mongolian Nation – founding of a nation – Yuan dynasty – Chinese history

## 1 Issues and Their Origins

In the early Yuan (1206–1368), the Confucian scholar Wang Yun 王惲 (1227–1304) came up with the term “Great Yuan” in his treatise *Jianguo hao shizhuang* 建國號事狀 and stated: “ever since ancient times, any ruler who has founded

a country has started by determining the official name of his dynasty so that it is clear that this country started from his actions.”<sup>1</sup> That is to say, from the perspective of the Central Plains’ traditional political culture, a country’s name is the primary symbol by which that country’s regime was established.<sup>2</sup> However, when looking at texts from the same era produced in other languages, we can see that the real situation at the beginning of the establishment of the Yuan dynasty by the Mongols in the Bingyin 丙寅 year (1206) is that, when he was at the source of the Onon River, Genghis Khan 鐵木真 (r. 1206–1227) proclaimed himself emperor, he did not make any particular move towards deriving a name for the lands he ruled over. However, it is well established that the country already had an official appellation. Traveling to the northern deserts of Mongolia in the Xinsi 辛巳 year (1221), Song dynasty (960–1279) native Zhao Gong 趙珙 (fl. 1221) said “the heroic land of the Mongolians has recently come to be known as the Great Mongolian Nation.”<sup>3</sup> In the eighth year of his Zhiyuan 至元 era (1271), Kublai Khan 忽必烈 (r. 1260–1294) decreed the name “the Great Yuan dynasty.” Prior to that, all Chinese language diplomatic credentials, government documents and inscribed stelae had used the phrase “Great Mongolian Nation” (*da Menggu guo* 大蒙古國). For example, in 1246, the “Letter from Güyük Khan to Pope Innocent IV” was stamped with a Uighur Mongolian seal which included the phrase “Yeke Mongγol Ulus.” As has been pointed out by Mongolian historians Francis Cleaves (1911–1995) and Antoine Mostaert (1881–1971), this phrase was the official title of the Mongol regime prior to the middle of the 13th century and, when translated into Chinese, it means “Great Mongol Nation.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the official naming of a country is one of the most important events in that country’s political history. However, when and how “Great Mongolian Nation” was established as an official name has always been a confusing matter. The Qing dynasty (1644–1911) scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814) attributed this problem to editorial oversight on the part of the early Ming dynasty (1368–1644) compilation of the *Yuan shi* 元史 in failing

1 Wang Yun 王惲, “Wutai bibu” 烏台筆補, in *Qiu Jian xiansheng daquan wenji* 秋澗先生大全文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 86.9a.

2 Cao Jincheng 曹金成 once criticized one of my articles on the subject. See Cao Jincheng 曹金成, “Da Meng gu guo’ guohao chuangjian shijian zai jiantao” “大蒙古國” 國號創建時間再檢討, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 2 (2002): 219–268.

3 Zhao Gong 趙珙, *Mengda beilu* 蒙鞑備錄, in *Wang Guowei quanji* 王國維全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 11: 339.

4 Antoine Mostaert and Francis W. Cleaves, “Trois Documents Mongols des Archives Secrètes Vaticanes,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952): 485–91.

to record when Mongolia came up with its state name.<sup>5</sup> This is not an entirely unreasonable way of looking at things.

## 2 Regarding the Disparate Claims about the Establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation”

It is well established that a lack of historical materials from the early Mongolian and Yuan eras makes it impossible to pinpoint when the “Great Mongol Nation” was founded.<sup>6</sup> However, the majority of scholars generally concur that Genghis Khan was crowned emperor in the Bingyin 丙寅 year (1206) and that he soon after established a country which was called the “Great Mongol Nation.”<sup>7</sup> As Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao 蕭啟慶 (1937–2012) has explained, looking at things from the perspective of the historical development of the Mongolians, the term “Yeke Mongyol Ulus” (Great Mongol Nation) was probably first adopted as an appellation in 1206 when Genghis Khan had become the ruler not only of all of Mongolia but also of all of the Mongolian ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> However, there is still no corresponding historical evidence to support the above viewpoint. As a result, it seems that the current theory of the “Great Mongol Nation” having been founded in the Bingyin year is still a topic worthy of further discussion by the academic community.

By reviewing both Mongolian and Chinese records, we found that there are three main theories regarding when the Great Mongolian Nation was established: the Jiyou year theory, the Bingyin year theory, and the Jisi year theory. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

### 2.1 *The Jiyou Year Theory*

The following statement comes from the late 17th century history book *Erdeniyin Tobči* (On the Source of Mongolia). In the third volume, the author of the

5 Wang Shumin 王樹民, *Nian'er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 29, 651.

6 Hodong Kim 金浩東, “Menggu diguo yu ‘Dayuan’ 蒙古帝國與 ‘大元’,” in *Qinghua Yuan shi* 清華元史, ed. Yao Dali 姚大力 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), 2: 5.

7 Zhou Liangxiao 周良霄 and Gu Juying 顧菊英, *Yuan shi* 元史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003), 108; Han Rulin 韓儒林, ed., *Yuanchao shi, xiuding ben* 元朝史(修訂本) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 1: 76; Chen Dezhi 陳得芝, “Guanyu Yuanchao de guohao, niandai yu jiangyu wenti” 關於元朝的國號、年代與疆域問題, *Beifang minzu daxue xuebao* 北方民族大學學報, no. 3 (2009): 5–7.

8 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao 蕭啟慶, *Nei beiguo er wai Zhongguo – Mengyuan shi yanjiu* 內北國而外中國—蒙元史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1: 72.

book, Saghang Sechen (b. 1604), tells a lengthy story about Genghis Khan's exploits as the founder of the empire:

In the Jiyou 己酉 year (1189), the then only 28 year old Temüjin – the son of Nomoqan – became the Mongolian Khagan (khan of khans) at Ködege aral-a on the banks of the Kerülen River ... According to legend, without action on the part of any person, a boulder suddenly split in half and revealed a rectangular jade seal the length and width of the space from a man's thumb to his index finger, bearing the pattern of two dragon turtles on its back as if intentionally carved. Inked only one time, this seal could stamp one thousand sheets of paper. Immediately afterwards, the white standard with nine tails was erected at the headwaters of the Onon River. People were sent to Deligün-bulaq to raise a black banner with four tails and Temüjin became the lord of the 400,000 Bata people. Then, per the decree of the Great Lord, the country was given the name “the Great Green Mongol Ulus” (Köke Mongyol Ulus).<sup>9</sup>

The Mongolian word “köke” is usually translated into Chinese as the color green (*qing* 青). Xie Zaishan 謝再善 (1903–1977) was convinced of the authenticity of this historical text, and, accordingly, was of the opinion that Genghis Khan adopted “Green Mongolia” as the country's name upon its establishment instead of the “Great Mongol Nation.” In explaining the reasoning behind his beliefs, he stated “The Mongolians' representative color is green, and the first character of *ganzhi* 干支 (Celestial stems and Terrestrial branches) of Mongolian writing uses *qing* instead of the standard *jia* 甲, so the use of ‘Green’ as an appellation for Mongolia ends up meaning ‘the first.’”<sup>10</sup>

This viewpoint has many flaws. First, research and analysis by Borjigijin Ulaan of the aforementioned section of *On the Source of Mongolia* finds that it is actually based on a textual conflation of sections 96 “Sending a Leather Coat to Wang Han” and 123 “the Nomination of Genghis Khan as Khan by Altan and Others” of the *Yuanchao mishi* 元朝秘史 (The Secret History of the Mongols). That is to say, two unrelated political events (one from when Genghis Khan was leader of the Qiyán tribal group and the other from the Bingyin year of the

9 The Chinese translation and the Latin transcription of this historical material come from pages 150 and 568–569 of Borjigijin Ulaan 烏蘭, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu* 《蒙古源流》研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2000).

10 Xie Zaishan 謝再善, “Guanyu Halaqidan Mengguren seshang ji Yuanchao guohao laili wenti” 關於哈刺契丹蒙古人色尚及元朝國號來歷問題, *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, April 26, 1956.

Mongolian Khanate) were randomly combined.<sup>11</sup> Even though the *The Secret History of the Mongols* does not specifically record the coining by Genghis Khan of the name “Great Mongol Nation” for Mongolia, the historical materials relating to the Mongolian and Yuan dynasties in *On the Source of Mongolia* primarily follow *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Additionally, the idea of this so-called “Great Green Mongol Ulus” is closely related to the concept of “Five Colors and Four Vassals” (*wuse siyi* 五色四夷) as was commonly found in Ming and Qing era documents about the history of Mongolia. Generally speaking, the “five colors” refer to the white Solonga (Solongyos) in the east, the yellow Sartaul (Sartayul) in the south, the red Kitad in the west, the black Tübed in the north, and the 400,000 green Mongolians in the center, while the “four vassals” refer to the various small states that surrounded Mongolia. Of these, putting the fresh green of the Mongolians at the center of the banner was intended to show that the Yuan dynasty and the Mongolians played a key role in 13th and 14th century world politics. However, the truth of the matter is that, being a concept either influenced by a later era’s Yellow Sect or a political and cultural concept newly born in Mongolian society under the influence of Ming and Qing dynasty Tibetan historiography, neither Mongolian nor Yuan dynasty historical documents speak of the “Five Colors and Four Vassals.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the idea that the name “the Great Green Mongol Ulus” existed as a title during the 13th century Mongolian and Yuan periods is invented, and the story of the founding of the country during the Jiyou year is a clear fabrication by later Mongolian historians.

## 2.2 *The Jisi Year Theory*

In Ouyang Xuan’s 歐陽玄 (1283–1358) “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” 高昌偃氏家傳, the Biography of the Uighurs in Gaochang, he retells in great detail the stories of a protagonist named Bilga. The name “Great Mongol Nation” is used when describing how the king of Gaochang was held hostage by Qara Khitai and conspired with Bilga to escape. Bilga offers to kill a young prisoner sent by Qara Khitai: “Lead my subjects in returning to the Great Mongol Nation”

11 Borjigjin Ulaan, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu*, 192–93, n.53.

12 See Hexigtaoktaog 賀希格陶克疏, “Wuse siyi’ kao” “五色四夷”考, *Zhongyang minzu xueyuan xuebao* 中央民族學院學報, no. 4 (1986): 48–54; Borjigjin Ulaan, *Menggu yuanliu yanjiu*, 197; Siduryu 希都日古, *Shiqi shiji Menggu biannianshi yu Mengguwen wenshu dang’an yanjiu* 17世紀蒙古編年史與蒙古文書檔案研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2006), 111–13; Borjigidai Oyunbilig 烏云畢力格 and Kong Lingwei 孔令偉, “Lun ‘wu se si fan’ de lai yuan ji qi nei han” 論“五色四藩”的來源及其內涵, *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究, no. 2 (2016): 85–97.

with that plan being successfully implemented in the end.<sup>13</sup> This material can also be found in the “Yuelin tiemu'er zhuan” 岳璘帖穆爾傳 in the *Yuan shi*,<sup>14</sup> but it is unclear as to when exactly this happened. According to *Shengwu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄, when the spring clouds of the Jisi 己巳 year (1209) came “Genghis Khan’s reputation had spread far and wide, and fearing that the king of the Uighurs had killed the young prisoner sent by Qara Khitai, he made plans to return to Mongolia.”<sup>15</sup> We also see it stated, in the “Taizu ji” 太祖紀 in the *Yuan shi*, that when the spring clouds came in the Jisi year – the fourth year of the reign of the Taizu 太祖 Emperor (Genghis Khan) – “the Uighurs came to surrender.”<sup>16</sup> In the eighth month of year 605 of the Islamic calendar (Spring of the Jisi year of the traditional Chinese calendar), the historical Persian text *Jāmi‘al-tawārikh* (the “Genghis Khan” Chapter of *An Anthology of History*) details the surrender of the Uighurs and the gifts which Genghis Khan gave to King Iduq-qut. There is no doubt that these three documents mutually corroborate each other. The aforementioned “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” also records that “the common people were led back to the Great Mongol Nation” in the Jisi year.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, some scholars have pointed out that, since Bilga speaks of the “Great Mongolian Nation,” it must mean that, by this time, this appellation was already in use.<sup>18</sup>

But, commentators have neglected the crucial issue of the date of the writing of “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan.” It is well established that the author Ouyang Xuan became a presented scholar (*jinsi* 進士) in the second year of the Yanyou 延祐 era of the Yuan Emperor Ayurbarwada Buyantu Khan (1315). Furthermore, he became an edict attendant (*daizhi* 待制) of the Hanlin Academy (*Hanlin yuan* 翰林院) in the first year of the Zhihe 致和 era of the Yuan Emperor Yesūn Temūr (1328), and he later became a compiler (*bianxiuguan* 編修官) of the Historiography Institute (*Guoshiyuan* 國史院).<sup>19</sup> Although “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” which he wrote did not specify the specific eras of the “family stories,” it does go into detail regarding the good works performed by members of the Xie family. The inclusion of “graduated in the Dingmao

13 Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄, “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan” 高昌偁氏家傳, in *Guizhai wenji* 圭齋文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 11.5b.

14 *Yuan shi* 元史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 124.3049–3050.

15 Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 and Chen Xiaowei 陳曉偉, ed., *Shengwu qinzheng lu, xin jiaoben* 聖武親征錄 (新校本) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), 197.

16 *Yuan shi*, 1.14.

17 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao, *Nei beiguo er wai Zhongguo*, 2: 714.

18 *Ibid.*, 72.

19 For details about Ouyang Xuan, cf. *Yuan shi*, 182.4196–97.

丁卯 year (1327)<sup>20</sup> indicates that this work should have been completed no earlier than that. Therefore, we can assert that the so-called “Great Mongol Nation,” rather than having been adopted as the country’s official name prior to the Jisi year, was nothing more than a posthumous name given by Ouyang Xuan to the regime which ruled over Mongolia’s northern deserts in that era.

To sum up, there are three viewpoints regarding the time of the establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation”: in the Jiyou year, the Bingyin year, and the Jisi year. Neither the literary nor historical data on which any of these three views is based is completely credible. According to this, it would seem that the specific year in which this term was coined is still an open question.

### 3 The Xinwei Year Theory

There are various signs that Genghis Khan was initially crowned emperor at the headwaters of the Onon River, and, not long after this, determined to refer to his country as the “Great Mongol Nation.” Owing to a lack of historical data, the exact date of this appellation being coined is a mystery with the various speculations thus far made by scholars failing to completely convince anyone.

I have discovered a clear record of the establishment of the “Great Mongol Nation” in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載 (The History of the Buddha). The book lists the ascension, reformation, and abdication of successive rulers and contains historical materials related to the reign of the Yuan Emperor Taizu, as follows:

In the Yichou 乙丑 year (1205), the Yuan Emperor Taizu conquered the Western Xia empire 西夏. The next year (1206), a meeting was held on the banks of the Onan River, the white standard with nine tails was hoisted, and he was embraced as the Khan and given the title Genghis Khan.

In the Xinwei 辛未 year (1211), the country started to become known as the “Great Mongol Nation.”

In the Renshen 壬申 year (1212), the Mongolian army reached Yanjing 燕京 (modern day Beijing) and, in the eighth month of that year, they attacked the city.

In the Jiaxu 甲戌 year (1214), the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) moved their capital to Bianjing 汴京 (modern day Kaifeng 開封) and sued for peace

20 Ouyang Xuan, “Gaochang Xieshi jia zhuan,” 11.12b.

with the Mongolians. Not long after Zhang Zhi 張智, the commander of the Jinzhou 錦州 army, surrendered the city, he led a revolt and proclaim himself the King of Liaoxi 遼西王. In the year of Da'an 大安, the Mongolian army once again quelled the rebellion. The city of Yanjing was captured.

In the eighth month of the Yihai 乙亥 year (1215), Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty. That year Mongolian soldiers captured Tongguan 潼關 (the northern part of modern day Shaanxi 陝西 province's Tongguan county).

In the Renwu 壬午 year (1222), Mongolian soldiers came from Uighur and attacked the Western Xia empire.

In the spring of the Bingxu 丙戌 year (1226), Genghis Khan arrived in the lands of the Western Xia empire. Within a year, he had conquered all the cities, and, by the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of the Dinghai 丁亥 year (1227) had destroyed the regime.<sup>21</sup>

All seven of the above quotations are from the “Jinling biao” 金陵表 in *Zhizheng jinling xinzhì* 至正金陵新志. These chronicles contain content such as “the Great Yuan Emperor Taizu’s ascension of the throne” in the Bingyin year, the “establishment of the great dynasty” in the Xinwei year, the “Yuan siege of Yanjing” in the Renshen year, the “Fall of Yanjing to the Yuan” in the Yihai year, and the “Yuan capture of western Xia empire from the Uighur” in the Renwu year.<sup>22</sup> Cao Jincheng 曹金成 is of the opinion that the four quotations referencing the Xinwei, Renshen, Yihai, and Renwu years were adapted from the *Dajin guo zhi* 大金國志, and, on account of having been copied from Li Xinchuan’s 李心傳 (1167–1244) work *Dada kuansai* 鞑靼款塞,<sup>23</sup> the Xinwei year quote about the founding of a great empire is of dubious credibility.<sup>24</sup> Although the *Fozu lidai tongzai* also uses materials which are found in the *Dajin guo zhi*, most of the historical materials relating to the “Great Mongol Nation” are independent of each other.

The above quote referencing the Yichou year is consistent with the Bingyin year material about the first year of Taizu’s rule in the “Taizu ji” in the

21 Shi Nianchang 釋念常, *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 77: 413b–415a.

22 *Zhizheng jinling xinzhì* 至正金陵新志, ed. Zhang Xuan 張鉉, Jiqinglu Ruxue Lishui-zhouxue yuankeben 集慶路儒學溧水州學元刻本, 3: 96a, 98a, 98b, 100b.

23 Li Xinchuan 李心傳, *Jiyan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記, annot. Xu Gui 徐規 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 2: 19.847–52.

24 Cao Jincheng, “Da Menggu guo’ guohao chuangjian shijian zai jiantao,” 219–68.

*Yuan shi*.<sup>25</sup> As noted above, according to the *Fozu lidai tongzai*, Ghenghis Khan conquered all the lands of the Western Xia empire in the Bingxu year.

However, in the “Taizu ji,” it is recorded that, in the 22nd year of Taizu’s reign, on the Jichou 己丑 day of the Seventh month of the Dinghai year: “Ghenghis Khan died in Sa’ari Ke’er Qala’utu’s camp.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, it seems that the two books are markedly different regarding the year of Ghenghis Khan’s birth and the place of his death.<sup>27</sup> It is not a question of right and wrong so much as contradictions caused early in the Yuan dynasty by the different calendars and different methods of marking time which were used when compiling the “Veritable Record of Emperor Taizu.” In other words, the theory provided in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* is, by no means, manufactured out of thin air. In fact, in the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu* 聖武親征錄 it is recorded that: “In the Dinghai year (1227), Ghenghis Khan conquered the Western Xia empire and returned to his base camp.”<sup>28</sup> This is completely consistent with content from the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. Third, although the *Fozu lidai tongzai* content regarding the Jiayu year is unique, the “Taizu ji” reports that in the Jiayu year – the ninth year of the reign of the Emperor Taizu – “Zhang Jing 張鯨, the military commander of Jinzhou, killed the state’s commissioner (*jie du shi* 節度使), named himself the ‘Linhai King’ 臨海王, and sent messengers to express his allegiance to Ghenghis Khan.” In the following year, when Zhang Jing (d. 1215) plotted to betray and murder him, “Zhang Jing’s younger brother Zhang Zhi once again came to occupy Jinzhou, arrogantly calling him the ‘Han Xing Emperor’ 漢興皇帝, and he replaced the term ‘Yuan dynasty’ with ‘Xinglong’ 興龍.”<sup>29</sup> These quotes basically corroborate the content of the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. Although they are not identical, the deeds of Emperor Taizu as recorded in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* are the same as the deeds recorded in the *Yuan shi*. There are also other historical texts which are similar to the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu*.

It is well established that the *Yuan shi* was compiled early during the reign of the Ming Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) and that part of its content was obtained from extant copies of the *Yuan shilu* 元實錄. Therefore, the “Taizu ji” should correspond with the *Taizu shilu* 太祖實錄 that was completed

25 *Yuan shi*, 1.13.

26 *Ibid.*, 1.25.

27 The issue of Ghenghis Khan’s birthday and whether he died at age 60 or at age 66 is still controversial. Cf. Zhou Qingshu 周清澍, “Chengjisi Han shengnian kao” 成吉思汗生年考, in *Yuanmeng shizha* 元蒙史札 (Hohhot: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 2001), 411–28.

28 Jia Jingyan and Chen Xiaowei, *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, 304–5.

29 *Yuan shi*, 1.18.

in the tenth month of the seventh year of the Dade 大德 era (1303).<sup>30</sup> As for the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu*, it was probably written during the period of the Emperor Shizu of Yuan 元世祖 (Kublai Khan), and should be considered a manuscript version of the *shilu* of both Taizu and Taizong 太宗 (Ögedei Khan, r. 1229–1241).<sup>31</sup> Using historical sources to make further analysis and comparison, it is likely that the aforementioned contents from the *Fozu lidai tongzai* were copied from the original court archives related to the *Taizu shilu*. As for the *Fozu lidai tongzai*, in the third month of the fourth year of the Zhizheng 至正 era (1344) of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong 惠宗 (r. 1333–1370), Jue An's 覺岸 (b. 1286) "Huating meiwu chang chanshi benzhuan tongzai xu" 華亭梅屋常禪師本傳通載序 describes the process of writing the book as: "In the summer of the third year of the Zhizhi 至治 era (1323), Shi Nianchang 釋念常 was called up to the capital city of Dadu 大都 (present day Beijing), to write the Buddhist sutras in golden characters. He decided to imitate the style of Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 and write a history of the Buddha, the *Fozu lidai tongzai*. While writing he often discussed the classics with scholars from the Hanlin Academy."<sup>32</sup> Among these scholars was the Hanlin academician and compiler in the Historiography Institute Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348) with whom Shi Nianchang had maintained a long professional relationship.<sup>33</sup> Through this channel, it would have been possible to make inquiries into some of the rare stories about Genghis Khan and the founding of his nation.

In summary, the author of the *Fozu lidai tongzai* – which was written in the Zhizheng era of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong – made the specific choice to include the dates of Genghis Khan's ascension to power, conquest of enemies, coining of a national name, and death. It clearly shares source material with both the *Sheng wu qinzheng lu* and the *Yuan shi*. It refers to the *Taizu shilu* or related manuscripts and records. It is most likely that – rather than personally excerpting the materials which were compiled into his book – the author Shi Nianchang obtained these via scholars from the Hanlin Academy working at the Historiography Institute. There are many examples of such

30 Ibid., 21.455. Cf. Chen Gaohua 陳高華, "Yuan shi zuanxiukao" 《元史》纂修考, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 4 (1990): 115–130.

31 Wang Guowei 王國維, "Shengwu qinzheng lu jiaozhu xu" 聖武親征錄校注序, in *Wang Guowei quanji*, 11: 409–11; Yekeminggadai Irinchin 亦鄰真, "Monacha shan yu jinze" 莫那察山與《金冊》, *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域歷史語言研究集刊 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2009), 2: 23–24.

32 Jue An 覺岸, "Huating meiwu chang chanshi benzhuan tongzai xu" 華亭梅屋常禪師本傳通載序, in *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, Dazheng cangben 大正藏本, 3.

33 Shi Nianchang, *Fozu lidai tongzai*, 3b–4a.

scholarly exchange in the Yuan dynasty. In the first year of the Zhizheng era of the Reign of the Yuan Emperor Huizong (1341), Chen Jing 陳桎 (fl. 1361) wrote a chronicle-style history book *Tongjian xubian* 通鑿續編. In section 19 of this book, it is written that in the second year of the Kaixi 開禧 era (1206) of the Reign of the Song Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (r. 1194–1224), “Genghis Khan became emperor at the Onon River” and in section 21, in the third year of the Baoqing 寶慶 era (1227) of the Reign of the Song Emperor Lizong 理宗 (r. 1224–1264) “Genghis Khan died at Liupan 六盤.”<sup>34</sup> On account of the deeds of Genghis Khan being described in great detail for the interval between these two events, it is quite likely that the original source text for this may have been the 1303 *Taizu shilu*. Of the officials who are associated with the book’s author Chen Jing, it is most likely that materials were provided by the Hanlin academician and edict attendant Zhou Boqi 周伯琦 (1298–1369) as – owing to his special position in the Hanlin Academy – he had the opportunity to read Yuan court records.<sup>35</sup> Of Yuan dynasty records which were preserved by the court, only a few select documents emerged into general circulation among the stories known to the common people near the end of the dynasty, but the Mongolian historical materials contained in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* and *Tongjian xubian* have a clear relationship with the *Taizu shilu*.

The aforementioned historical events relating to the Yuan Emperor Taizu as described in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* are clearly from the *Taizu shilu*. For example, when it says that, in the Xinwei year “Da Menggu guohao shi jian” 大蒙古國號始建, we have an obvious chronological clue regarding when the Yuan dynasty was founded. If we pay careful attention, we can also see similar evidence in Song dynasty documents. In the *Jiyan yan yilai chaoye zaji* 建炎以來朝野雜記, the prosperity of Mongolia during the Jin dynasty is described as follows:

When the Jin dynasty was strong, the Tatars paid an annual tribute, and the government sent envoys to the northeast to govern. After King Wei 衛王 (1209–1213) ascended the throne, Temujin 忒沒貞 began to rebel and claimed the title “Emperor Genghis.” The northern area of the lands ruled by the Jin dynasty (Shandong 山東, Hebei 河北, and Hedong 河東) were ravaged and occupied by Temujin. After the Tatars occupied the Jin empire, they married women from Khitan and Han’er, had mixed blood children, and learned to eat cooked food. At this time, the Tatars called

34 Chen Jing 陳桎, *Tongjian xubian* 通鑿續編, Yuan keben 元刻本, 19–21: 7a–12a.

35 Cf. Huang Shijian 黃時鑿, “*Tongjian xubian* Menggu shiliao kaosuo” 《通鑿續編》蒙古史料考索, in *Huang Shijian wenji* 黃時鑿文集 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2011), 1: 136–37.

themselves the “Great Mongol Nation” and the officials of the border counties called them “Mongols and Tatars” (*meng da* 蒙韃).<sup>36</sup>

Where the text says “the Tatars occupied the Jin empire,” it is referring specifically to an event which took place in the fourth month of the third year of the Da’an 大安 era (1211) as recorded in the “Weishaowang ji” 衛紹王紀 in the *Jin shi* 金史 “Genghis Khan, the Great Yuan Emperor Taizu, went forth to conquer the Jin dynasty”<sup>37</sup> and the *Yuan shi* as “Genghis Khan brought his own troops south to attack the Jin dynasty, defeated the Jin general Ding Xue 定薛 at Yehuling 野狐嶺, and occupied the counties of Dashuiluan 大水瀾 and Fengli 豐利” in the second month of the sixth year of the reign of the Yuan Emperor Taizu (1212).<sup>38</sup> This can only mean that the Xinwei year was the year in which the Tatar people founded the “Great Mongol Nation.”

Other than giving his country the appellation the “Great Mongol Nation,” nothing else particularly unusual happened in the Xinwei year. In fact, according to the *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, that year was “the year Genghis Khan vowed to march south and conquer the Jin dynasty”<sup>39</sup> and was the beginning of what is known as the Mongolian conquest of the Jin. Two conclusions can be drawn about the significance of this move. First, repeatedly attacking the Mongolian grasslands, the Jin had tried to subdue the tribes and make them vassals, but had only inspired hatred towards themselves. We see this in the *Mengda beilu* 蒙韃備錄, which states: “the Jin Emperor Shizong 金世宗 (r. 1161–1189) ordered his men to go deep into the Tatar hinterland and destroy them. Every three years, he sent troops to kill the strongest of their men and decimate their people.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, revenge may have been one of the reasons behind Mongolia deciding to move southwards.<sup>41</sup> Second, from a strategic perspective, Genghis Khan’s unification of the Mongolian Plateau and the success of his crusade against the Jin dynasty not only meant that he would be able to occupy all of the vast Central Plains area north of the Yellow River, but would also lay

36 Li Xinchuan, *Jiyan yan yilai chaoye zaji*, 19, 848–52.

37 *Jin shi* 金史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 13, 293.

38 *Yuan shi*, 1.15.

39 Jia Jingyan and Chen Xiaowei, *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, 212.

40 Zhao Gong, *Mengda beilu*, 11: 351.

41 Shu Zhenbang 舒振邦, “Chengjisi Han nanzheng de xingzhi he zuoyong” 成吉思汗南征的性質和作用, in *Zhongguo Menggu shixuehui lunwen xuanji* 中國蒙古史學會論文選集, ed. Zhongguo Menggu shixuehui 中國蒙古史學會 (Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1980), 151–64; Buyandelger 寶音德力根, “Chengjisi Han jianguo qian de Jin yu Menggu zhubu” 成吉思汗建國前的金與蒙古諸部, *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 內蒙古社會科學, no. 4 (1990): 58–61.

a solid foundation for the demise of the Southern Song dynasty and the future establishment of the Yuan dynasty.<sup>42</sup>

The southern expedition in the Xinwei year was very important. Other than the two points mentioned above, the Gengchen 庚辰 year (1220) saw Yelü Chucai's 耶律楚材 (1190–1244) push west to conquer the western regions. The *Xizheng Gengwu yuanli* 西征庚午元曆 produced on the way used astrology to explain how this was significant from the perspective of the mandate of heaven.<sup>43</sup> Quoting the *Gengwu yuanli*, the *Yuan shi* said: “The imperial army marched south to fight the Jin and began the task of bringing the world under their control.”<sup>44</sup> This act of “bringing the world under their control” refers to the events of the twelfth year of the reign of the Taizu Emperor (1217) when the expedition by Mu Huali 木華黎 (1170–1223) in the eighth month of the Dingchou 丁丑 year “led to the establishment of a province (*xingsheng* 行省, the branch secretariats of the Yuan dynasty) in the Yan 燕 area, and the plan to conquer the Central Plains.”<sup>45</sup> That is to say “the Yuan Emperor Taizu established the province of Dafanfu 大藩府 in Yan specifically to control the Central Plains.”<sup>46</sup> These remarks by Yelü Chucai come after a decade of subjugating the Jin, and it is clear that he regards this move as endorsed by heaven.

In summary, throughout the political history of the northern dynasties, it was fairly common for the official title of the established regime to become the name of the country as a whole (such as “Great Turk” or “Great Khitan”). But, according to the relevant literature, these terms were originally used primarily in diplomatic situations. For example, in the “Tujue zhuan” 突厥傳 chapter of *Sui shu* 隋書, the envoy which the Turkic leader Ishbara Qaghan (r. 581–587) sent to the emperor of the Sui dynasty (581–618) was referred to as the “Great Turk.”<sup>47</sup> Also, the “Jin Gaozu ji” 晉高祖紀 chapter of *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 contains an imperial order written by the Liao Emperor Taizong 遼太宗 (r. 927–947) which, in establishing Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭 (892–942) as the emperor of the Jin dynasty, starts with “On the twelfth day of the eleventh month of the ninth year of the Tianxian 天顯 era (Bingshen 丙申 year, 934) of the Liao Emperor Taizong, the Great Khitan Emperor said ...”<sup>48</sup> Then,

42 Cf. Shu Zhenbang, “Chengjisi Han nanzheng de xingzhi he zuoyong,” 151–64.

43 Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材, *Zhanran jushi wenji* 湛然居士文集, annot. Xie Fang 謝方 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186.

44 *Yuan shi*, 52.1119.

45 *Ibid.*, 119.2932.

46 Ma Zuchang 馬祖常, *Ma Shitian wenji* 馬石田文集, in *Yuanren wenji zhenben congkan* 元人文集珍本叢刊, 6: 631.

47 *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 84.1868.

48 *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 75.986.

based on the above, we can conclude that, in the years prior to and just after 1200, Genghis Khan was gradually unifying the Mongolian Plateau. Prior to his eventually establishing the Mongolian Khanate in 1206, he began in the east from the Hulunbuir grasslands and – marking the formation of the Mongolian people – brought the “tent dwellers” of the vast lands to the west of the Altai Mountains under his control and led to “Mongolia” becoming a collective name for the grasslands’ various tribes.<sup>49</sup> However, at this time, the country’s official name had not yet been announced and it was referred to (both in Central Plains documents and those from later periods) as just “the great dynasty.”<sup>50</sup> However, by 1211, when the Mongolians began their subjugation of the Jin, this emerging regime, which – prior to that point had always been a Jin vassal – began to give itself a national status equal to that of the Jin by adopting a national name. As the “Great Mongol Nation,” it then proceeded to declare war on the Jin. In other words, just like “Great Turk” and “Great Khitan,” the “Great Mongol Nation” was originally a clan name which, in use by outsiders, eventually became the name of a state.

*Translated by Marian Rosenberg*

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- 49 See Yekeminggadai Irinchin 亦鄰真, “Chengjisi Han yu Menggu minzu gongtongti de xingcheng” 成吉思汗與蒙古民族共同體的形成, in *Yekeminggadai Irinchin Menggu xue wenji* 亦鄰真蒙古學文集 (Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 2001), 387–426.
- 50 Ch’i-ch’ing Hsiao proposed that “Great Dynasty,” as the appellation which the Mongolian regime used in Han region, is actually an abbreviated translation of the Mongolian phrase “Yeke Monggol Ulus.” Coins, administrative documents, and stone carvings from that era often feature the phrase “Great Dynasty” (*Da chao* 大朝), and it seems to be the official name of the country prior to Kublai Khan establishing the Yuan dynasty. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏 (1924–1990) is of the opinion that the original meaning of the “Great Dynasty” was the “Holy Dynasty” or “present dynasty” and was actually a term of respect rather than a term for a specific country. Cf. Jia Jingyan 賈敬顏, “Cheng ‘Dachao’ 稱 ‘大朝’”, in *Minzu lishi wenhua cuiyao* 民族歷史文化萃要 (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), 62–63. As is recorded in *Jingshi dadian* 經世大典, the Yuan Emperor Shizu directly changed the name of the country from the Great Mongol State to the Great Yuan dynasty. In the Chinese language, the “Great Dynasty” is never mentioned. A version of Han Daozhao’s 韓道昭 *Gaibing wuyin jiyun* 改並五音集韻, which was published in 1289, has, “Zhiyuan xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 至元新雕改並五音集韻, “Dayuan xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 大元新雕改並五音集韻 and “Dachao xindiao gaibing wuyin jiyun” 大朝新雕改並五音集韻 where it is obvious that the “Dachao” actually refers to the “Yuan dynasty” and not specifically to the “Great Mongol State.”

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

*Lu Zhengheng* 盧正恒

Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
College of Hakka Studies, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University,  
Taipei, Taiwan, China  
[chenghenglu@nycu.edu.tw](mailto:chenghenglu@nycu.edu.tw)

*Huang Yinong* 黃一農

Professor, School of Humanities, National Tsing Hua University,  
Hsinchu, Taiwan, China  
[ylhuang@mx.nthu.edu.tw](mailto:ylhuang@mx.nthu.edu.tw)

## 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

## 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*),<sup>1</sup> *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 市村瓊次郎 (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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 黃彰健 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).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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)<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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.”<sup>11</sup> 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,<sup>12</sup> 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).<sup>13</sup> 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,<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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*.<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> 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).<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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.”<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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."<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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).<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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 内治 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).<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> 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.”<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.”<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

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,”<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.”<sup>45</sup> 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 Chunchugwan 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 Xuezhong, *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.”<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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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## *Article*



# **Aristocratic Families in the Jianghuai Region during the Tang-Song Interregnum**

*Ng Pak-sheung*

General Education Centre, Hong Kong Polytechnic University,  
Hong Kong, China

*NGPS@link.cuhk.edu.hk*

### **Abstract**

With an emphasis on the Jianghuai region, this article aims to study the activities of aristocratic families during the Tang-Song Interregnum. Some aristocratic families managed to survive but were no longer in a position to carry out the cultural functions they had performed during the Tang dynasty. Based on the discussions undertaken by the article, aristocratic families played no evident role in political and cultural domains during the reign of Yang Wu and the Southern Tang. As such, total disappearance of the political and cultural capabilities of this privileged class in the Jianghuai region may have already taken place prior to the founding of the Southern Tang.

### **Keywords**

aristocratic families – Tang-Jianghuai – Yang Wu – Southern Tang – *Qingliu Wenhua*

## 1 Introduction

As a geographical term commonly used in imperial China, Jianghuai 江淮 in a narrow sense refers to the plains between the Yangtze River 長江 and the Huai River 淮河, roughly in today's Anhui 安徽 and Jiangsu 江蘇. In the context of this article, Jianghuai refers to a much wider geographical domain, which includes the Circuit of Huainan (*Huainan dao* 淮南道), the East Circuit of Jiangnan (*Jiangnan dongdao* 江南東道), and the West Circuit of Jiangnan (*Jiangnan xidao* 江南西道) designated by the Tang regional administrative divisions; the mentioned territories are roughly equivalent to present-day entire of or parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi 江西, Hubei 湖北, and Henan 河南.<sup>1</sup> Founded by Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (851–905), Yang Wu was the first kingdom established in Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum. When Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (889–943) founded the Southern Tang, he took over the Yang Wu territories.<sup>2</sup> With an emphasis on the Jianghuai region, this article aims to discuss the political and cultural roles of Tang aristocratic families during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960). The concept of the “Tang-Song Interregnum” is particularly relevant to the present study. Suggested by Hugh R. Clark, the Tang-Song Interregnum is the framework used to conceptualize events that took place within the concerned period. “Interregnum” is interpreted as a power vacuum, an idea aimed to embody the chaotic situation that characterized the era in question.<sup>3</sup>

During this period, the destiny of aristocratic families varied by region, a truth that brings to light a shortcoming in examining historical continuity of the Tong-Song era simply from the dynastic-oriented perspective, as consciously or unconsciously presented in the concept of Tang-Song Transformation. Unlike the Tang-Song Interregnum concept, which highlights the period as a separate phase with regional characteristics, the more popular perspective

1 On regional administration in the Tang dynasty (618–907), consult article Ng Pak-sheung, “What Happened to Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum: From Cultural and Social Perspectives,” *Etudes Chinoises* (Forthcoming).

2 On historical details of the Southern Tang, consult Robert J. Krompart, “The Southern restoration of Tang: Counsel, policy and parahistory in the stabilization of the Chiang-Huai region, 887–943” (Ph.D. diss. University of California at Berkeley, 1973); Johannes L. Kurz, *China's Southern Tang Dynasty, 937–976* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011). Kurz's work is the first book officially published in English to provide a comprehensive overview of the Southern Tang and full coverage of military, cultural, and political history.

3 Hugh R. Clark, “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter? A focus on the economies of the South,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 1–28; “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter? Part Two: The social and cultural initiatives of the South,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 47 (2017–2018): 1–31.

among historians refers to the same period as the Tang-Song Transformation (alternatively, Tang-Song Transition), a concept that presents this same period as one that merely bridges dynasties. One shortcoming of the latter is its failure to address the ways in which various regions across China independently contributed cultural and economic innovations to the period in question. As pointed out by Luo Yinan, “When reading Naito and Miyazaki, for example, we notice the topic of their research was China in its entirety, not the different regions.”<sup>4</sup> The comment reveals the major defect of their works, namely, focusing on the events taking place in dynasties founded in the Great Plain while neglecting regional uniqueness. To address this shortcoming, some scholars have responded by basing their own studies within regional contexts.<sup>5</sup>

To address the defect, Clark has gone further by suggesting the Tang-Song Interregnum concept in examining regional transformation in South China.<sup>6</sup> The concept of exploring regional significance during the interregnum is indeed useful to overcome the weakness in Naitō’s theory: while serving as the framework to illustrate the change and stability in Tang-Song China, Clark’s concept modifies Naitō’s theory by pointing out the importance of regional studies. In this sense, these two theories are not necessarily exclusive, but are mutually supplemental instead.

Different from a common bias that relegates the Five Dynasties to an obscure time span characterized by usurpation, Clark argues that this era constitutes neither a pause nor a regression, but an era of expansion and innovation thus deserving recognition. Following this logic, the significance of Jianghuai during the interregnum might not be confined to affiliation with chaos and destruction, but more importantly, to facilitating positive influences

4 Luo Yinan, “A study of the changes in the Tang-Song Transition model,” *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 35 (2005), 106. Recently, Chinese scholars have increasingly cast doubt on the validity of the Tang-Song Transition Theory. For details, consult Sun Qi 孫齊, “Editor’s introduction: Limitations of the Tang-Song Transition Theory,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 127–28; Yang Jiping 楊際平, “Dispelling the Myth of the ‘Tang-Song Transition Theory,’” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 129–52; Li Huarui 李華瑞, “Time to Turn the Page in Tang and Song History Studies: Exploring the Tang-Song Transformation Theory from Multiple Perspectives,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 153–79; Wang Huayu 王化雨, “A Historical Study of Political System Reform in the Tang and Song Dynasties,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 180–91.

5 For instance, Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦 has conducted a painstaking study of regional social, political, and military uniqueness and disparities that developed during the chaotic late Tang and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. For details, consult his book, Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū* 唐宋變革の地域的研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1990).

6 Clark, “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter?” 30.

on regional cultural enhancement. Based on the cultural contributions of the Southern Tang, this article intends to highlight the point that the contributions demonstrated in the Song dynasty (960–1279) were primarily homegrown, implying that those involved in this endeavor were local intellectuals. This finding widens the dimension for the discussion on the destiny of the Tang aristocratic families, which followed a tragic path to their ultimate demise.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Significance of Literary Tradition in Medieval China

Among the Southern states, the Southern Tang has been credited with having performed a crucial role culturally in Tang-Song China. As observed by Johannes L. Kurz, the preservation of “cultural values and artifacts” from the Tang served as the basis of Song culture, while the culture preserved by the Southern Tang presented the Song “with a direct link to the Tang and its traditions.”<sup>8</sup> Kurz’s observation brings up an important question: who could fulfill the mission as cultural bearer? Based on common perception, Tang aristocrats would be considered those who possessed sufficient cultural acumen to fulfill this role. During medieval China, Tang aristocrats were the key force that integrated political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics.<sup>9</sup> Their cultural importance was manifested in their robust ability to shape cultural norms and values.

Among these culture-shaping features, one can be identified as self-serving, used to achieve the perpetuity of aristocracy. Based on the study of Cui 崔

7 The collapse of the Tang aristocratic families has succeeded in drawing scholarly attention over the years. Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 appears to be the first scholar to issue the theory of center-oriented migration (*qianxi zhongyanghua* 遷徙中央化) and the devastating impact the center-oriented migration pattern had on aristocratic families during the final phase of the Tang. His major elaborations on these issues are collected in his book, Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1988). Recently, Nicolas Tackett has suggested his distinct viewpoint, specifically, that the impact of dynastic disintegration on this privileged group was not merely confined to their physical existence, but it also affected the social network that had proven essential for maintaining the group’s power. See his book, Nicolas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

8 Johannes L. Kurz, *China’s Southern Tang Dynasty, 937–976*. For a similar discussion, see Wei Liangtao 魏良弢, “Nan Tang shiren” 南唐士人, *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江蘇社會科學, no. 2 (1995): 85–89.

9 Li Jianhua 李建華, “Wenzhang shishang zhengkailu fayue Shandong zhupotian – qianlun Tangdai Shandong shizu de wenxue chuanguo” 文章世上爭開路闕闕山東拄破天—淺論唐代山東士族的文學創作, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 古典文學知識, no. 2 (2014): 49–56.

(Ts'ui) families originating in Qinghe 清河 and Boling 博陵, Chen Jo-Shui 陳弱水 elaborates on the role of culture in the distinction of aristocratic families. Defined by lifestyle and intellectual tendencies, cultural features embodied a refined, morally-oriented behavioral pattern, and a tradition of learning within the family. "If the Ts'ui families of the late-T'ang had, to a significant degree, lost their traditional cultural characteristics, then the cultural distinction between aristocrat and non-aristocrat had disappeared before the actual disappearance of medieval aristocrats." Following this logic, Chen points out the impetus for decline among Tang aristocratic families: "Cultural change was closely related to the decline of these families: consciously or not, in the ninth and tenth centuries they abandoned an important line that had separated them from the rest of society, thereby letting go a major aspect of status."<sup>10</sup> Besides serving as a basis for consolidating family coherence, some literati of aristocratic background, such as Xiao Yingshi 蕭穎士 (717–768), reiterated the need to create a cultural community (*wenhua gongtongti* 文化共同體) substantiated by civilized norm and value for common interest.<sup>11</sup>

The issues discussed above reveal an eye-catching feature, which is the dominant position of aristocratic families in the cultural domain. Recently, a different approach with an emphasis on literary significance has taken place that provides a new perspective on social, political, and cultural dynamics in medieval China. Issued by Lu Yang 陸揚, the *qingliu wenhua* 清流文化 (clear-stream culture) is a framework designed to conceptualize culture as characterized by literary tradition and the historical events closely related to this tradition that prevailed roughly from the 9th century to the end of the

10 Chen Jo-Shui 陳弱水, "Culture as Identity during the T'ang-Sung Transition: The Ch'ing-ho Ts'uis and Po-ling Ts'uis," *Asia Major* 3rd series 9.1–2 (1996), 105–6.

11 Lei Enhai 雷恩海 and Su Liguó 蘇利國, "Lun Tangchao wenhua gongtongti jianshe – yi Xiao Yingshi 'huali' sixiang wei zhongxin de kaocha" 論唐朝文化共同體建設—以蕭穎士“化理”思想為中心的考察, *Xibei shida xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 西北師大學報 (社會科學版), no. 1 (2015): 36–42; Lei Enhai 雷恩海 and Su Liguó 蘇利國, "Lun Tangdai wenhua gongtongti jianshe de biranxing – yi Xiao Yingshi 'huali' shuo de sixiang yu wenhua yuanyuan wei" 論唐代文化共同體建設的必然性—以蕭穎士“化理”說的思想與文化淵源為例, *Henan shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 河南師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 2 (2017): 121–28. Cultural shaping did not seem to be monopolized by aristocratic families; even local prominent families displayed their interest in this endeavor. With an emphasis on the Duan family in the Linzi region, Xu Zhiyin 許智銀 explores how this family played its role in shaping local culture. For details, consult Xu Zhiyin 許智銀, *Tang dai Linzi Duanshi jiazhu wenhua yanjiu* 唐代臨淄段氏家族文化研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013). Regarding academic contributions of this book, see Niu Weidong 牛衛東, "Qiongjiu shili kai xinjing – du Tangdai Linzi Duanshi jiazhu wenhua yanjiu" 窮究事理開新境—讀《唐代臨淄段氏家族文化研究》, *Henan keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 河南科技大學學報 (社會科學版), no. 2 (2014): 110–12.

10th century. Literally “clear stream,” or scholar-officials reputed for integrity, the *qingliu* in the context of Lu Yang’s study refers to a network formed by those who succeeded in the civil service examinations, obtained recommendations from high-ranking officials, held bureaucratic careers, and/or formed marriage relations with politically significant families. Accordingly, the *qingliu wenhua* can be comprehended as culture created and nurtured by the interactions between those categorized as part of the *qingliu* group. The importance of literary writings with elegant words (*wenci* 文詞) had been enthusiastically admired by scholars in medieval China, which enabled men of letters to distinguish themselves in political, social, and cultural aspects. This mindset was certainly a major force that led to a superior position enjoyed by the *qingliu* group. Consequently, the *qingliu* group monopolized the discourse of power that fundamentally shaped contemporary culture and politics.<sup>12</sup>

When anglicizing the book title, Lu Yang uses a rather modern term in *Literocracy and Empire: Study of Political Culture of the Tang Dynasty*. The term literocracy has been widely used in the study of language and social sciences.<sup>13</sup> Comparatively, as used in historical studies, the term seems to make better sense. In his study of archives and archival systems in Pharaonic Egypt, Paul Delsalle defines literocracy as a society in which literacy and the writing of documents marked the exercise of political and administrative authority.<sup>14</sup> Delsalle’s definition sheds light on how literary activities pertained to the running of a government. Comparing the Chinese and English versions of the abstract for Lu’s book, literocracy obviously corresponds to the *qingliu wenhua*, which implies how Lu understands ways in which Tang politics was influenced by literocracy. As elaborated in his book, literary writings were the essential factor in shaping the power and identity of the high political cultural elite. Then, who could be identified as part of the specified elite?

The core members in the *qingliu* group included the officials with literary talent (*cichen* 詞臣) and their families. In the context of the *qingliu wenhua*, the term *cichen* refers to the officials, particularly Hanlin academicians (*Hanlin*

12 For details, consult Lu Yang 陸揚, *Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo* 清流文化與唐帝國 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016).

13 Maisha T Fisher, “Building a Literocracy: Diaspora Literacy and Heritage Knowledge in Participatory Literacy Communities,” *The Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 105.2 (2006): 361–81; Raphael d’Abdon, “Teaching Spoken Word Poetry as a Tool for Decolonizing and Africanizing the South African Curricula and Implementing ‘Literocracy,’” *Scrutiny* 2 21.2 (2016): 44–62.

14 On evidence used to substantiate the argument, consult Paul Delsalle, *A History of Archival Practice*, trans. Margaret Procter (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 1–16.

*xueshi* 翰林學士), who served the emperor on the basis of their literary ability and performance. Structurally, social backgrounds of the *cichen* were diverse. Despite the general understanding that members from aristocratic families would have far more chances for recruitment by the Tang government, some *cichen* were of much lesser privilege. Taking Hanlin academicians as examples, Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754–805) was from an aristocratic family while Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (678–740), who served the position of academician awaiting orders (*Hanlin daizhao* 翰林待詔), was from a humble family originating in Shaozhou 韶州, a place that had been commonly relegated to the outer fringe of civilization (*huawai zhi di* 化外之地).

As defined by Zhang Jiuling, literary value should be demonstrated by two factors, namely, success in passing the *jinshi* examinations 進士試 and service in positions known as purity and importance (*qingyao* 清要) in terms of rank and office. These two factors formed the standard with which society would judge whom to identify as elite. The suggested standard replaced the traditional one that focused on local nobility (*junwang* 郡望) and official rank (*guanpin* 官品). Of humble background, Zhang had good reason to advocate replacing conventional standards with the new criteria in which professional awareness and identity transcended descent, while aristocratic predominance had been a norm that prevailed since the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern dynasties (220–589).

Although the *qingliu wenhua* had already been developed before the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763), Tang Dezong 唐德宗 (r. 779–805) was the first emperor after the Rebellion to reorganize the ruling mechanism in a way that provided more room for the *qingliu wenhua* to perpetuate their influence. Definitely, the emperor was significantly concerned with the agenda of strengthening imperial authority. Against this background, reviving the role played by the *cichen* was only part of his scheme, while eunuchs were also considered an essential force instrumental in bolstering imperial authority during the time when he was driven out from Chang'an 長安 in a mutiny in 782. As a result, the power of the *cichen* and eunuchs was institutionalized, which eventually played a tremendous role in shaping Tang politics until the dynasty came to an end.

Rather than referring to an authentic political bloc, Lu Yang attributes the *qingliu* to a social or cultural group. To judge the exact nature of the *qingliu*, one must understand their job responsibility. Their major duty involved drafting imperial decrees (*zhaoling* 詔令). Writings were essential to imperial rule, as conveyance of government decree and policy required facilitation by documentation. Literary value was thus highlighted by a traditional belief in a close linkage between writing and authority, which necessitated that imperial rule

be substantiated by the writing of government decree. Shaping the societal mindset for norms and values was also an endeavor that required documentation. As discussed by Chen Zhijian in his review of Lu Yang, the *qingliu* and the *qingliu wenhua* fall within the political history domain. In fact, politics was always the core issue in the history of imperial China. As such, studying the writing of imperial decrees and the *cichen* group from a political perspective should be used to demonstrate the significance of the issue.<sup>15</sup>

Chen Zhijian's point of view is well substantiated by the study of Chinese bureaucracy. As argued by Hai Yunzhi 海云志, formation of the bureaucratic mechanism in ancient China was closely linked with its writing system.<sup>16</sup> The linkage can certainly explain the perpetuity of elite literacy in imperial China, which was manifested in the governance of a small group of civil officials who possessed such a high level of literate competence to formulate the administrative pattern as prescribed by literocracy. Besides civil officials with adequate literary competence, emperors used writing to shape the ruling pattern as well as establish social norms and value.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the needs of the *fanzhen* 藩鎮, literally, military domains ruled by military governors (*jiedushi* 節度使), and various military blocs, the combination of literary writings and political usefulness enhanced the literati's worthiness during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. Against this background, the turbulent era did not weaken the important role previously performed by the

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- 15 In addition to adopting a political perspective in discussing the nature of the *qingliu* and the *qingliu wenhua*, Chen Zhijian 陳志堅 raises additional issues, thus making his review comprehensive and providing readers with needed information for a better understanding of the book. For details, see Chen Zhijian 陳志堅, "Lu Yang Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo" 陸揚清流文化與唐帝國, *Tang Song lishi pinglun* 唐宋歷史評論, no. 3 (2017): 334–49. Also based on Lu Yang's book, Li Hongbin 李鴻賓 focuses more on the interactions between the civil and the military, one of the major dynamics instrumental in shaping the elite culture in Tang-Song China. See Chen Zhijian, "Lu Yang Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo," 323–33.
- 16 Hai Yunzhi 海雲志, "Tingshu congshi: Zhongguo zaoqi de shuxie xitong yu guanliaozhi xingcheng" 聽書從事：中國早期的書寫系統與官僚制形成, *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* 政治學研究, no. 6 (2020): 46–56.
- 17 The history of the Ming dynasty offers many events that demonstrate how writings could be used by the emperors to tighten their control on officials and society as a whole. For details, consult Yang Yifan 楊一凡, *Ming Dagao yanjiu* 明大誥研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1988); Luo Bingmian 羅炳綿, "Ming taizu de wenzi tongzhishu" 明太祖的文字統治術, *Zhongguo xueren* 中國學人, no. 3 (1971): 37–51; Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟, "Jinglao shi suoyi jianlao – Mingdai xiangyin jiuli de bianqian ji qi yu difang shehui de hudong" 敬老適所以賤老—明代鄉飲酒禮的變遷及其與地方社會的互動, *Zhongguo yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 76.1 (2005): 1–77.

*qingliu wenhua*; instead, it spread from the central government to regional establishments, as indicated by imitations of literary practices by the *fanzhen*. Imitations could be found not only in the *fanzhen* that were on good terms with the central government, but also those located in Hebei 河北, infamous for generations-long rebellions.<sup>18</sup>

The rosy picture strengthens the argument that, due to the uniqueness and proliferation of the *qingliu wenhua*, those who possessed outstanding literary skill could preserve their advantage during social and political upheaval. The basic reason was that all regimes wanted to be legitimized and glorified, and literary ability had been considered a key to achieving the goal. As a result, the literati became indispensable to regimes even in chaotic periods. However, Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南 views the issue from a different perspective. On the one hand, literary ability during chaotic periods was considered practical; on the other hand, whether serving in central government or local administration, civil officials had to face significant adversity in order to survive.<sup>19</sup>

Timeframe plays a substantial role in the arguments presented above. Since dynasties had short lifespans, the careers of many officials, if not abruptly eliminated through purges, could continue across different regimes characterized with totally different ruling patterns. Taking the career of Fan Zhi 范質 (911–964) as an example, Fan once served as Hanlin academician in the Later Jin (936–947); he would also enjoy a prosperous career even in the Later Han (947–951), a dynasty notorious for bloody persecutions and merciless penalties. Even though Fan succeeded in his career during the Later Han, he would not take pride in it. There were remarkable discrepancies between cruel administration and the Confucian training that emphasized benevolence in governing people.<sup>20</sup> Facing the grim reality, Fan basically lacked the means to turn the tide and had to concede to new ways in order to avoid a political purge.

After the founding of the Later Zhou (951–960), Fan Zhi could relax once more. Comparatively speaking, Zhou Taizu 周太祖 (r. 951–954) was well aware of the importance of promoting culture and education and cautious in using penalties.<sup>21</sup> Before founding his dynasty, Guo had already shown much

18 Wu Liyu 吳麗娛, “Lüe lun biao zhuang jian qi shu yi wen ji yu wan tang wu dai zheng zhi” 略論表狀箋啓書儀文集與晚唐五代政治, *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo xueqian* 中國社會科學院歷史研究所學刊, no. 2 (2004): 339–59.

19 Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, *Zuzong zhi fa: Bei Song qianqi zhengzhi shulue (xiuding ban)* 祖宗之法: 北宋前期政治述略 (修訂版) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 126, 131.

20 Regarding the image of Fan Zhi's cautious application of penalty, see Shao Bowen 邵伯濫, *Shaoshi wenjian lu* 邵氏聞見錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 62.

21 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 290.9450–51.

appreciation for Fan's literary skill and the judgment Fan had demonstrated in the imperial edict drafted by himself. Based on such merits, Guo praised Fan to have the acumen for a grand councilor. When Guo came to the throne, he promoted Fan to the position of grand councilor.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the brutal ruling pattern that frustrated Fan Zhi, the tense relationship between the civil and the military was another point of constraint. During the reign of the Later Han, the real power was firmly grasped by a handful of military and political elite who held deep resentment against civil officials; under the circumstances, civil officials were marginalized and vulnerable to unexpected purges. The ruling elite's negative view of the literati was well demonstrated by comments made by Shi Hongzhao 史弘肇 (d. 950): "Literati (*wenren* 文人) were difficult to endure; they despised us, calling us soldiers. Detestable! Detestable!"<sup>23</sup> Yang Bin 楊邠 (d. 950) was good at administrative affairs (*lishi* 吏事) but lacked the discernment to appreciate the highest principles of propriety. He claimed that administering the country required a plentiful state treasury (*tangcang fengying* 帑藏豐盈) and powerful soldiers in armor (*jiabing qiangsheng* 甲兵強盛), while literary writings as well as rites and music (*wenzhang liyue* 文章禮樂) were unpractical and not worth mentioning.<sup>24</sup>

Similar to Yang Bin, Wang Zhang 王章 (d. 950) disliked Confucian scholars (*rushi* 儒士). In a conversation, the two high-ranking officials mocked Confucian scholars, musing that if given an abacus, they simply would not know the head from the end. "Of what use are they?"<sup>25</sup> Based on the quoted conversation, it is clear that the usefulness of civil officials was just confined to the domains directly related with the survival of the dynasty; culture had nothing to do with it. Unlike Shi Hongzhao, who started out as a soldier, both Wang Zhang and Yang Bin began their careers as petty officials (*li* 吏) in local administration, implying that they were educated to a certain degree.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the essence of the confrontation was not one of uneducated military vs. educated civil officials, but of their different understanding on how to administer the country.

22 *Songshi* 宋史, 249.8793–8794. On major life events of Fan Zhi, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Jie erzhi babaizi yu Fan Zhi shengping kaoshu: Lun Bei Song jiaxunshi de shehui gongneng jishiliao jiazhi" "誠兒姪八百字" 與范質生平考述: 論北宋家訓詩的社會功能及史料價值, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 NS no. 11 (2002): 151–96.

23 *Jiu Wudaishi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 107.1405.

24 *Ibid.*, 107.1408–09.

25 *Ibid.*, 107.1410.

26 *Ibid.*, 107.1408–09.

Chaos was only part of Chinese history; the time for the *qingliu wenhua* to prosper came again after the founding of the Song dynasty. Nevertheless, the *qingliu wenhua* came to an abrupt end during the reign of Song Renzong 宋仁宗 (r. 1022–1063). According to the observation of Lu Yang, discontinuity of this Tang heritage was caused by a new set of norms and values nurtured by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and the Song literati. Despite their multi-layered associations with the *qingliu wenhua* in their upbringing and learning processes, they eventually developed their own perspective in identifying the role of the literati; preserving the virtue of loyalty was highlighted in this endeavor. As such, Feng Dao 馮道 (882–954) was sharply criticized for having served a total of five dynasties, namely the Later Tang, the Later Jin, the Liao 遼 (907–1125), the Later Han, and the Later Zhou, as dragging out an ignoble existence. Denial of Feng's political flexibility at the expense of loyalty reflected the new belief in Song China, marking the end of the *qingliu wenhua*.

After Lu Yang's book was published, the concept of the *qingliu wenhua* received fairly positive feedback, as indicated by the reviews previously cited. The new findings reveal the nature of the Tang's political elite, thereby providing a framework that affords historians an alternative with which to conceptualize the related events and dynamics in Tang-Song China. Prior to the book's publication, the Tang-Song Transformation concept suggested by Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 (1866–1934) provided a major conceptual framework. Another approach was framed by Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), who interpreted the confrontations between officials of aristocratic and humble backgrounds as the origin of the Tang's factional struggles. Since Lu Yang's conceptual framework includes officials of different backgrounds and thereby removes class distinction, major challenges to Chen's theory are highly anticipated.

In brief, introduction of the *qingliu wenhua* signifies Lu Yang's attempt to create a new conceptual framework with the potential to take the study of Tang history to a higher stage. Academically speaking, a fresh start (*lingqi luzao* 另起爐灶) is always praiseworthy, for the move can bear the effect of pushing out the old and bringing in the new (*tuichen chuxin* 推陳出新). However, like all other well-proven, influential conceptual frameworks, the *qingliu wenhua* would require a series of refinements and modifications before it can satisfactorily be substantiated and be able to gain recognition. In this regard, identification of officials with high repute (*qingguan* 清官) in the Tang bureaucracy is particularly needed to strengthen the validity of this conceptual framework, as suggested by Chen Zhijian.

Another issue concerns how the impact of literary writings and *jinshi* examinations are interpreted from a different perspective. Instead of serving as the factors that formed the *qingliu wenhua*, they could be the reasons for

the decline of aristocratic families. As argued by Chen Jo-Shui, deterioration of cultural identity was linked to their involvement in the *jinshi* examinations and literary writings. Obviously, Chen attempts to link the decline of aristocratic families to internal decadence caused by cultural change.<sup>27</sup> From the perspective of the *qingliu wenhua*, Chen's argument certainly poses a challenge to the validity of the conceptual framework. First, Chen's association of literary writings with the decline of aristocratic families sounds detrimental to the theory of how the *wen* served as the medium to cement the officials of different social backgrounds to form a particular elite group. Second, if pursuing literary writings proved devastating to aristocratic families, one would struggle to imagine how a group identity that transcended social distinctions could be created and consolidated.

In addition to discussion on the viability of the *qingliu wenhua* as a conceptual framework, how to extend the scope of scrutiny to obtain more evidence should be of significance. During the reign of the Southern Tang, the *cichen* played a dominant role in running the kingdom administration and formulating national policy. Therefore, whether or not the Southern Tang's experiences alone can sufficiently sustain the conceptual framework of the *qingliu wenhua* is worthy of particular attention.

### 3 Cultural Role Played by Aristocratic Families in the Jianghuai Region

Again referring to Kurz's observation, one might reasonably deduce that aristocratic families played a significant role in cultural continuity in Tang-Song China. However, actual events reveal another story. This academic issue calls for examination of two very basic questions: Were aristocratic families able to continue their cultural significance in the Jianghuai region after the collapse of the Tang? And during the Tang-Song Interregnum, who exactly was responsible for cultural preservation and continuity during the rule of the Southern Tang? These two questions are explored within the section that follows.

Prior to the Sui-Tang era, the major source of literati and talent was located in the regions north of the Yangtze River, particularly Guanzhong 關中 and

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<sup>27</sup> Chen Jo-Shui, "Culture as identity during the T'ang-Sung Transition," 127. Certainly, this is a meaningful approach with potential to better demonstrate the interplay of various dynamics that led to the final end of the aristocratic families. However, this new argument can hardly be conclusive at this point due to very limited samples – only two to be exact.

Shandong 山東.<sup>28</sup> Since the mid-Tang era, the wealthy and stable Southeast region became a central destination for migration.<sup>29</sup> Among those who moved to Southeast China were some aristocratic families, literati, and officials. Their immigration enlarged the scale of educated people and facilitated an upgrade to the cultural quality of the region.<sup>30</sup> During the late Tang period, there were new causes for the abundance of literati in Jianghuai: Those who fled to Jianghuai to avoid disturbances,<sup>31</sup> and those serving in Jianghuai who found themselves unable to return to the North due to war and chaos and were forced to remain in the prefectures in which they served.<sup>32</sup>

From a utilitarian perspective, aristocrats may not have been useful to local strongmen, but they would theoretically be welcomed by the founders of the southern kingdoms. Wang Jian 王建 (847–918), founder of the Former Shu 前蜀 (907–925), was an example. According to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, “At this time, many of the families of the great officials (*yiguan zhizu* 衣冠之族) had fled to Shu to avoid the chaos, and the Lord of Shu [Wang Jian] treated them with courtesy and utilized them.”<sup>33</sup> Since the Shu region was both geographically

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- 28 On the territorial domain of Shandong, consult Xiao Jinhua 蕭錦華, “Sui-Tang shidai ‘Shandong’ yongyu zhi zhengzhi, shehui, jingji, wenhua hanyi” 隋唐時代“山東”用語之政治、社會、經濟、文化涵義, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 NS no.12 (2003): 13–67.
- 29 Concerning how turbulence in North China, such as the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), drove aristocratic families to South China, consult Wu Songdi 吳松弟, “Tang houqi Wudai Jiangnan diqu de beifang yimin” 唐後期五代江南地區的北方移民, in *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 (Xi’an: Shenxi renmin chubanshe, 1996): 3: 59–94.
- 30 Concerning the profound impact on Southeast China caused by the widespread migration trend during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, such as the driving forces for local developments, categorization and organization of migrants, and interactions between new migrants and locals, consult Gu Licheng 顧立誠, *Zouxiang nanfang: Tang Song zhiji zibei xiangnan de yimin yuqi yingxiang* 走向南方: 唐宋之際自北向南的移民與其影響 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 2004).
- 31 For instance, Liu Chongyuan 劉崇遠 (fl. 924), author of *Jinhuaizi* 金華子, sought refuge to Jiangnan when the Huang Chao Rebellion 黃巢之亂 (875–884) broke out. He served the Southern Tang after his middle-age years. Consult Tao Min 陶敏, “Liu Chongyuan ji qi zhezuo kaolue” 劉崇遠及其著作考略, *Yunmeng xuekan* 雲夢學刊, no. 6 (2006): 106–8.
- 32 During the Song, when some locals traced their ancestry back to the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, they usually linked their family ties to the North. Here are some examples for reference: Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032–1078) claimed Wannien 萬年, a county in Chang’an, as his family’s homeland. Liu Du 劉度, his ancestor of the sixth generation who then served as magistrate of Linchuan 臨川, could not return to his native place because of the war. After death, Liu Du was buried in Junzhou 筠州, a prefecture that the family thereafter claimed as its native place. See Fan Zuyu 范祖禹, “Mishucheng Liujun mujie” 秘書丞劉君墓碣, in *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, ed. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳 et al. (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988–1994), 98:2149–315.
- 33 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 266.8685.

protected by natural barriers and economically plentiful, many scholar-officials fled there seeking shelter against anarchy. Although Wang Jian had once been a bandit, he was courteous and respectful to the scholarly. Consequently, he succeeded in recruiting those from renowned aristocratic families: Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836–910), the grandson of Wei Jiansu 韋見素 (697–762); and Zhang Ge 張格 (d. 927), son of Zhang Jun 張濬 (d. 904). More than one hundred other scholar-officials, including Song Pin 宋珖 (dates unknown), were entrusted with positions in office.<sup>34</sup>

Wang Jian, like most of the contemporary regime founders, was *wulai* 無賴 of humble origin and did not have taste for aristocratic families;<sup>35</sup> what interested him was their administrative skill. As explained by Hugh Clark, “Wang Jian employed civil officials who had learned their craft under the civil traditions of the Tang dynasty, and they carried those traditions with them.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, not all aristocratic families necessarily disappeared with the Tang in the metropolitan areas (*Jingji* 京畿), as a substantial number among this contingency would continue to survive and even prosper.

Besides Wang Jian, “many more examples of this trend in recruitment for the early southern states could be given. Biographical information survives from everyone of the southern kingdoms on scholars who had fled the chaos of the north for the greater tranquility of the south and wound up serving a southern lord.”<sup>37</sup> Clark’s assertion is substantiated by the recruitment policies implemented by the founders of other southern states, as follows:

Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932), founder of Wu Yue 吳越 (907–978)<sup>38</sup>

Wang Shenzhi 王審知 (862–925), founder of Min 閩 (909–945)<sup>39</sup>

Liu Yan 劉龔 (889–942), founder of the Southern Han 南漢 (917–971)<sup>40</sup>

Ma Yin 馬殷 (853–930), founder of Chu 楚 (927–951)<sup>41</sup>

34 *Xin Wudai shi*, 63.787.

35 For details, consult Hugh R. Clark, “Scoundrels, Rogues, and Refugees: The Founders of the Ten Kingdoms in the Late Ninth Century,” in *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*, ed. Peter Allan Lorge (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 47–77.

36 Hugh Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms between the Tang and the Sung,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, pt. 1: “The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 164. Also consult Wang Hongjie, “The Civil Pursuits of a Military Man in Tenth-century China,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 40 (2010), 10.

37 Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms Between the Tang and the Sung,” 162.

38 *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.837.

39 *Ibid.*, 68.846.

40 *Ibid.*, 65. 810–812.

41 *Ibid.*, 66.824.

The above information does not include Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (852–905), founder of Yang Wu, simply because he did nothing to recruit respectable literati during his rule.<sup>42</sup> This historical event totally contradicts a common understanding that Jianghuai traditionally had been known for cultural attainments.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the Southern Tang's role in cultural preservation cannot be taken for granted, as Yang Wu, predecessor of the Southern Tang, was the regime in which brutal acts and disdain for cultural tradition prevailed. As a result, Jianghuai was the last region to engage in massive recruitment of educated people into the government, compared with the above kingdoms.

Different from Yang Xingmi's neglect in culture and education (*wenjiao* 文教), Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (889–943), founder of the Southern Tang, enacted drastic policy changes while in power. Among the changes, his eagerness to achieve “civil transformation” (*wenzhi zhuanhua* 文質轉化) is most noteworthy in the context of this article; the concept refers to a shift in the regime's nature from one of military domination to one with civil officials in authority.<sup>44</sup> Benefiting from civil transformation, scholar-officials accordingly created more room for themselves to play an active role in civil administration (*wenzhi* 文治), or governance characterized by culture, education, rites, and music as elaborated by the Chinese Classics.<sup>45</sup>

42 Ibid., 61.747–752. Regarding the social background for those who were included in Yang Xingmi's bloc, consult Ng Pak-sheung, “On Yang Xingmi's bloc – With an Emphasis on Socio-political Setting, Subjugation, and Subordination,” *T'oung Pao* 107 (2021): 40–94.

43 Numerous works mention cultural developments in South China during the Tang dynasty, which may be interpreted as indication that rich cultural disposition in the Jianghuai region enabled the Southern Tang to effectively fulfill the mission as a cultural preserver. Consult Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, “Tangren xiye shanlin zhi fengshang” 唐人習業山林之風尚, in *Yan Gengwang shixue lunwen xuanji* 嚴耕望史學論文選集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 1: 271–316; Liu Jianming 劉健明, “Tangdai Jiangxi keju de fazhan ji qi tezheng kaojiu” 唐代江西科舉的發展及其特徵考究, *Mudanjiang shifan xueyuan xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 牡丹江師範學院學報 (哲學社會科學版), no. 4 (2012): 43–47; Wang Chengwen 王承文, “Tang houqi Lingnan keju jinshi yu wenhua fazhan lunkao” 唐後期嶺南科舉進士與文化發展論考, *Jinan shixue* 暨南史學, no. 1 (2018): 29–60.

44 Civil transformation of the Southern Tang has become an academic issue that attracts scholarly attention. Huang Tingshuo, for instance, dedicates his masters thesis to this issue. Instead of using civil transformation, Huang adopts the term “scholarization of bureaucrats” to explain circumstances under which local literati became the most powerful group in the Southern Tang. For details, see Huang Tingshuo 黃庭碩, “Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi – yi Yang Wu, Nan Tang wei zhongxin” 唐宋之際的東南士人與政治—以楊吳、南唐為中心 (Master thesis, National Taiwan University, 2013).

45 Krompart appears to be the first scholar to use the term civil administration to refer to Xu Zhigao's policy. See Robert J. Krompart, “The southern restoration of T'ang,” 228.

In contrast to the military-dominated reign of Yang Wu, civil transformation and civil administration implemented by the Southern Tang functioned like two sides of a coin that signified the evolution towards civil authority. Following in proper order and advancing gradually, civil transformation and civil administration developed in complementary ways; the higher the degree of civil transformation Southern Tang rulers achieved, the greater the opportunity to manipulate establishment of an organized and efficient bureaucracy by filling all existing vacancies in the central and local administrative structures with civil officials. Likewise, realization of civil administration would in turn intensify the progress of civil transformation for the regime.<sup>46</sup>

Ideal conditions for civil administration could be created through the successful transformation, conducted in a civil way, of a regime accustomed to military domination. Since military force played a decisive role in the founding of most dynasties in imperial China at their onset, almost every dynasty profoundly emphasized military significance, as vividly demonstrated in policy-making and administration. Yet whereas military means were unquestionably essential to a dynasty's founding, this was no longer the case once the dynasty was established; instead, civil transformation would at that point become sorely needed in order for the dynasty to achieve stability and prosperity. Civil administration could eventually be shaped only under the condition that sufficient time had passed, which would allow for the dynasty to undergo transformation. Such a condition did not exist within the Five Dynasties, as every dynasty within this era had a short timespan: the Later Liang spanned the longest at sixteen years, while the Later Han was the shortest at only four. The short duration's most direct impact on administration was that none of these dynasties had sufficient time to transform themselves from a military to a civil state. As a result, all of the regimes during the Five Dynasties era remained in similar states to what they had been during the time their rivals eliminated them.<sup>47</sup>

As such, aristocratic families would have no viable chance to regain their privileges in the dynasties founded in North China. The only hope for aristocratic families could be found in southern kingdoms. However, southern kingdoms were not on an equal footing and needed to be differentiated according to lifespan and stability. Although all listed kingdoms apart from

46 On details of interconnection between civil transformation and civil administration, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "On civil transformation of the Southern Tang: Recruitment of literati and subsequent realization of civil administration," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 70.1 (2022): 131–63.

47 On details of major historical events during the period of the Five Dynasties, consult chapters contributed by Standen and Clark in *The Cambridge History of China*, 5: 1.38–205.

Wu Yue, had initially surpassed the Jianghuai region, their influences would not last long. The Former Shu was annexed by the Later Tang in 925; Min and Chu were defeated by the Southern Tang in 945 and 951, respectively; and the Southern Han was seriously hindered by political corruption.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the Southern Tang could enjoy long-term stability and prosperity until the war with the Later Zhou in 955. As a whole, cultural rejuvenation of the Jianghuai region served as a solid basis for enabling the Southern Tang to perpetuate civil transformation and civil administration. One important way to achieve the goal was to bureaucratize the ruling mechanism, which would certainly benefit those of aristocratic background who possessed a cultural disposition to contribute to the regime and the administrative skill to carry out their duties.

In addition to the need to staff the ruling mechanism with civil officials, optimism among aristocratic families could be further stimulated by the image portrayed by Xu Zhigao. Although Xu was of humble origin, he displayed a keen interest in portraying himself as a descendant of the Tang imperial family. In addition to reiterating his enthusiasm in restoring the Tang system, Xu fabricated his family genealogy as a means to link himself to the Tang in order to help establish his claims to Tang heritage.<sup>49</sup> Under the circumstances, ample opportunity should have existed for aristocratic families to gain appointments. Nevertheless, reality proved otherwise in the formation of the Southern Tang political and cultural elite.

A major indicator that proves the role of aristocratic families in Jianghuai was their participation in the civil service examinations. Since the mid-Tang onward, perpetuation of aristocratic families counted on three interconnected components for achieving success in the civil service examinations, and the *jinshi* degree in particular was one of them. Given the traditional practice, the percentage of candidates from aristocratic families who succeeded in passing the examinations was directly correlated with this privileged group's prospects for preserving their dominant role in society. Regarding the backgrounds of those who succeeded in the *jinshi* examination since the tenth year of the Baoda reign, Huang Tingshuo has contributed significantly through his painstaking efforts to compile a comprehensive list. Surprisingly, the study conducted by Huang indicates that among successful candidates of the *jinshi* examination, not one had an aristocratic family background.<sup>50</sup> In this sense,

48 Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms Between the Tang and the Sung," 140–58.

49 Johannes L. Kurz, "On the Southern Tang Imperial Genealogy," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014), 601–20.

50 Huang Tingshuo, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi," 198–202, and Appendix 10: Nan Tang jinshi dengdi renwubiao 南唐進士登第人物表, 302–5.

successful candidates of humble background, rather than of aristocratic origin, could solely benefit from the examination system as an entry point into bureaucracy and as a means to consequently honor and bring prosperity to their families.

Absence from taking the civil service examinations was tantamount to depriving aristocratic families of the means to facilitate the continuity of privileges; lacking bureaucratic careers, this privileged class could not maintain their superior position. This assumption is substantiated by the non-existence of aristocratic families in the highest political echelon, as follows:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Song Qiqiu 宋齊丘 (887–959)	Yuzhang 豫章	Nil
Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Feng Yanlu 馮延魯 (905–972)	Guangling	Nil
Wei Cen 魏岑 (dates unknown)	Xucheng 須城	Nil
Chen Jue 陳覺 (dates unknown)	Hailing 海陵	Nil
Cha Wenhui 查文徽 (885–954)	Xiuning 休寧	Nil

Song Qiqiu was the leader among the most powerful political bloc; the others, negatively termed the “Five Ghosts” (*wugui* 五鬼) by contemporaries, served as core members. None of them were affiliated with Tang aristocratic families in the slightest. Sun Sheng 孫晟 (d. 956), the group’s arch enemy who originated in Gaomi 高密, was also unaffiliated with aristocracy.

The cultural domain is another avenue through which one can assess the vitality of aristocratic families in Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum. Serving as a base for cultural preservation and development necessitated that the Southern Tang possess sufficient economic strength and socio-political stability in the first place. In contrast to dynasties founded in North China that were constantly plagued by chaos and brutal administration, the Southern Tang enjoyed a considerable period of stability that was only interrupted when the kingdom was at war with the Later Zhou and its final defeat at the hand of the Northern Song. Besides stability, the Southern Tang possessed optimal conditions for economic growth, such as an ideal geographical setting, an efficient irrigation system inherited from the Tang, and something even more important: a stable society and administration. As a result, the Southern Tang could be rivaled only by Wu Yue in terms of economic prosperity and stability.

Substantiated by robust economic strength and measures to promote culture and education – efforts continually implemented throughout its rule – the Southern Tang earned repute for its cultural attainments, but such merit morphed into fuel for antagonizing the Song. Immediately following its founding, the Northern Song continued to cling to cultural traditions characterized by simple, unadorned, militant, and unrestrained styles that originated in the late Tang and the Five Dynasties (907–960). If erudition, literary cultivation, and refinement were considered key components in defining great culture, then the Southern Tang's advantage over the early Northern Song in this aspect proved outstanding. Cultural discrepancy signified limitations in the extent to which the Song achieved victory; despite the fact that the Southern Tang territories were entirely overtaken by the Song, the defeat of the Southern Tang was solely confined to political and military aspects, while its cultural edge remained intact.

Facing cultural inferiority, some Song literati embraced Southern Tang culture and wished to incorporate it into its own dynasty. Those who were agitated by the unconquered cultural domain managed to outmatch Southern Tang literati; famous men of letters of the Southern Tang had thus become their opposing force (*jiaxiangdi* 假想敵). Restricted by unadorned and militant fashions that generally prevailed during the initial period of the dynastic founding, Song literati could not match them in the domain of culture (*wenhua jiaoliang* 文化較量). In the context of this article, *Wenhua jiaoliang* is defined as the persistent competition between the Song and the Southern Tang primarily in the domains of literary expression, cultural attitude, erudition, the ruler's acumen, and the ruling pattern. In the course of competition, several literati from the Southern Tang were consistently identified by their Song counterparts as major targets for sharp criticism, as follows:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Xu Kai 徐鉉 (920–974)	Guangling	Nil
Yin Chongyi 殷崇義 (Later renamed as Tang Yue 湯悅, 912–984)	Qingyang 青陽	Nil
Zhang Ji 張洎 (934–997)	Quanjiao 全椒	Nil
Wu Shu 吳淑 (947–1002)	Danyang 丹陽	Nil
Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020)	Pucheng 浦城	Nil
Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960)	Guangling	Nil

(cont.)

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Diao Kan 刁衍 (945–1013)	Shengzhou 昇州	Nil
Pan You 潘佑 (938–973)	Youzhou 幽州	Nil
Jiang Wei 江為 (dates unknown)	Songzhou 宋州	Nil

In early Song China, the goal of the cultural competition was to overwhelm the Southern Tang's cultural advantage by militancy. Therefore, some Song literati counted on their superior political and military strength to overcome their opponents as a way to strengthen dynastic-political legitimacy and cultural identity. The course of *wenhua jiaoliang* changed once cultural deposits made by the Song had accumulated enough, as indicated by the appearance of a new trend that emerged in the mid-Song era among rulers and the literati: the contest switched from one of a military to a cultural nature in order to secure a thorough victory. From then on, *wenhua jiaoliang* remained ongoing, but the focus shifted to a refinement and erudition previously monopolized by the Southern Tang.<sup>51</sup> Another point worthy of scholarly attention is the background of those listed in the table; that none among them came from aristocracy sufficiently signifies that local literati exclusively facilitated the shaping of the Southern Tang culture and its interactions with Song China, whereas Tang aristocratic families played no evident role in this regard.

Besides cultural competition, the roles played by Southern Tang *peichen* 陪臣 (subsidiary officials) in literary and ritual-oriented matters can further reveal the position held by aristocratic families in cultural continuity during the Tang-Song era. Compared with those of other southern kingdoms, Southern Tang rulers deliberately tended to highlight their superior status as the descendants of the Tang dynasty.<sup>52</sup> This fabricated propaganda necessitated that the regime compete with dynasties founded in the Central Plain in order to secure legitimacy; working whole-heartedly on the restoration of

51 Ng Pak-sheung, "Cultural interactions and competitions: The case of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the Southern Tang (937–965)," *Bulletin of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 7 (2020): 255–319.

52 Ren Shuang 任爽 and Wu Feng 吳楓, "Wudai fenhe yu Nan Tang de lishi diwei" 五代分合與南唐的歷史地位, *Dongerhua shida xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 東二化師大學報 (哲學社會科學版), no. 5 (1994): 31–37. Also consult Johannes L. Kurz, "Sources for the history of the Southern Tang (937–975)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 24 (1994): 217–35.

imperial etiquette and ritual adopted during Tang China was considered a way to achieve the goal. As a result, the Southern Tang abounded with experts in imperial etiquette and ritual.

Interestingly, aristocratic families again played no significant role in the process of restoring imperial etiquette and ritual in Jianghuai, as those who took charge in these matters, such as Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902–970) and Jiang Wenwei 江文蔚 (901–952), were without aristocratic background. Han Guangsi 韓光嗣 (d. 926), Han Xizai's father, served as vice military commissioner (*jiedu fushi* 節度副使) of Pinglu 平盧 and was executed by Later Tang Mingzong 後唐明宗 (r. 926–933) for his involvement in mutiny. Jiang Wenwei, originally from Jianzhou 建州, received his *jinshi* degree during the reign of the Later Tang Mingzong. Unlike Han Xizai, who had never served in central government, Jiang was appointed inspector of the postal relay stations (*guanyi xunguan* 館驛巡官) of Henan Prefecture 河南府. His service experience in the capital of the Later Tang afforded him sufficient opportunity to observe ritualistic performances; consequently, he acquired considerable knowledge of etiquette and ceremony.<sup>53</sup>

Although Jiang Wenwei had knowledge of court etiquette and ceremony, authenticity remains an issue. By the time the Later Tang took control of North China, nearly twenty years had elapsed since the Tang dynasty's collapse, thereby making complete restoration of the authentic Tang system of rites and music nearly impossible. Another concern is that the imperial family of the Later Tang originated from the Shatuo 沙陀, a Turkic tribe; non-Han ethnic background is surely a factor that corrupted the original form of the old system. As recorded in *Jiu Wudaishi*, when Later Tang Zhuangzong 後唐莊宗 (r. 923–926) emerged from the frontier wilderness, his entertainment repertoire included nothing other than the barbaric, lewd songs of the Cheng that prevailed in frontier regions (*bianbu Zhengsheng* 邊部鄭聲). As authentic court music was almost non-existent, no musician was successful in replicating the traditional rhythms of musical instruments played in the ancestral hall during the reigns of Emperors Zhuangzong and Mingzong.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the rites and music Southern Tang obtained from the Later Tang were not necessarily practiced in previous dynasties.

Despite the fact that authenticity of the Southern Tang court ritual and ceremony was open to question, working with fabricated material was still preferable to having nothing at all. Following the Southern Tang's collapse,

53 For details, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions," 274–75.

54 *Jiu Wudaishi*, 144.1923. Also consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions," 276.

Jiangnan immediately became the resource from which the Song could complete its own ritual protocols and ceremonies. Another advantage enjoyed by the Southern Tang was its much stronger and more solid ritualistic and literary foundations that allowed Southern Tang *peichen* to fully capitalize upon their advantage. Listed below are notable figures who distinguished themselves in their new careers in the Northern Song:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Yang Huizhi 楊徽之 (921–1000)	Pucheng 浦城	Nil
Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020)	Pucheng	Nil
Diao Kan 刁衍 (945–1013)	Shengzhou 昇州	Nil
Du Hao 杜鎬 (938–1013)	Wuxi 無錫	Nil
Wu Shu 吳淑 (947–1002)	Danyang 丹陽	Nil
Pan Shenxiu 潘慎修 (937–1005)	Putian 莆田	Nil
Qiu Xu 丘旭 (ca. 910–ca. 990)	Xuancheng 宣城	Nil
Yin Chongyi 殷崇義 (912–984)	Qingyang 青陽	Nil
Wang Kezheng 王克正, or	Luling 廬陵	Nil
Wang Kezhen 王克貞 (fl. 952)		
Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007)	Yihuang 宜黃	Nil
Lü Wenzhong 呂文仲 (d. 1007)	Xinan 新安	Nil
Zhang Ji 張洎 (934–997)	Quanjiao 全椒	Nil
Chen Shu 陳恕 (ca. 945–1004)	Nanchang 南昌	Nil
Wei Yu 魏羽 (944–1001)	Wuyuan 婺源	Nil
Liu Shi 劉式 (949–997)	Lushan 廬山	Nil
He Meng 何蒙 (937–1013)	Hongzhou 洪州	Nil
Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 (961–1017)	Nancheng 南城	Nil

Compared with *peichen* from other subjugated states who started their careers in the Song, those from the Southern Tang constituted the most influential group in both numerical representation as well as in literary and ritual domains. Their erudition, ritual knowledge, and literary ability certainly provided the main reasons. To meet the particular needs of the Northern Song in its cultural endeavors, Southern Tang *peichen* were roughly divided into two groups with different missions: those versed in ancient classics along with ritual change and development were recruited to perform advisory roles in forming new rituals; and those who possessed outstanding literary ability were

appointed to the posts for litterateurs.<sup>55</sup> The *peichen* from the Southern Tang listed in the above two tables comprised only a portion of those recruited by the Northern Song; those not mentioned were not necessarily insignificant, either. For instance, Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025) was not categorized into either group, yet he succeeded in gaining the most prominent position in the Song bureaucracy compared with all the individuals from the Southern Tang.<sup>56</sup>

Like those listed in the previous table, those categorized in above two groups were not of aristocratic background. Evidently, no one from the Southern Tang could be substantially identified as a descendant of aristocracy.<sup>57</sup> This phenomenon gives context to David Johnson's study in which he discusses an observation made by Wang Mingqing 王明清 (1127–ca. 1215) in his *biji* 筆記 titled *Huizhu qianlu* 揮塵前錄. Wang notes that among the six top-class aristocratic families in Tang China, namely the Cui 崔, Lu 盧, Li 李, Zheng 鄭, Wei 韋, and Du 杜, “not one of them has been heard of in the present dynasty.” Johnson relegates the description to “exaggeration,” but at the same time admits it as “a revealing one.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, Johnson states that locating the Zhaojun Lis (*Zhaojun Lishi* 趙郡李氏) in the Northern Song proves no easier.<sup>59</sup> Johnson's study resonates with what had already happened in the Southern Tang, which includes the absence of aristocratic families in the core power structure and their lack of position to facilitate cultural continuity during the Tang-Song Interregnum.

55 For details, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, “Nan Tang *peichen*'s Careers in early Song bureaucracy: With an emphasis on literary and ritual-oriented roles,” *East Asian History* (Forthcoming).

56 On major life events of Wang Qinruo, see Wang Ruilai 王瑞來, “Ningchen ruhe zuoyou huangquan: Yi Bei Song yingxiang Wang Qinruo weili” 佞臣如何左右皇權：以北宋“瘦相”王欽若為例, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 48 (2008): 81–122; Sun Junkai 孫軍凱 and Yang Rui 楊蕤, “Shilun Bei Song qianqi zhengzhi zhong de diyu yinsu – yi nanren shouxiang Wang Qinruo weili” 試論北宋前期政治中的地域因素—以南人首相王欽若為例, *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 2 (2019): 152–59.

57 When composing the tomb epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) for Wang Qinruo, Zhang Fangping 張方平 (1007–1091) highlighted Wang's choronym (*junwang* 郡望) as Taiyuan in an attempt to portray Wang as a descendant of the top-class aristocratic family in Tang China. See Zhang Fangping 張方平, “Chaosan dafu shou shangshu hubu shilang zhishi shangzhuguo Taiyuanjun kaiguogong shiyi erqian jiubai hu shishifeng wubai hu ci zijin yudai Wanggong muzhiming bingxu” 朝散大夫守尚書戶部侍郎致仕上柱國太原郡開國公食邑二千九百戶食實封五百戶賜紫金魚袋王公墓誌銘並序, in *Quan Song wen*, 38: 825, 266. Surely, this practice aimed merely to boost his status and prestige without plausible substantiation.

58 David G. Johnson, “The last years of a great clan: The Li family of Chao Chün in late T'ang and early Sung,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.1 (1977), 51.

59 *Ibid.*, 49.

Against this background, the shaping of a cultural climate in Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum was clearly an initiative undertaken by literati predominantly, if not entirely, of humble origin; aristocrats played no apparent role in this cultural endeavor.

The above phenomenon leaves one critical question: what became of the aristocrats? The answer most likely lies in factors and circumstances that led to the quick and total disappearance of aristocratic families. In my study on the ultimate demise of Tang aristocratic families, the *Jingji* served not only as the location to sustain the physical existence of aristocratic families, but also as an essential hub for this privileged class to build up and consolidate their network. In addition, the *Jingji* fulfilled another critical function by serving as the platform for aristocratic families to affirm their success. Criteria for success in this context refer to three primary items: Civil service examination completion, bureaucratic alignment, and burial of deceased in ancestral graveyards. The collapse of the Tang relegated the *Jingji* to chaos, which consequently deprived aristocratic families of the traditional means to affirm their success. Without the civil service examinations, which had enabled aristocratic families to distinguish themselves, having relinquished the opportunity to engage in burial practices to refresh their sentimental attachment to the *Jingji*, and lacking the bureaucratic careers necessary in preserving their superior position, this privileged class could not survive; it disappeared much quicker than scholars have anticipated.<sup>60</sup>

Referring to previous discussions, some southern kingdoms would ultimately recruit aristocratic families into their administrative establishments. As such, could the aristocratic families of Jianghuai have represented a unique scenario? Primary sources related to the kingdoms in question tend to describe the initial stage of forming their ruling mechanisms; whether or not aristocratic families could continue and consolidate their influence therefore remains an issue. A better comprehension of this issue surely calls for additional case studies on the power structure of the southern kingdoms.

#### 4 Conclusion

Echoing claims listed in the introduction, below are some concluding remarks.

A literary function was perpetuated by the close linkage traditionally existing between writing and authority, meaning that imperial rule needed to be

60 Ng Pak-sheung 伍伯常, "History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China: Part 2, The Ultimate Demise," *Journal of Asian History* 55.2 (2021): 217–50.

substantiated by the writing of government decrees. Shaping the societal mindset as well as norms and values desired by the emperor also required literary undertaking. Due to the needs in all times, the *wenci* had been important in the Tang as well as all dynasties in imperial China. Also, the cause-and-effect relationship that existed between writing and authority contributed to the creation and continuity of the *qingliu wenhua*. This new conceptual framework sheds light on a literary tradition that prevailed among the elite group in Tang China; the tradition had its own inner life that was demonstrated not only in its fulfillment of a literary function, but also in its vitality to bridge constraints during the Five Dynasties' times of turbulence and persecution. The end of the *qingliu wenhua* in mid-Song serves as an entry point that allows historians to study how the elite in the Tang and the Song shaped their cultural identity and political norm differently. As the Southern Tang was the only regime able to preserve long-term stability and cultural prosperity, it provided the needed environment for the *cichen* to continue their literary function. In this sense, the Southern Tang might be the regime from which evidence can be found to prove the continuity of the *qingliu wenhua*.

During the Five Dynasties, northern China experienced a long period of war and chaos that caused a decline in almost all aspects of its cultural heritage. Cultural decline was further intensified as most of the rulers were military leaders whose regimes tended to hold culture in disdain. Against this background, the Southern Tang's cultural attainments would be valuable to the Northern Song. From the Southern Tang, the Northern Song could appropriate whatever elements it needed in order to culturally embellish the dynasty. If the Tang aristocratic families could play a significant role in this endeavor, their direct involvement would certainly be a reliable guarantee for their own continued existence and prosperity. Much to the disappointment of aristocratic families, Yang Wu showed no interest in enlisting them into its administrative mechanism. Although the Southern Tang was named after the Tang and its founder even claimed that he was descendant of the Tang imperial family, ironically, aristocratic families, the backbone of the Tang, played no evident role in the new regime's cultural domain.

Due to the absence of aristocratic families in Jianghuai, all career opportunities were taken by non-aristocrats. As indicated in the political hierarchy and in the civil service examination system, those who occupied a position in the core power structure were not affiliated with the aristocracy while all successful examination candidates were of humble origin. After the downfall of the Southern Tang, a number of officials with erudition, ritual knowledge, and literary ability were appointed to continue their careers in the Northern Song. Besides their numeric representation, their advantage was reflected in

the literary and ritual domains. In this process of cultural continuity, the Tang aristocrats did not seem to be involved nor play any role. Their disappearance in this significant aspect conveys a clear message that they had already stepped down from the historical arena during the reign of the Southern Tang. Definitely, what happened in the Jianghuai region represents only a single case; a complete picture concerning the destiny of aristocratic families necessitates a comprehensive study of all kingdoms founded during the era of the Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms.

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## *Book Review*



Daniel Bell and Wang Pei, *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. ISBN 978–0691200897. 288pp.

In this ambitious and daring intellectual endeavor, Daniel Bell and Wang Pei fearlessly defend an unpopular idea in the minds of their English-language readers: hierarchy can foster moral and just practices in modern progressive polities and societies. In support of this position, they draw on philosophical deliberation of political thoughts throughout history in the East and West, findings of modern social sciences research, as well as their own observations and experiences in their lifeworld embedded in China. As hierarchy results from society's needs for complex organizations, attempts at completely eliminating hierarchy in human history has often ended in disaster. Therefore, the “choice today is not between a society with no hierarchies and one with hierarchies, but rather between a society with unjust hierarchies that perpetuate unjust power structures and one with just hierarchies that serve morally desirable purposes.” (p. 14)

What is in need, therefore, is good research on hierarchy, which lags behind because it is a taboo in progressively-minded intellectual circles in the West. Such knowledge would modernize hierarchy and hierarchical practices according to socially progressive aspirations. It would also help us to think about solutions to the challenges the world faces today, which range from connections among friends, lovers and family members, to reciprocity between nations in international relations, and to the role of animals and AI in human society. With passion and compassion, Bell and Wang offer insightful responses, most of which are inspired by and derived from the Confucian thoughts and practices of hierarchy. Their arguments demonstrate how Confucianism could be actively and even proactively utilized to improve modern societies and cultures. As the authors argue, modernized hierarchy should not just be tolerated; it should be endorsed and enjoyed by societies because of its benefits.

The first order of business is to distinguish morally just and unjust hierarchies and to examine various grounds of moral justification. The first two chapters investigate hierarchies in two areas that students of Confucianism are familiar with: human relations and individuals' role within a polity. In intimate relations (among lovers, friends, parent-children, and families and their domestic help), while hierarchy with fixed positions could perpetuate unhealthy power relations, hierarchy with shifting roles enables the stronger and wiser parties to take care of the weaker and more needy ones and thereby promote the overall wellbeing of the collective. Drawing examples from ancient Indian erotic texts as well as traditional and modern practices in Chinese society, the authors show that the role shift takes place naturally in some cases (such as in parent-child relations) yet may require certain techniques in some other cases (such as among lovers), but when practiced well, such hierarchies could add humor, passion and compassion to these relationships. Housekeepers' relationship with their employers' family in modern Chinese life is used as an example. Referred to endearingly as "auntie," they are integrated into the family relational structure, albeit a hierarchical one, but with it comes graded love and accommodation, as well as long-term relationships, love and care.

Chapter Two opens by noting that, regarding political institutions, it is not enough to justify a hierarchical system purely on its efficiency. Such efficiency needs to serve the benefits of the ruled, a requirement stipulated by both Plato (427–347 BCE) and Confucius (551–479 BCE). The case to be made here is that the specific institutions and practices in China's hierarchical political system can indeed produce high quality leaders who can enhance the system's performance and be held accountable for their commitment to serving the people. The recommendation system solicited nominations from local notables for political candidates based on their moral principles and practices. Meritocracy, with necessary renovations to inject new energy into the system when it slips into ossification, has largely demonstrated its capacity in selecting and promoting political talents. The authors' vivid discussion on the success of Xi's anti-corruption campaign, the potential effectiveness of moral education promoted by the government, and China's incremental democratic reforms provide modern illustrations of these ideas. Here, the reader not only learns of ideas and practices of hierarchy, but also encounters vivid accounts and analysis of everyday Chinese life.

While Chinese scholars have been applying Confucian concepts to contemporary international relations in recent decades, Bell and Wang bring this effort closer to the Western perspective. The authors begin Chapter Three by conceptually distinguishing three types of international relations: weak reciprocity based solely on self-interest such as money diplomacy, weak reciprocity plus,

such as China's Belt and Road Initiative which is also grounded in self-interest but is more stable, and strong reciprocity that is embedded in a sense of community. The moral justification for hierarchy lies in the argument that the powerful in the hierarchical community should and do help the less powerful. Hierarchical rituals contribute critically to community-building through including both the powerful and the vulnerable in their practice and fostering commonalities in their performance. For example, the village wine ceremony, where the old and young drink from the same cup, manifests social distinction and, at the same time, helps to overcome it by "fostering commonalities." (p. 121) China's tributary system is used as the main illustration to examine hierarchical rituals in international relations. Different frequencies of sacrificial offerings proportionally reflected the strengths of the mutual commitment between the Chinese Empire and its tributary states. Practicing these rituals, continually and performatively, manifested and reinforced the hierarchical relations, which, in the end, obligated China to defend the weaker members of its alliance system.

Chapters Four and Five take us into terrains to which Confucian thoughts are not typically applied. After a brisk discussion of the development of Western notions of human-animal relations – all the way from traditional Christian theology (animals have no souls) and Descartes's (1596–1650) view (animals are mere machines) to advocacy of animal welfare voiced by thinkers such as Singer, Donaldson and Kymlicka, Bell and Wang launch their argument for a relationship of "subordination without cruelty." The Confucian principle of graded love is well illustrated here by a quote of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529): "we love both human beings and beasts, but the heart can bear to slaughter beasts to feed family, to make sacrifices, and to treat guests." (p. 171) Confucianism relies on humans' natural affectionate inclinations and emotional reactions to distinguish proper relationships and behaviors from improper ones. On this basis, Bell and Wang argue for a hierarchy of compassion: we owe less compassion to animals than to humans, but we still owe them some compassion.

In Chapter Five the discussion takes another intriguing turn towards moral justification for a master-slave relationship between humans and their machines. The Marxist view that machines, in higher Communism, can free humans from mundane work so that they can realize their creative capacity, is found to be rather narrow. The "other-regarding morality" in Confucianism teaches us that we owe the most to people who have done the most for us. Only a society thriving on rich and meaningful human relations can come close to the Confucian ideal. Therefore, AI could be used to contribute to areas where it can help humans to maintain and nourish their meaningful relations with

other humans, but moral utilization of such technology should stop there. The employment of AI should also be fine-tuned to incorporate the values of the cultures and societies it operates in: driverless cars in Lhasa should be programmed to reflect Buddhist values that embrace animal life.

The language used in this work exhibits merits that deserve attention independent of the book's content. Stripped of unnecessary academic expression, this language aids the authors in their efforts at explaining Chinese concepts and realities in the most plain way possible by leaving out Western conceptualization as much as possible. This less-is-more policy helps maintain the meaning and flavor of these Chinese concepts and practices. At the same time, the kind of fluidity, clarity and playfulness of a language, which only emerge when it is used as the mother tongue, is on full display here. By presenting a nearly seamless blend between the East and West conceptually and linguistically, this book, like Bell's earlier works, encourages the reader to let go the various binaries that conventionally divide them. Rather, the reader's gaze, mind and heart are directed to those aspects that bind them together as human communities, progressive societies, and forward-looking polities. Here, on the theme of hierarchy, the East is introduced and presented to the West with ease, grace, and transcendence; its notions and practices are observed and analyzed with Western sensibility and Confucian virtues.

Introducing the East to the West is one matter; bridging and connecting the two is quite another. For scholars who take it upon themselves to facilitate cross-cultural understanding between the East and West in today's world, the challenge we face is that the lifeworld of contemporary Westerners provides very little cultural basis for comprehension in this direction and perhaps rather weak motivation too. In the East, harmony is to be preserved and consensus rightfully serves as the starting point, whereas in the West, conflict is a valued method of political and social organization and consensus and harmony often appear suspicious. The different life experiences conceptualized, normalized and justified by such different political ideologies and cultural schemas are all reinforced and perpetuated through socialization, education and media on a daily basis. It is truly ironic that larger amounts of information and faster speed of its transmission seem to have pulled the East and West further apart and left them more firmly entrenched in their respective positions.

In this context, since many justifications offered in the book rest on the acceptance of values such as harmony, consensus, meritocracy, graded love, and differential social order, the persuasive power of these arguments is likely to be much higher in Confucian societies where these values are already embraced than in others. The authors readily acknowledge so. Yet, as a major work that breaks new ground on an important concept in English-language

scholarship, to persuade readers in the West is the main task, and therefore it deserves greater effort. In the West, the past few centuries have witnessed repeated and relentless efforts at tearing down the hierarchy in all domains of human life. The Western mind has questioned its very existence and justification from divine and humanistic angles; the Western person keeps rectifying its abusive habits and dominating inclinations with political and artistic methods. In this context, despite the book's illuminating arguments and enchanting style, the most open-minded reader would probably still find it difficult to place its arguments into a proper place in the current Western epistemology. To help the reader to relate to and categorize the knowledge presented in this book, it is perhaps necessary for the author to lay out their conception on the relationship between hierarchy, assuming it can be modernized in theory, and it is indeed being modernized in reality and the already widely embraced modern aspirations for equality and equality. Can they co-exist? Are they reconcilable? To sway the reader towards positive responses to these questions might already present a mission impossible. In this sense, Bell and Wang have adopted a wise strategy. However, even if it is wise to stay away from direct confrontation, exploring some nuanced but critical questions on this spectrum of "hierarchy-equality" might help bringing all parties closer. What are the existing mechanisms of checks and balances in just hierarchy and how should we best modernize them? How can we fine-tune the practice of hierarchy to prevent abuse and dominance that have so plagued it in the past? After all, the East has also been trying to reform its centuries-old traditions.

In modern Chinese life, notions and practices of hierarchy have changed radically in the past few decades. Take child-parent relations as an example. In the book, Bell and Wang examine how and when the roles between parents and children shifted, but such a discussion is situated more in the general and abstract cultural guidance than in in-your-face concrete realities. As many children have migrated from villages to cities, from small cities to mega-cities, from China to abroad, and as their journeys have placed them in professional and social environments that are so drastically different from those experienced by their parents, the presumed qualities of the parents and the cultural assumption that the parents always have something to teach their children are facing serious reality checks. Cultural change on such a scale and speed can be cruel because it forcefully shakes up cultural assumptions and throws people out of their assigned social roles. The disempowerment of parents in Chinese families has caused disharmony but it does not warrant the reinforcement of hierarchy. The normative power endowed in parents often prevents them from seeing realities clearly and recognizing their children's legitimate needs willingly. We often read reports from all kinds of sources of the Chinese-style

parental forms of power abuse, from chiding their children for not getting perfect grades to insistently interfering in marriage and family affairs of their adult children. In such circumstances, the most effective way to save the hierarchy entails nuanced and realistic analysis of real-life situations embedded in China's social and cultural changes, and serious revisions of the assumptions and practices of hierarchy so as to modernize it. Here, the authors may have missed a good opportunity to examine these changes and issue advice.

In a similar fashion, the gaps between important Confucian ideas and their actual practice in history are also left under-explored in some places. With regards to hierarchical rituals in China's traditional tributary system, for example, a brief review provides a glimpse into scholarly debates on their practices, usefulness, and, to a certain extent, their very existence. With such controversy, the authors nevertheless argue that "[E]ven assuming a large gap between the ideal and the reality of the tributary system in imperial China, however, it doesn't follow that the ideal is not worth defending today." (p. 128) This claim might be convincing from a purely theoretical perspective, but the authors obviously intend to cast these ideas further onto today's international relations, especially in regards to the Sino-U.S. relationship. If a grand- and noble-sounding idea did not even work in its own historical era, how realistically can we expect it to take force in our modern time and in an international political environment where it carries very little legitimacy? For more practically or empirically minded readers, the argument would need to be further developed to realize its effectiveness and usefulness to the fullest extent.

This work brings out a brave new way of envisioning the role that China and the Communist Party of China (CPC) can play in the world at present and in the near future. In the last chapter, for example, the authors weigh different options that enable the world to monitor Silicon Valley's relentless pursuit of AI technology. In the end, they contend that the CPC would be a better candidate than the U.S. government for the job. Support for this position is drawn from the Party's commitment to using policies and technologies to serve the people, its recent actions in organizing and advocating for international collaboration, and its already manifestly prudent approach towards AI technology. This perspective offers a sensible and optimistic vision where China plays an active and positive role on the global stage. Given the widespread skepticism towards Chinese politics in the West and the discrepancy between political rhetoric and political action that exists in politics of all shapes and forms, the reader may naturally wonder about the strength of such support. Sharper analyses on the performative versus the functional aspects of what the Party says and does might provide a necessary remedy.

In the terminology of hermeneutics, a true cross-cultural understanding must involve the fusion of horizons of the East and West. To help our readers, we might try to locate the appropriate area, direction, or niche in their existing knowledge system for the new concepts and realities that are coming their way. This is a common challenge for all of us who are engaged in scholarly exchanges across horizons. Is just hierarchy a counterpoint, or an alternative, to the Western conceptions and experiences? Or, is it altogether a universalist principle rooted in human existence? The current, binary conception of China versus the West creates a rigid frame of mind that is hard to escape from. In this book, Bell and Wang respond to the challenge with a Confucian spirit: to ask difficult questions and try one's best to answer them, to aspire to accomplish missions that are impossible to accomplish, and to address an intellectual rival in a gentlemanly way. To offer a moralistic, pragmatic, and practical account of human society, the gentleman and gentlewoman fully exhaust their intellectual capacity not only by drawing on political ideals and empirical knowledge but also by invoking their own deepest and truest reflective understanding of life. This is indeed the Confucian way.

*Shanruo Zhang* 張善若

Professor, Department of Political Science, California Polytechnic  
State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, USA  
*nizhang@calpoly.edu*

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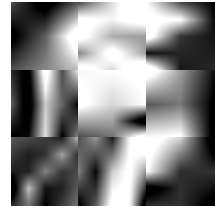
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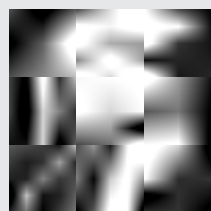


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